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Boston Public Library Strategic Plan 2024



**Cover Image to be updated,
Free to All photography**

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Introduction



Introduction

Letter from the President

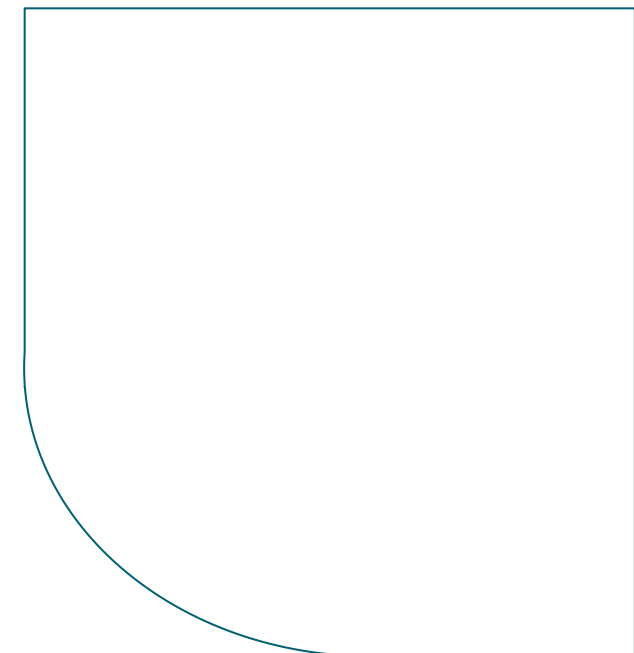


David Leonard
BPL President

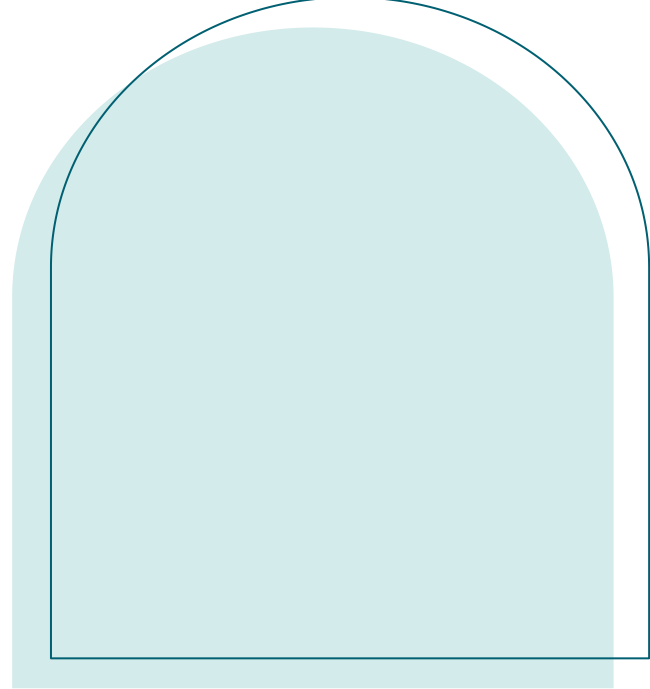
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Introduction
**Letter from
the Mayor**

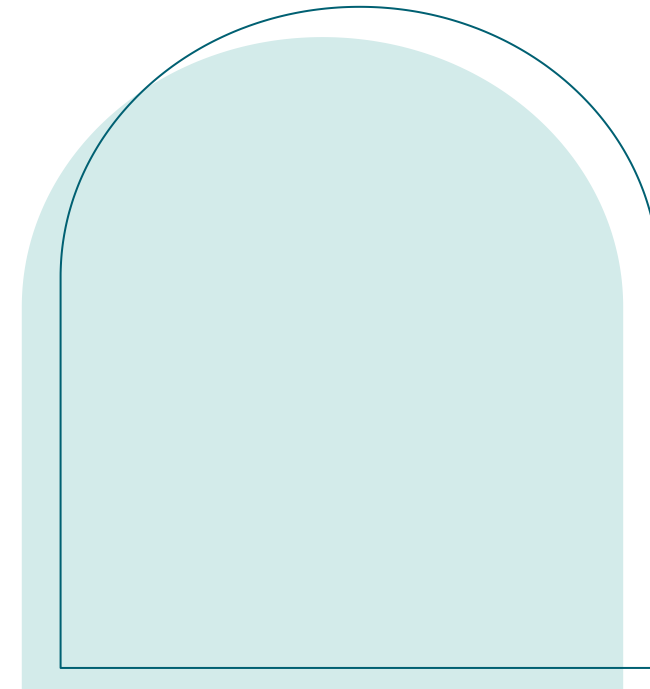


*Michelle Wu, Mayor
City of Boston*

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**Board of
Trustees**



*Raymond Liu
Chair, BPL Board of Trustees*

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Introduction

Context

Since its founding, Boston has been a **hotbed of revolutionary thought**, and since its charter in 1848, the Boston Public Library has served as a **portal for access to the knowledge each generation has needed to face its challenges**.

Today, we stand in the midst of a new revolution in library services, with patrons coming to us for new services, help navigating a rapidly-shifting digital landscape, and recovering from an unprecedented pandemic. The Boston Public Library is committed to continuing to be a pioneer of library services, today, and well into the future.

As **the first large free municipal library in the United States**, BPL's innovations have shaped the modern library world. BPL was the first to lend books; establish a branch library; and to create a dedicated children's room.

Today, **BPL stands as a leading urban public library and research institution, with 27 locations including its central library and archival center**. As both a community anchor and a cultural hub, BPL is a vital resource locally, across the Commonwealth, and internationally.

Renowned Research and Collections:
BPL stands out as a unique institution in the research and preservation of shared history. Our nearly 23 million item collection – including materials dating back to the 10th century and farther -- positions us as one of the premier research institutions in the nation if not the world.

As stewards of our nation's past and future, **BPL preserves invaluable cultural artifacts** while delivering forward-thinking initiatives to ensure our collective memories, identities, and cultures will be assets that belong to every generation.

Why Update our Plan Now?
The **role of the library has changed**. Today, we stand at a crossroads, where digital platforms require new tools and ways of thinking, while also offering new opportunities to make more information more accessible. Banned books in other jurisdictions are bringing new communities to us, and a post-pandemic community is seeking connections to human services and to community.

We have a duty to evolve the roles we embody to address these needs, and to commit to continuing that evolution to meet the future.

2,264,592

In-person visits systemwide

50,196

New library cards issued

CIRCULATION

Print:
~2.2M

E-content:
~4.7M

2,531

Rare or unique items available in-person

Stats to be revisited and opportunities sought to: Include some cumulative stats and/or outcome focus, i.e. #ESL grads, # children's programs, or stats since peak COVID, etc.

8,258

In-person visits to Special Collections

Introduction Context

Building on our strengths, we are adapting to serve the present and future of Boston, the Commonwealth and beyond.

For 176 years, the Boston Public Library has stood as a beacon of learning, democracy, innovation, and possibility. We were the first to declare that knowledge should be "Free to All," pioneering a movement that transformed American society. Today, we stand at the threshold of another transformation. *This is not just a strategic plan – it is a bold declaration of our commitment to lead the next revolution in public libraries.*

Our Strengths:

BPL not only serves as a **cultural and educational destination** for residents and visitors alike, but is also **recognized as a trusted resource and is a critical piece of our community's infrastructure.** All of this is possible thanks to our dedicated staff, world-class collections and resources, and welcoming physical spaces; as well as municipal, state and private sector supporters.

Notably, **73% of Boston residents live within a 15-minute walk of a library branch,** positioning BPL as a natural partner for a variety of city initiatives, and a vital resource for cultivating vibrant neighborhood life and community well-being.

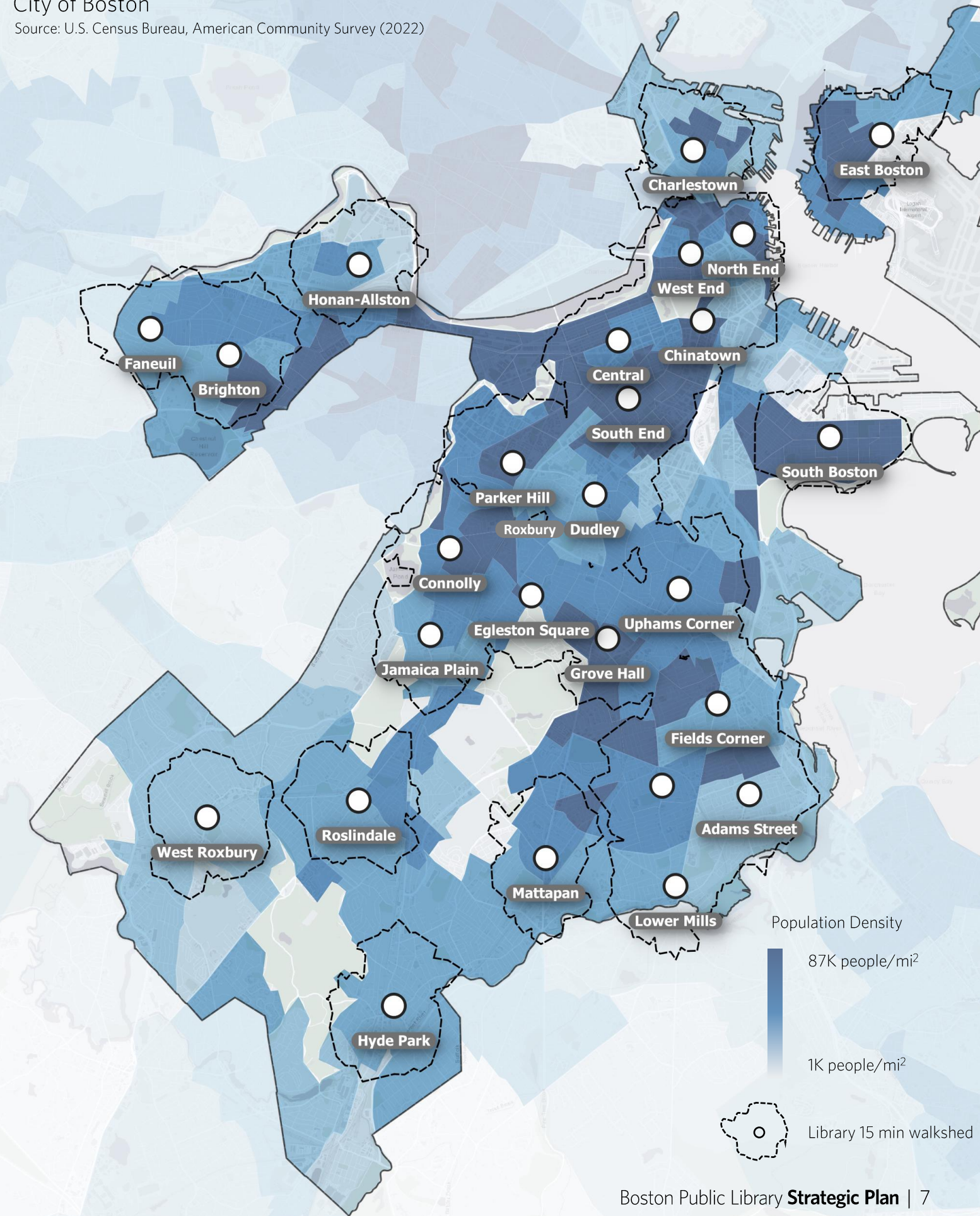
Current Challenges:

The BPL continues to make a significant social impact through its services and offerings while grappling with long-standing multifaceted **funding constraints, a large portfolio of legacy physical infrastructure** to manage, and a **staffing model that is demonstrably under-sized** for the scale of its work and both staff and community aspirations, both in comparison to leading peer national urban public libraries, and given the **size and complexity of the special collections function.**

Our Changing Role:

Over our history, BPL has continued to evolve to meet the diverse needs of our communities. In the post-pandemic landscape, along with the **library's integration with the Human Services Department of the City of Boston,** we have a unique opportunity to further refine our role with an intentional focus on equity and the unique needs of individual communities.

Population Density by Census Tract
City of Boston
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (2022)



Values Vision Mission

Values

The principles and beliefs that guide how we work and how we interact with each other to serve our communities.

Vision

How we envision the future outcomes for our communities.

Mission

Our purpose, why we exist, and what we do to make our Vision a reality.



We believe in

Free to All

Our values are anchored in the promise of **Free to All**, proudly inscribed above the entrance of the Central Library in Copley Square, and at the entrance of each recently renovated branch.

This commitment to welcoming everyone equally—regardless of gender, race, national origin, sexual orientation, faith, or economic status—reflects our enduring dedication to inclusion, equity, and access. At BPL, we envision a world where everyone has the freedom to flourish.

"Free to All" is a living promise that expands with each generation. In a world of increasing barriers and widening divisions, we declare that freedom of mind, spirit, and exploration is a fundamental human right.

This is what "Free to All" means today - beyond free access to books and buildings, it represents the freedom to grow, to question, to create, and to belong. It is a promise that has defined the Boston Public Library since 1848, and one that will guide us into the future.

Free to All. Now and always.

Free to...

Free to **Discover**
Free to **Learn**
Free to **Create**

Free to **Imagine**
Free to **Connect**
Free to **Explore**

Free to **Choose**
Free to **Read**
Free to **Think**

Free to **Be**
Boston Public Library

Free to All

Core Value

The spirit of
Free to All
must be at
the heart of
everything
we do.

Vision

We believe in an inclusive community propelled by curiosity, connection, and the pursuit of knowledge.

Mission

We will open a world of discovery and learning, to enrich lives and elevate every community.

Strategic Roles, Goals, & Initiatives

Strategic Roles

These are the key roles we play in our communities and will shape the strategic direction we will take to make the most impact.

Strategic Goals

These are the ambitious objectives that will guide our decision making, helping us to prioritize the best actions to take to achieve our mission and vision.

Strategic Initiatives

These are the focused actions we will take to advance our strategic plan, prioritizing the resources and efforts to meet the needs of our communities.



Strategic Roles

A Bold Path Forward. Our vision demands transformation. We will revolutionize how we serve our communities by focusing on four powerful roles:

Community Engager

Expanding the reach of the library beyond its physical walls so we can meet and engage communities where they are.

Life-Long Learning & Research Partner

Empowering curiosity and a love of reading, discovery, and scholarly exploration for all.



Welcoming Destination

Creating active, inclusive third spaces where every person can chart their own path.

Trusted Resource

Connecting all people to reliable information and services that meet their needs and enrich their lives.



Life-Long Learning & Research Partner

Empowering curiosity and a love of reading, discovery, and scholarly exploration for all.

Our role as a **lifelong learning and research partner** reflects our dedication to fostering a love of reading, learning, and celebrating our shared history. We create inclusive and engaging opportunities that connect with our communities at every stage of life. By leveraging our unique role as a premier research institution that is open to everyone, we collect, preserve, steward, and amplify access to, Boston's treasures in a way that brings the diverse contributions of our city and community to life.

Strategic Role

Life-Long Learning & Research Partner

Empowering curiosity and a love of reading, discovery, and scholarly exploration for all.

Strategic Goals:

- 1. Ignite Young Minds:** Elevate BPL’s role as an extraordinary hub of discovery, **igniting the curiosity of young children** and their families as they learn and grow together.
- 2. Advance Youth Opportunities:** Launch the next generation toward excellence, **empowering young adults** with innovative tools and opportunities to shape their own futures and thrive during their transition to adulthood.
- 3. Support Lifelong Growth:** Champion **adults' aspirations** for personal success by becoming their life-long learning partner, fostering meaningful connections to their work, their communities, and to each other.
- 4. Preserve and Make Accessible our Heritage & History:** Pioneer innovative approaches to serve patrons from Boston and the Commonwealth by leveraging our collections, services, and programs to closely **connect communities to their past and preserve their stories for the future.**



“Our department helps cultural heritage institutions digitize materials and put them online. We answer individual questions, direct users to partner institutions, and help them use the repository to find what they need.”

- BPL Staff Survey

Community Needs

Our communities want us to provide access to collections and resources that are driven by their specific needs, including:

- Addressing learning loss and achievement gaps
- Opportunities for self-discovery, life skills, and personal development
- Engagement with youth – from early literacy to skill-building for employment
- Enhancing civics education and engagement
- Workforce development and economic opportunity
- Supporting social and emotional well-being for all ages
- Opportunities to explore personal interests and hobbies
- Ensuring that older patrons can feel engaged, connected, and welcome

How We Live This Role

BPL’s current range of engaging programs and resources supports all ages and interests, including:

- Art on Public Display
- Age Strong Librarians and age-friendly spaces
- Branch Book Groups and Programming
- Chef-in-Residence program
- Digital Commonwealth
- Entrepreneur-in-Residence
- ESL Classes
- Genealogy and Research Services
- Leventhal Map & Education Center
- Online GED, High School Diploma
- Reader Services
- Special Collections & Open Houses
- Storytime Across All Locations

Life-Long Learning & Research Partner

Strategic Initiatives

1. Ignite Young Minds

Elevate BPL's role as an extraordinary hub of discovery, **igniting the curiosity of young children and their families** as they learn and grow together.

2. Advance Youth Opportunities

Launch the next generation toward excellence, **empowering young adults** with innovative tools and opportunities to shape their own futures and thrive during their transition to adulthood.

3. Support Lifelong Growth

Champion **adults' aspirations** for personal success by becoming their life-long learning partner, fostering meaningful connections to their work, their communities, and to each other.



Key Initiatives:

- **Actively engage families and caregivers as a premier provider of enriching, educational, and fun programs and services** for young children, such as interactive story times, reading challenges, and parent-child workshops.
- Continue to play a **vital role in preparing children and parents for kindergarten** by providing resources and programs supporting early literacy and social emotional learning.
- Develop a service model designed to establish in kids a **life-long connection to the library as a safe, welcoming place** where they can continue to grow and explore through **all ages and stages of their lives.**

Key Initiatives:

- Create vibrant, interactive **programs that blend education and fun**, such as interactive workshops, volunteer opportunities, STEAM-based activities, and book clubs.
- **Support local schools** and students by **providing dedicated academic and other resources**, such as test preparation and workforce counseling prepare students for life after high school.
- Position the BPL as a safe space to grow through programs focused on **emotional intelligence, stress management, and healthy relationships**, supporting the well-being of youth and teen patrons.

Key Initiatives:

- Support and **empower people at all stages of their journeys to personal success** by expanding programming and resources that bring digital literacy, ESOL services, and career support together.
- Building on the success of the Kirstein Business Library and the Entrepreneur-in-Residence programs, **partner with local universities and businesses to provide increased support for aspiring entrepreneurs and business owners.**
- Expand programming and connections for older adults, such as Age Strong Boston participants, to **ensure the library remains a vital resource for the community's elders.**

Life-Long Learning & Research Partner

Strategic Initiatives

4. Preserve and Make Accessible our Heritage & History

Pioneer innovative approaches to serve patrons from Boston and the Commonwealth by leveraging our collections, services, and programs to closely **connect communities to their past and preserve their stories for the future.**



Key Initiatives:

- Inspire and empower all patrons to **see themselves as researchers** by designing spaces and service models that **fuel curiosity, encourage exploration of our collections, and democratize access.**
- Create a **cohesive hub for information that centers the researcher**, prioritizes clear paths and connections between collections and service areas, and broadens awareness throughout the library system and beyond.
- Build and promote **collections that represent the diversity of our communities of users**, with an emphasis on the historically underrepresented voices, histories, and lived experiences of our city and region.

- **Foster a community for research through collaborative engagement with collections**, experiential learning, and creative programming





Welcoming Destination

Creating active, inclusive third spaces where every person can chart their own path.

Our role as a **welcoming destination** is to offer inclusive spaces across Boston that are uplifting, safe, and thoughtfully designed, fostering an environment where curiosity naturally flourishes. We strive to meet the needs and interests of our community by offering modern, well maintained, and transformative experiences where everyone can explore, connect, and contribute to the vibrancy of neighborhood life.

Strategic Role

Welcoming Destination

Creating active, inclusive third spaces where every person can chart their own path.

Strategic Goals:

- 1. Create Inclusive Spaces:** Ensure that **every location of the library is a place of belonging** where all community members feel welcome, safe, included, and inspired to discover, create, connect, and celebrate their unique identities.
- 2. Reimagine McKim:** Transform **the historic McKim Building into a vibrant, exciting, library space** that preserves and builds on its unique history while honoring its past, meeting the present, and celebrating the future
- 3. Embrace Cultural Diversity:** Dramatically expand **our offerings in multiple languages** to create a cultural crossroads where diverse communities find their voices amplified and their heritage celebrated.
- 4. Build Sustainable Communities:** Create **future-ready spaces** that adapt with and support our evolving communities by continuing our visionary transformation of our BPL's physical locations through bold investment and innovative design.



“Our branch is one of the listed ‘Safe Place’ on the ‘Bridge Over Troubled Waters’-services to runaway, homeless and high-risk youth.

- BPL Staff Survey

Community Needs

Our library creates safe and inclusive places that are driven by the needs of the community.

- Safe, welcoming spaces, especially for those historically excluded or marginalized
- Support for reducing social isolation
- Access to resources for mental health and well-being
- Opportunities for community engagement and connection
- Fostering a sense of belonging
- Culturally relevant programming
- Inclusive and accessible services for all community members

How We Live This Role

BPL has made great efforts to create spaces that foster inclusivity, warmth, and accessibility.

- Branches in every Boston neighborhood
- Ongoing capital investments from the City of Boston enabling 15 branches to be renewed or renovated since 2000
- Adaptive Computer Stations
- Assistive Listening Devices
- Braille Collection
- Community Rooms
- Musical Performances
- Innovation Lab, Reading Gardens, Nutrition Lab, Learning Lab
- Language Interpretation Services
- Unique, partner lead experiences such as: the Newsfeed Café, Map Room Lounge, Courtyard Tea Room
- Safe Place Program
- Sensory Walls

Welcoming Destination

Strategic Initiatives

1. Create Inclusive Spaces

Ensure that **every location of the library is a place of belonging** where all community members feel welcome, safe, included, and inspired to discover, create, connect, and celebrate their unique identities.

2. Reimagine McKim

Transform **the historic McKim Building into a vibrant, exciting, library space** that preserves and builds on its unique history while honoring its past, meeting the present, and celebrating the future

3. Embrace Cultural Diversity

Dramatically expand **our offerings in multiple languages** to create a cultural crossroads where diverse communities find their voices amplified and their heritage celebrated.



Key Initiatives:

- Ensure that community members **feel a sense of belonging** in every BPL location and department by designing and planning for the maintenance of **inclusive, safe, and secure spaces**.

- **Remove physical and perceptual barriers to access** spaces through space design and responsive multilingual outreach and communication efforts.
- Make all BPL locations a center of civic engagement and discourse, **a public forum animated with ambitious, elevated, world-class programming** that engages and inspires.

Key Initiatives:

- **Execute the McKim renovation and transformation project in a way that excites the public's imagination**, showcases BPL's vast collections and programs, and highlights Boston's diversity and contributions to the world.

- **Develop services and staffing vision** for the proposed restored and renovated spaces.
- **Conduct a user-focused process** for the design of flexible spaces to connect with programs, collections, and staff (i.e. studios, maker spaces, practice rooms, hands-on exhibitions, etc).
- **Establish a transparent and collaborative process**, involving all BPL stakeholders, to align on goals for the project and fundraising priorities

Key Initiatives:

- Increase **multilingual communications and accessibility** to provide equitable access to all of BPL's services **and expand our reach to non-English speaking communities**.

- **Increase multilingual capabilities for all communications** (text, print materials, wayfinding, services) to create an inclusive and welcoming experience for everyone.
- **Expand services for immigrant communities** by providing increased citizenship support and relevant programs at all stages of their journey.

Welcoming Destination

Strategic Initiatives

4. Build Sustainable Communities

Create **future-ready spaces** that adapt with and support our evolving communities by continuing our visionary transformation of our BPL's physical locations through bold investment and innovative design.

Key Initiatives:

- Develop and enhance **sustainability and climate resilience practices across the BPL system in alignment with the City of Boston's climate action goals** of reducing building emissions, waste, and creating places resilient to climate change.
- Develop ambitious **new and inclusive methods of soliciting broader community input** into planning, programming studies and design activities.
- Utilize **universal design** in all projects to ensure sustainable accessibility, with particular attention to **multilingual wayfinding and physical accessibility**.





Trusted Resource

Connecting all people to reliable information and services that meet their needs and enrich their lives.

Libraries remain among the most trusted institutions in the US. This role leverages that unique positioning to allow us to help people access reliable city-wide and regional resources and support, when and where they need them; as well as the official records of our past and recent history and cultural life. By serving as a resource for trusted, vetted information, our patrons are able to access the accurate, unbiased information they need to enrich their lives.

Strategic Role

Trusted Resource

Connecting all people to reliable information and services that meet their needs and enrich their lives.

Strategic Goals:

1. *Deliver Reliable Information:* Champion **the pursuit of truth and knowledge** by establishing an unprecedented standard for information access, positioning the BPL as a beacon of accuracy and intellectual freedom in the digital age.

2. *Bridge Human Services:* Pioneer an **effective model of integrated community support**, connecting social and human services in the City of Boston with those who need them most.

3. *Empower Digital Access:* Continue **pioneering bold initiatives to shrink the digital divide**, ensuring all our patrons have the digital literacy skills, connectivity and tools they need to embrace new technologies and thrive in an increasingly connected world.



"A patron once insisted I answer their tax questions because 'You're a librarian. I trust you.' Our trustworthiness is an extraordinarily valuable asset. We provide reliable information, no matter what."

- BPL Staff Survey

Community Needs

The BPL must serve as a reliable resource for resources that address community needs.

- Access and connection to essential resources, such as job training, affordable housing, food security, childcare, and mental health support
- Assistance for immigrants and new citizens
- Accurate information and critical thinking to combat misinformation
- Media and digital literacy

How We Live This Role

BPL has longstanding and established partnerships, programs, and services to connect people to the resources they need.

- Digital and Media Literacy Offerings
- Digital Tools such as Hoopla, Boston Globe, LinkedIn Learning, and Headspace
- Immigrant Information Corners
- Outreach through Department of Youth Services
- Partnership with Pine Street Inn
- Contacts with City and State agencies and non-profit service providers
- Tax Prep Classes

Trusted Resource

Strategic Initiatives

1. Deliver Reliable Information

Champion **the pursuit of truth and knowledge** by establishing an unprecedented standard for information access, positioning the BPL as a beacon of accuracy and intellectual freedom in the digital age.

2. Bridge Human Services

Pioneer an **effective model of integrated community support**, connecting social and human services in the City of Boston with those who need them most.

3. Empower Digital Access

Continue **pioneering bold initiatives to shrink the digital divide**, ensuring all our patrons have the digital literacy skills, connectivity and tools they need to embrace new technologies and thrive in an increasingly connected world.



Key Initiative:

- **Unlock the freedom to read and acquire information** by removing barriers to entry through **expanded card access and programs**, such as Browse | Borrow | Board and Books Unbanned.
- Enhance the public's awareness of **the Library as a dependable source of unbiased information**, a fierce **supporter of intellectual freedom**, and as an **advocate for patrons' rights** to information, resources, and privacy.
- Equip patrons with the **skills to identify, evaluate, and use information effectively** through workshops and training sessions on media literacy and critical thinking.
- Establish a civic literacy program that engages communities and **help individuals become more informed citizens**.

Key Initiative:

- Evaluate and deepen BPL's **commitment to our social work program**, in order to support our communities with specialized staff skills.
- **Work with the City of Boston's Human Services Cabinet to identify target populations of the highest need**, in order to deepen our strategic focus on programs, resources, and partnerships that serve these populations and align with the City's priorities.
- Implement a structured **process for identifying and selecting partners**, ensuring alignment with our strategic roles, community needs, and need for measurable impact.

Key Initiative:

- **Increase use of BPL's online resources** through increased access to laptop, hotspot, and other technology lending programs.
- **Expand digital literacy programs to ensure patrons of all skill levels** can use technology to find the resources they need.
- **Improve digital and online access to collections** for under-represented and underserved communities.
- **Explore and evaluate integrating machine learning and AI-enabled tools** into library workflows and online resources for discovery, enhanced accessibility, and language translation.



Community Engager

Expand the reach of the library beyond its physical walls, meeting communities where they are.

Our role as a community engager is to activate library assets across the city and beyond, boldly expanding the BPL experience through creative outreach strategies informed by our communities. We aim to extend our presence far beyond our walls, significantly grow our digital footprint, and build widespread awareness with dynamic, multi-channel campaigns that drive deep engagement.

Strategic Role

Community Engager

Expanding the reach of the library beyond its physical walls so we can meet and engage communities where they are.

Strategic Goals:

1. Respond to Neighborhood Needs: Revolutionize how we serve, engage, and evolve with our neighborhoods, prioritizing **community-centered, data-driven programs and services** at neighborhood branches, enabling BPL to be in the community, working for the community, and informed by the community.

2. Amplify Diverse Voices: Uncover and celebrate **the untold stories and history of Boston and the Commonwealth** through our collections, programs, and services, ensuring every community's narrative becomes an integral part of Boston's collective identity.

3. Foster Civic Participation: Launch an **innovative civic engagement program** to transform community members into active architects of Boston's civic life and future.

4. Expand Digital Reach: Pioneer a true **'Library without Walls'** by **enhancing the digital experience** and creating expansive online collections that set new standards for accessibility, engagement, and use.



"Every location has a community room where events and gatherings can take place. We engage in extensive outreach to schools and community organizations, bringing library services to external locations when patrons can't come to us."

- BPL Staff Survey

Community Needs

Our library strives to reach our patrons and increase access to the offerings tailored to the needs of the community.

- Increased awareness of available resources and offerings
- Outreach to under-served community members
- Reduce barriers to access library services
- Provide inclusive participation opportunities that offer diverse formats and accessibility options

How We Live This Role

BPL has engaged its communities in multiple channels - digitally and physically.

- Affinity Months
- Ask@BPL.org
- BPL by Bike
- Books Unbanned
- Browse | Borrow | Board
- Chat Reference
- Digital Commonwealth
- Library e-card
- Museum Passes
- Newsletters
- Online Research Guides
- Oral History Backpacks
- Shelf Service

Community Engager

Strategic Initiatives



1. Respond to Neighborhood Needs

Revolutionize how we serve, engage, and evolve with our neighborhoods, prioritizing **community-centered, data-driven programs and services** at neighborhood branches, enabling BPL to be in the community, working for the community, and informed by the community.

Key Initiative:

- Develop a **strategic approach for outreach, using creative, multi-channel methods** to meet people where they are in unexpected and exciting ways, such as pop-up locations and mobile outreach.
- **Deepen community members' library connections by meeting people wherever they are** -- whether inside the library or elsewhere.
- **Conduct user research to understand the information-seeking experience** of students, researchers, and community members to enhance and refine our service offerings.

- Establish practices for **active, ongoing engagement with diverse communities** to identify the needs and gaps to better inform the communication, services, and programs at each branch.
- **Gather and use data from both patrons and those who do not use the library** to prioritize outreach, marketing, and tailored communication strategies, with a focus on **reaching underserved communities** who do not come to the library.

2. Amplify Diverse Voices

Uncover and celebrate **the untold stories and history of Boston and the Commonwealth** through our collections, programs, and services, ensuring every community's narrative becomes an integral part of Boston's collective identity.

Key Initiative:

- Curate a **strong portfolio of community history-based offerings** and opportunities.
- Highlight **underrepresented communities** in circulating materials, special collections, and research.
- Create **digital opportunities to elevate underrepresented voices through** training and user-friendly tools for communities to express their personal histories and increase online accessibility to their stories.
- Nourish civic literacy and education through **meaningful programs and engagements that help people become better citizens.**

Community Engager

Strategic Initiatives

3. Foster Civic Participation

Launch an **innovative civic engagement program** to transform community members into active architects of Boston's civic life and future.

4. Expand Digital Reach

Pioneer a true **'Library without Walls'** by **enhancing the digital experience** and creating expansive online collections that set new standards for accessibility, engagement, and use.



Key Initiative:

- **Research best practices for civic engagement work** in public libraries
- **Nourish civic literacy and education** through meaningful programs and engagements that help people become better citizens.

Key Initiative:

- Create a more **user-centric digital experience through enhanced website navigation and updating the BPL to Go app** to be responsive to individual preferences and needs.
- Democratize **access to BPL's research collection through digital channels** by expanding and focusing the BPL's digitization program to prioritize high value projects that reflect and respond to community and research needs.
- Increase awareness and usage of **BPL's electronic resources** to enhance and support both formal education and personal growth through instruction, education, and outreach.

- **Use data to develop and execute a targeted campaign** to increase awareness and accessibility of BPL's online programs, services, and resources to communities throughout the city and beyond

Organizational Readiness

Organizational Readiness

Key internal changes that will build capacity and enable BPL to fulfill our strategic roles and desired experiences for our patrons.

Operational Initiatives

The focused actions to advance our strategic plan, prioritizing the resources and efforts to meet the needs of our communities.



Organizational Readiness

This transformation comes from within.

We are investing in our greatest asset – our people – through a workplace culture that champions creativity, growth, and well-being.

We are embedding equity and inclusion principles into every aspect of our work. We are building new capabilities in technology, community engagement, and cross-system collaboration. And we are examining how to shift our structures and strategies to use our resources most wisely.

By scaling our organizational capacity, BPL will be positioned to achieve more ambitious initiatives and explore new opportunities. These internal priorities must be addressed alongside the implementation of external initiatives.



Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

Center Equity, Diversity and Inclusion as a core value to our staff and services

Operational Initiatives:

- **Create and implement a comprehensive EDI 2.0 plan** with measurable goals, dedicated resources, and integrated training to ensure an inclusive, equitable workplace and support staff in better engaging with their communities
- **Develop a language access plan** to ensure that all patrons, regardless of language proficiency, can engage with BPL's services, programs, and resources through multilingual, multimodal access
- Adopt a **research-backed, data-driven approach** to identify internal and community needs, set priorities, and guide informed decision making.

Workplace Culture

Foster a supportive and welcoming workplace culture built on trust, well-being, and belonging

Operational Initiatives:

- **Establish standardized and streamlined internal processes** across the system to reduce bureaucracy, empower BPL staff, and foster creativity.
- **Invest in efforts to support the safety, resilience, and wellbeing of BPL staff**, including cultivating a trauma-informed workplace.
- **Adopt a customer service approach** and develop guiding principles to ensure a consistent experience for all patrons.
- Foster an environment where **people are empowered to ask for and receive help**; cultivate **a culture of accountability and responsibility** to enhance service delivery, while encouraging experimentation, innovation, and learning opportunities.
- Adopt **project management, performance analysis and impact centered mindsets**.



Staff Development

Support workforce development, while activating staff's expertise, skills, and passion

Operational Initiatives:

- **Leverage the deep expertise and lived experiences** of our skilled staff and **create opportunities for community engagement** aligned with their passions.
- **Invest in professional development** to equip BPL staff with the skills and experiences to serve patrons of all ages and backgrounds, including multilingual and digital skills.
- **Increase awareness and opportunities for career advancement**, professional development, and skill building; reduce barriers to entry for librarianship and other types of advancement through fellowships, access to continuing education, and mentoring.
- Allow all staff members to make greater impact by **aligning BPL's hiring strategy with strategic roles and initiatives.**
- **Develop a program of next generation library worker** support and mentoring, targeted at those about to enter the workforce.

Collaboration and Communication

Enhance communication and collaboration between all departments, locations, and branches, at all levels of the organization

Operational Initiatives:

- **Leverage BPL's goals, roles, and priorities to create a unified direction** for the BPL, where everyone can see themselves as capable of making meaningful contributions to the library's mission.
- **Enable knowledge sharing** by providing tools that identify **experiences, skillsets, and resources** available across the system.
- **Establish transparent and collaborative processes and guidelines** to align goals and break down siloes between the departments and branches.
- Identify **core staffing and operational gaps** to support future growth in communication, services, and programs, to ensure the successful implementation of strategic initiatives
- **Commit to a specific program and a set of best practices** on enhanced internal cross-organizational communication

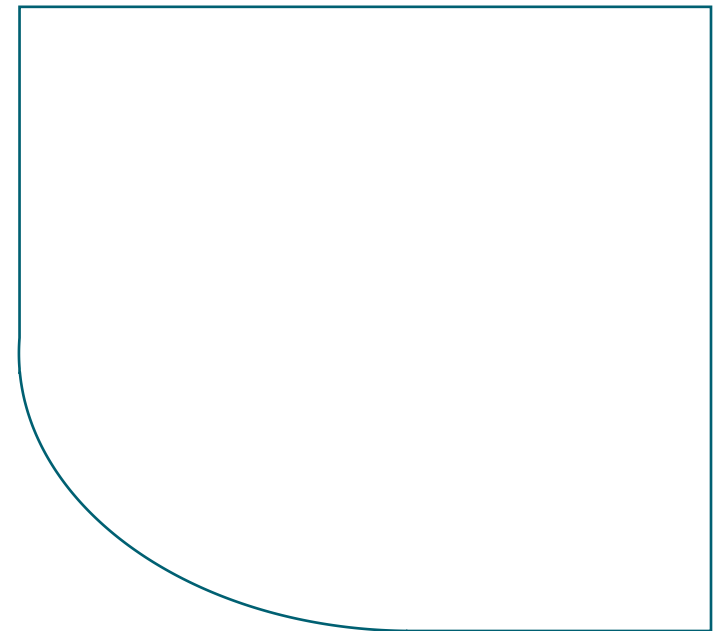


Resource Development

Strengthen our impact by ensuring that BPL's existing resources and efforts to secure additional resources are aligned with our strategic roles

Operational Initiatives:

- Expand BPL's funding through **philanthropy and private fundraising channels** to build greater financial capacity, **in partnership with the BPL Fund** as the Library's primary Philanthropic Partner and de facto fundraising arm.
- Develop a funding strategy across all vehicles - **municipal, state, federal, philanthropic, and in-kind funding** - to catalyze strategic roles and goals.
- Enhance the **collaboration and coordination within BPL** to align funding goals and resource allocation, maximizing support for effective initiatives.
- **Renew and leverage Affiliates, Friends and Partners-in-residence relationships** (at the appropriate levels of engagement) in support of the overall BPL Mission and Strategic Plan, in both service delivery and resource development and stewardship.



Activating the Strategic Plan



How We Will Live the Strategic Plan

Bring the Plan To Life

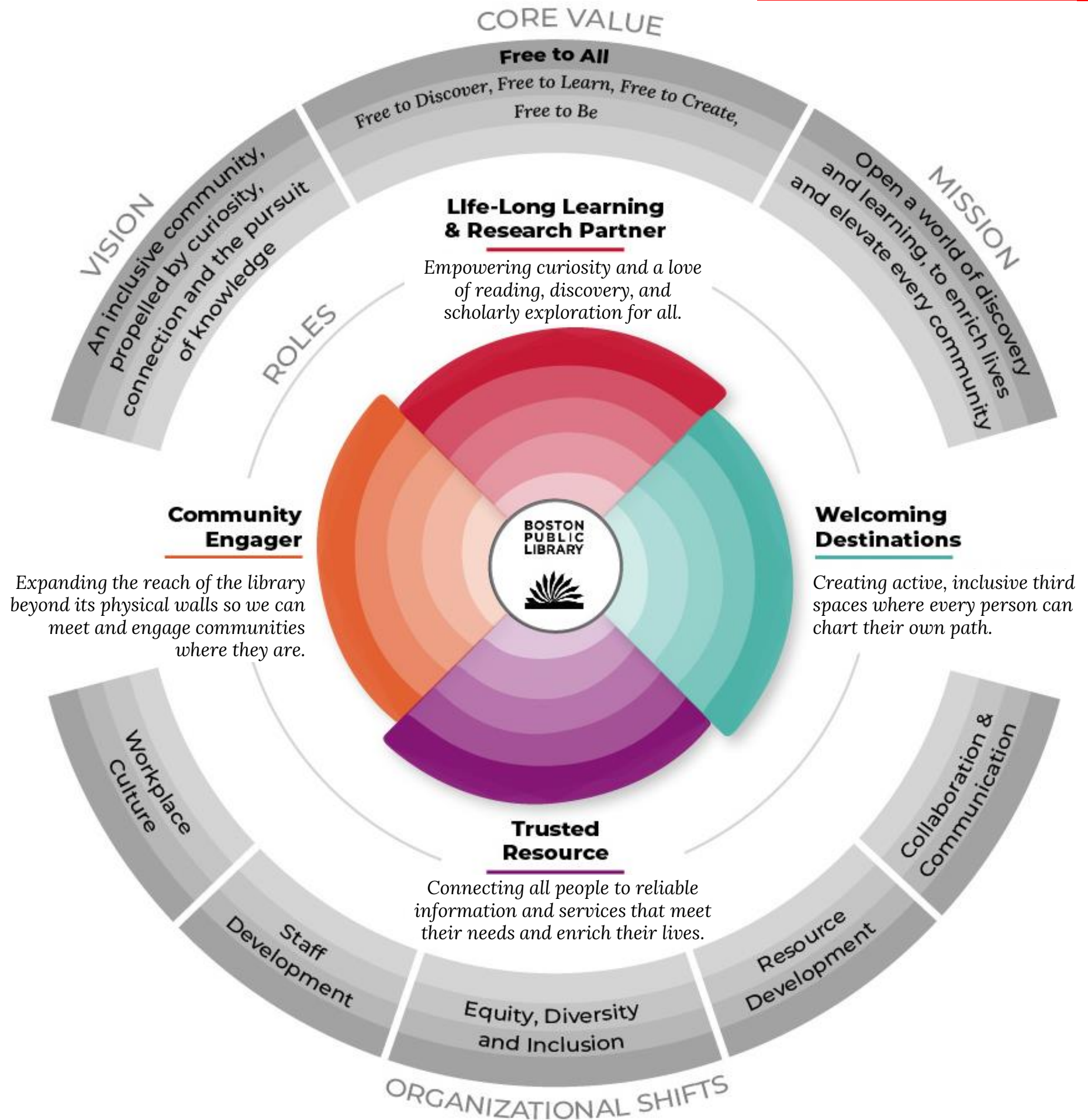
The success of our strategic plan is built on a shared commitment to bring our vision to life.

This strategic plan will serve as a guiding framework to coordinate our efforts and amplify our impact. We recognize that achieving our goals requires the collective commitment of every staff member and our partners, as well as a focus on aligning our actions with our mission, vision, and values.

The following pages exemplify how the BPL might embody its strategic roles across the entirety of a given initiative.

We invite staff, partners, community members, and supporters to join us in making this bold vision a reality. Together, we will ensure that the Boston Public Library continues to light the way forward, just as it has since 1848. **This is our moment to lead - not just for Boston, but for the future of public libraries everywhere.**

The future is free to all.



How We Will Live the Strategic Plan

Our Strategic Goals

Life-Long Learning & Research Partner

1. Ignite Young Minds

Elevate BPL's role as an extraordinary hub of discovery, **igniting the curiosity of young children** and their families as they learn and grow together.

2. Advance Youth Opportunities

Launch the next generation toward excellence, **empowering young adults** with innovative tools and opportunities to shape their own futures and thrive during their transition to adulthood.

3. Support Lifelong Growth

Champion **adults' aspirations** for personal success by becoming their life-long learning partner, fostering meaningful connections to their work, their communities, and to each other.

4. Preserve and Make Accessible our Heritage & History

Pioneer innovative approaches to serve patrons from Boston and the Commonwealth by leveraging our collections, services, and programs to closely **connect communities to their past and preserve their stories for the future.**

Welcoming Destination

1. Create Inclusive Spaces

Ensure that **every location of the library is a place of belonging** where all community members feel welcome, safe, included, and inspired to discover, create, connect, and celebrate their unique identities.

2. Reimagine McKim

Transform **the historic McKim Building into a vibrant, exciting, library space** that preserves and builds on its unique history while honoring its past, meeting the present, and celebrating the future

3. Embrace Cultural Diversity

Dramatically expand **our offerings in multiple languages** to create a cultural crossroads where diverse communities find their voices amplified and their heritage celebrated.

4. Build Sustainable Communities

Create **future-ready spaces** that adapt with and support our evolving communities by continuing our visionary transformation of our BPL's physical locations through bold investment and innovative design.

Trusted Resource

1. Deliver Reliable Information

Champion **the pursuit of truth and knowledge** by establishing an unprecedented standard for information access, positioning the BPL as a beacon of accuracy and intellectual freedom in the digital age.

2. Bridge Human Services

Pioneer an **effective model of integrated community support**, connecting social and human services in the City of Boston with those who need them most.

3. Empower Digital Access

Continue pioneering bold initiatives to **shrink the digital divide**, ensuring all our patrons have the digital literacy skills, connectivity and tools they need to embrace new technologies and thrive in an increasingly connected world.

Community Engager

1. Respond to Neighborhood Needs

Revolutionize how we serve, engage, and evolve with our neighborhoods, prioritizing **community-centered, data-driven programs and services** at neighborhood branches, enabling BPL to be in the community, working for the community, and informed by the community.

2. Amplify Diverse Voices

Uncover and celebrate **the untold stories and history of Boston and the Commonwealth** through our collections, programs, and services, ensuring every community's narrative becomes an integral part of Boston's collective identity.

3. Foster Civic Participation

Launch an **innovative civic engagement program** to transform community members into active architects of Boston's civic life and future.

4. Expand Digital Reach

Pioneer a true **'Library without Walls'** by **enhancing the digital experience** and creating expansive online collections that set new standards for accessibility, engagement, and use.

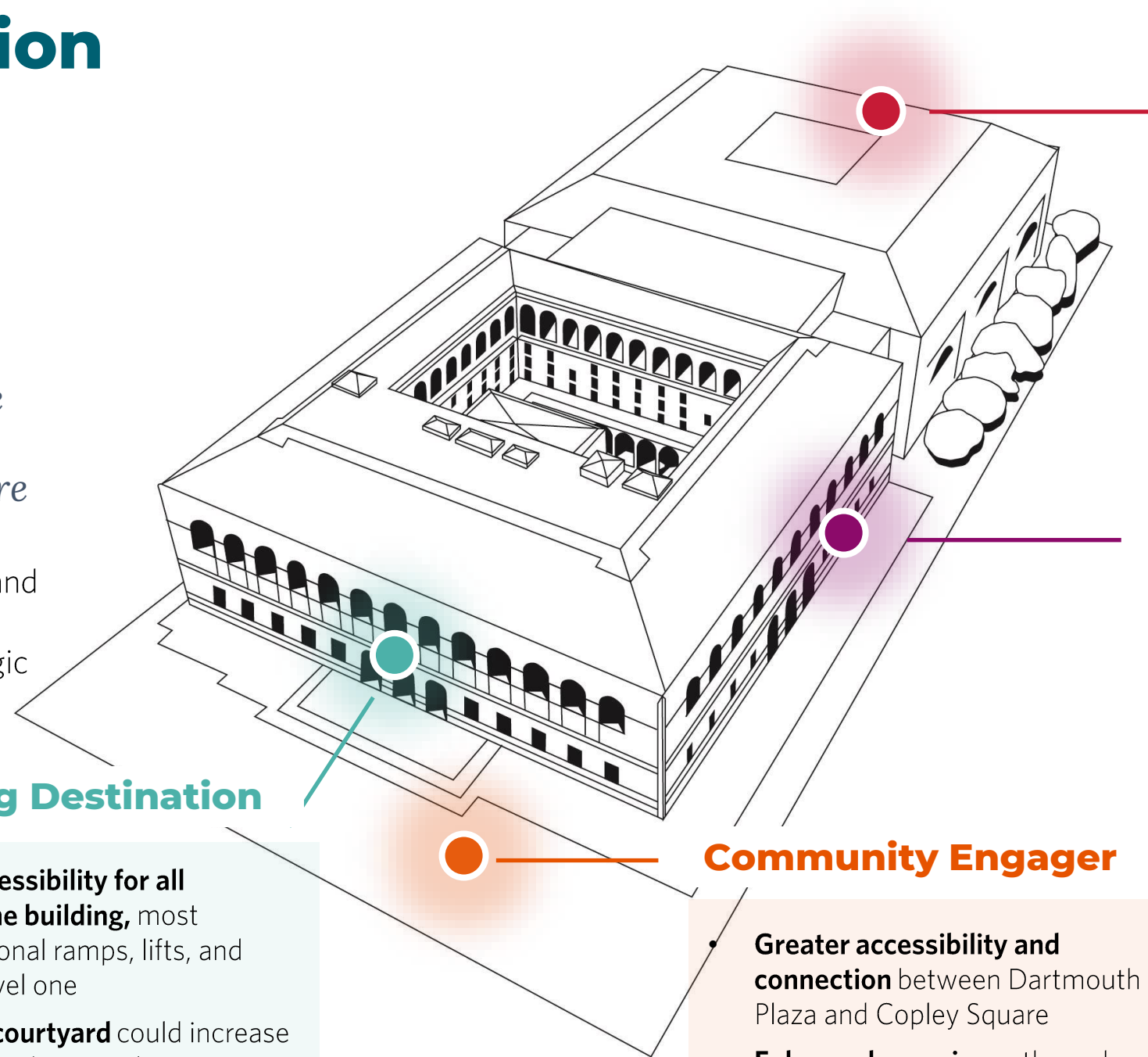
How We Will Live the Strategic Plan

Sample Implementation: McKim Renovation

Strategic Goal:

Transform the historic McKim Building into a vibrant, exciting, library space that preserves and builds on its unique history while honoring its past, meeting the present, and celebrating the future

As each goal is implemented, initiatives and tactics within these efforts will focus on elements that help the BPL live its Strategic Roles, bringing these roles to life.



Life-Long Learning & Research Partner

- **Incorporation of more dedicated spaces for learning and collaboration** including classrooms, demonstration spaces, and enhanced multipurpose rooms

Trusted Resource

- **Improved ground floor service connection** for the public to connect to services and partners
- **Additional space for display and use of BPL's extensive Special Collections** across the building

Welcoming Destination

- **Improved accessibility for all throughout the building**, most notably additional ramps, lifts, and elevator on level one
- **An enclosed courtyard** could increase activity by providing a welcoming third space for year-round programming and use

Community Engager

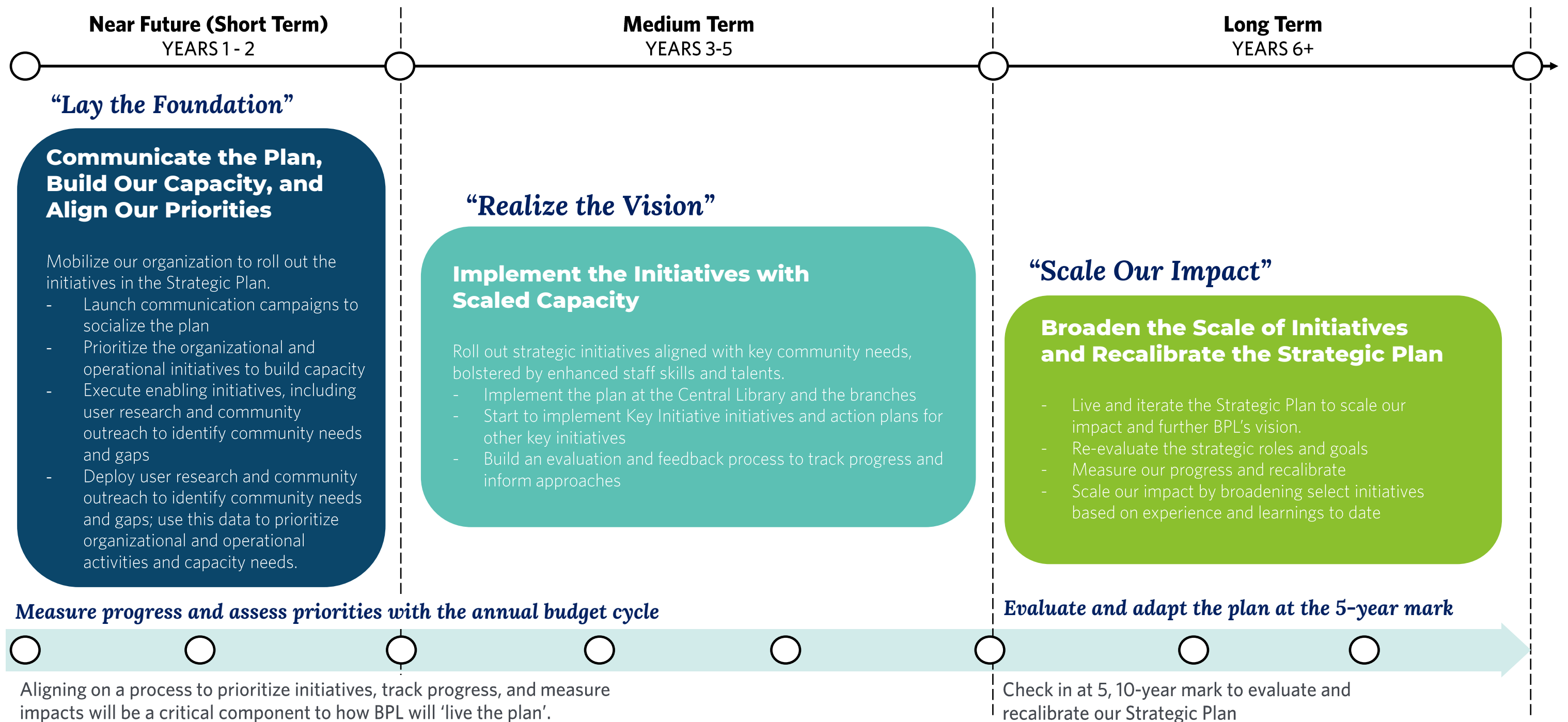
- **Greater accessibility and connection** between Dartmouth Plaza and Copley Square
- **Enhanced experience** through entertainment, services, and agile public space

Sources: McKim Master Plan Update – Community Meeting: Planning Themes” (June 2, 2020)
Boston Public Library McKim Building Improvements Project: Master Plan Report – Volume 1 Executive Summary” (October 22, 2021)

How We Will Live the Strategic Plan

Implementation Roadmap

The Strategic Plan will guide the BPL over the next 10 years and beyond. It is a living framework for setting annual work plans and charting the path to our north star. The roadmap below shows how we envision the plan unfolding over the near and long term future.



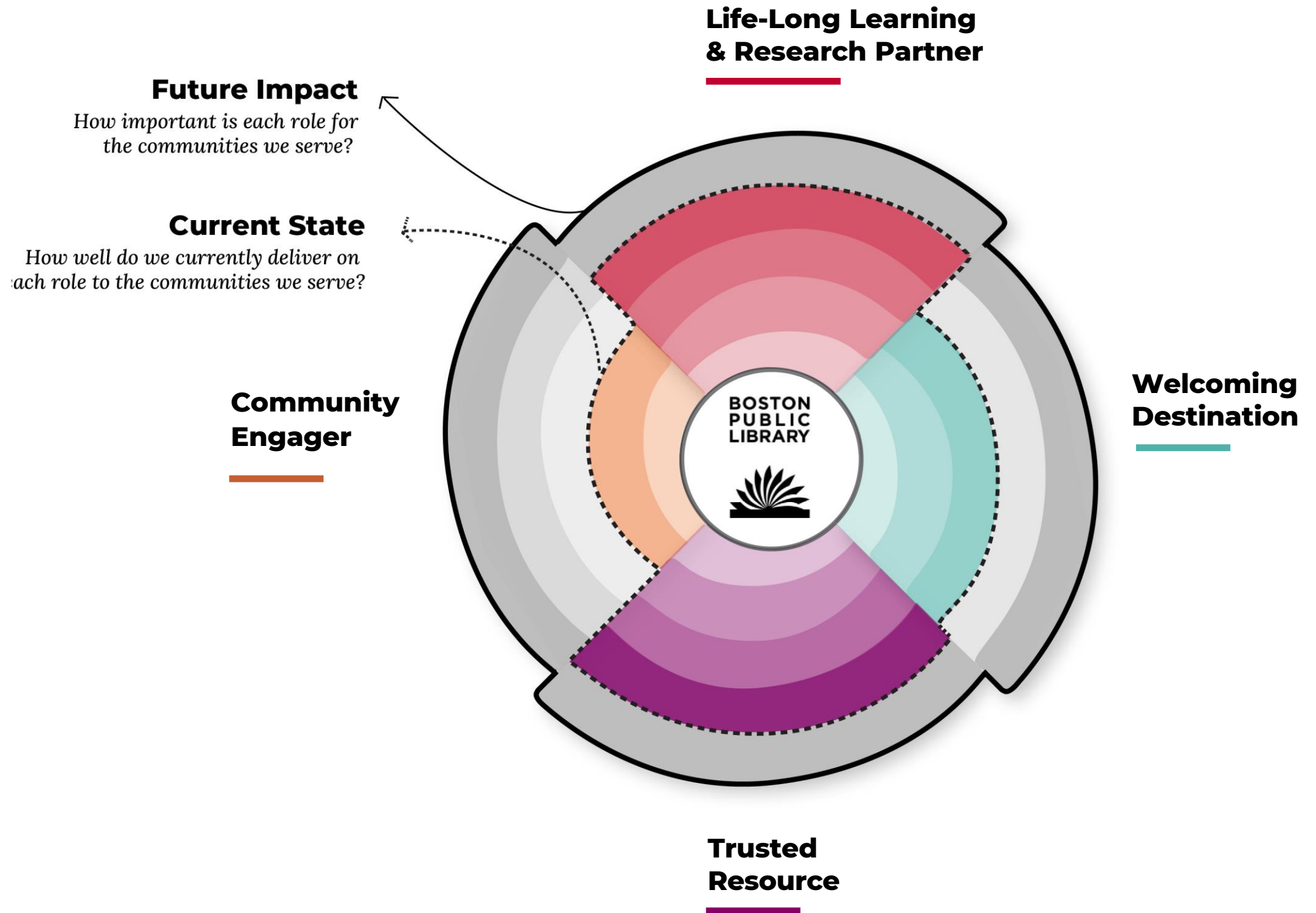
How We Will Live the Strategic Plan

Living The Plan To Meet Our Community

The strategic plan is a dynamic tool that will drive our future impact, guiding us to continually adapt and innovate as we serve our diverse communities.

The Strategic Role framework can be utilized to calibrate future initiatives at system-wide, branch, and department levels to meet the needs of each unique community. It's a living tool that will help us measure, refine, and enhance our impact across a large and complex organization.

This plan drives us toward a future where we can serve the community more effectively and boldly than ever before. Together, we will forge a future where every individual can thrive, fully embodying the spirit of Free to All.



How We Will Live the Strategic Plan

Acknowledgments

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

BPL Staff, for helping the Strategic Planning Team understand the communities they serve, for contextualizing BPL’s strengths and opportunities, and for providing essential feedback and guidance that co-created this plan.

| | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Amy Loustau | Euronna Taylor | Robin Malamud |
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BPL Board of Trustees, for their integral role in defining the future of BPL.

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Ray Liu, Chair | Priscilla H. Douglas |
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| Joe Berman | Cheryl Cronin |
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| Julie Kim | Jonathan S. Lavine |
| José C. Massó III | Porsha Olayiwola |
| Senator Mike Rush | Christian Westra |
| Lynn Perry Wooten | Chynah Tyler |

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| Lisa Pollack | Ray Liu |
| Michael Colford | Sarah Zaphiris |

City of Boston

| | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| Michelle Wu, Mayor | Tiffany Chu, Chief of Staff |
| José Massó, Chief of Human Services | Nathan Rosin |

Our internal BPL partners:

Associates of the Boston Public Library
Board of Trustees
Boston Public Library Fund
Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center

The following **community partners** for their thought leadership on the communities they serve:

Animal Rescue League of Boston
Asian Community Development Corporation
Back Bay Association
Boston Children’s Museum
Boston Centers for Youth & Families
Boston Schools Fund
Boston University
Bunker Hill Community College
City of Boston
Fisher College
Grub Street
Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners
Massachusetts Library System
Mayor’s Office of New Urban Mechanics
Northeastern University
Office of Youth Engagement and Advancement
Pine Street Inn
The Basics Boston
The Boston Foundation
United Way of Massachusetts Bay
YMCA

The external Strategic Planning Team:

Gensler
Margaret Sullivan Studio
Advancing with Purpose

Appendix

Financial Benchmarking

Appendix

Organizational Benchmarks

The Boston Public library is a complex institution, ‘punching above its weight’ providing world-class services with comparably less resources as the benchmarks will demonstrate.

Closest direct benchmarks, comparable population, and size:

DC Public Library, Enoch Pratt Free Library (Baltimore), Seattle Public Library, and San Francisco Public Library are similar in **size, geographic reach, and the population they serve.**

Benchmarks with similar populations, and larger geography:

The Denver Public Library and Columbus Metropolitan Library cover a larger geographic area but are **comparable in size and population served, making them excellent benchmarks.**

Benchmarks with larger systems in key cities:

While not directly comparable to BPL in size, reach, or population, **Chicago Public Library, Brooklyn Public Library, Los Angeles Public Library, and New York Public Library**—are larger systems that provide additional context.



DC Public Library



Enoch Pratt Free Library



Seattle Public Library



San Francisco Public Library



Denver Public Library



Columbus Metropolitan Library

Appendix

Business & Operational Metrics

In comparison to comparable urban libraries with similar scale, BPL has **24-78% less staff than peers**, and far less, **93-187%**, than peer cities.

| | LIBRARY | ANNUAL OPERATING BUDGET | POPULATION | GEOGRAPHIC REACH (sq.mi) | LOCATIONS | TOTAL FTE | % FTE COMPARED TO OTHER LIBRARIES |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------|--------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------------------------------|
| PEER CITIES | BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY | \$61,599,091 (FY25) | 692,600* | 48 | 26 | 506/550** | |
| | NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY | \$380,325,000* | 3,630,175 | 123 | 92 | 1450/2120 | 187% MORE FTE |
| | BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY | \$197,300,000 | 2,736,074 | 69.5 | 62 | 1168 | 131% MORE FTE |
| | LOS ANGELES PUBLIC LIBRARY | \$203,070,540 | 3,795,936 | 502 | 73 | 978 | 93% MORE FTE |
| | CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY | \$113,400,000 | 2,746,388 | 231.7 | 81 | 1152 | 128% MORE FTE |
| COMPARABLE SIZE & REACH | DC PUBLIC LIBRARY | \$75,000,000 | 670,050 | 68 | 27 | 625 | 24% MORE FTE |
| | ENOCH PRATT FREE LIBRARY (BALTIMORE) | \$61,482,800 | 602,495 | 92 | 22 | 492 | 2% LESS FTE |
| | SEATTLE PUBLIC LIBRARY | \$92,000,000 | 749,256 | 84 | 27 | 711 | 41% MORE FTE |
| | SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC LIBRARY | \$166,000,000 | 873,965 | 46.7 | 31 | 900 | 78% MORE FTE |
| | DENVER PUBLIC LIBRARY | \$90,000,000 | 717,632 | 153 | 27 | 853 | 69% MORE FTE |
| | COLUMBUS METROPOLITAN LIBRARY | \$81,656,000 | 971,930 | 223 | 23 | 850 | 68% MORE FTE |

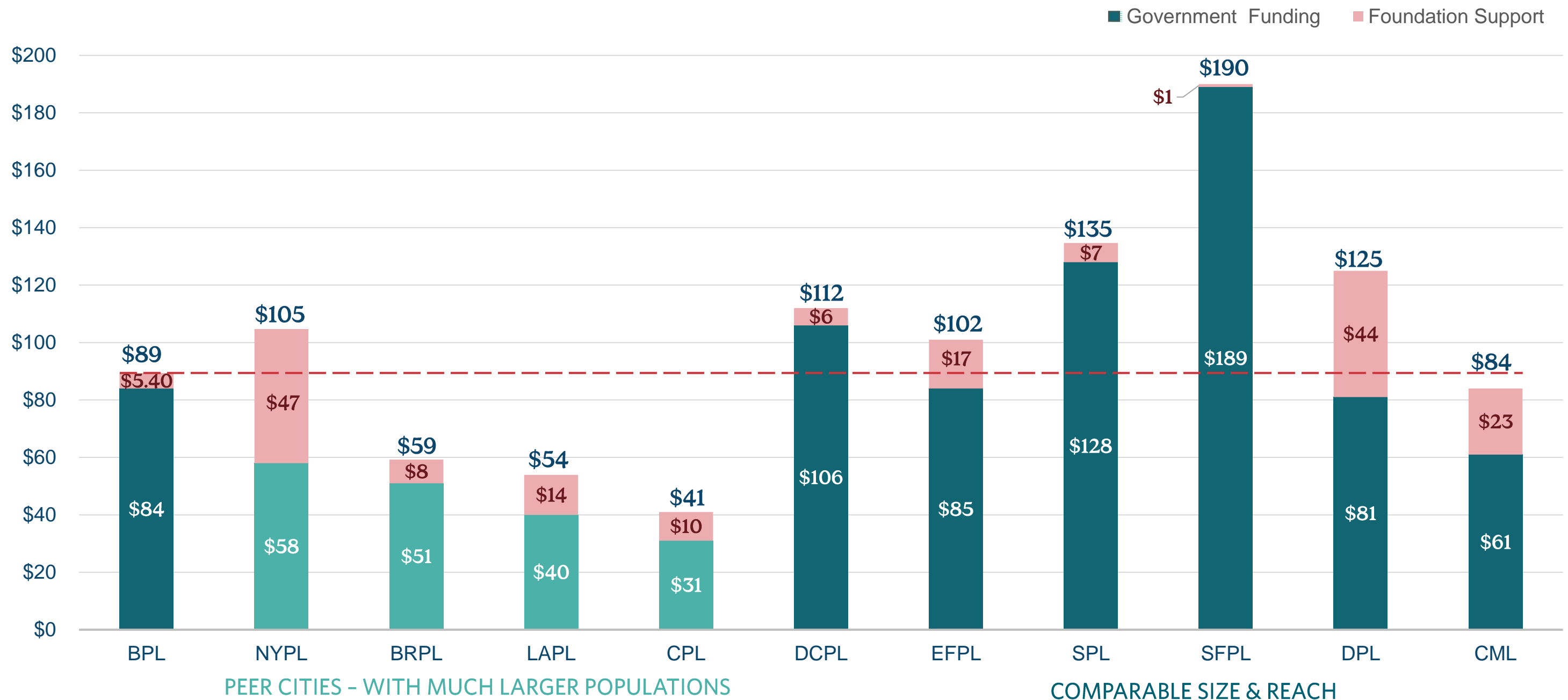
*The Boston Public Library serves 700,000 people within its immediate area and approximately 7 million people across the Commonwealth.

**BPL operates one Central Library and 25 branches, with 550 full-time equivalent (FTE) employees. Of these, 44 FTEs are assigned to Research and Special Collections. All comparisons are based on the 506 FTEs excluding research and special collections staff, FTE count provided October 2024

Appendix

Spending Per Capita

Per capita, peer library systems **operate with a much larger budget than the Boston Public library**. While BPL is able to create incredible impact within these constraints, the **success of the Strategic Plan will be dependent on elevating all funding streams**.

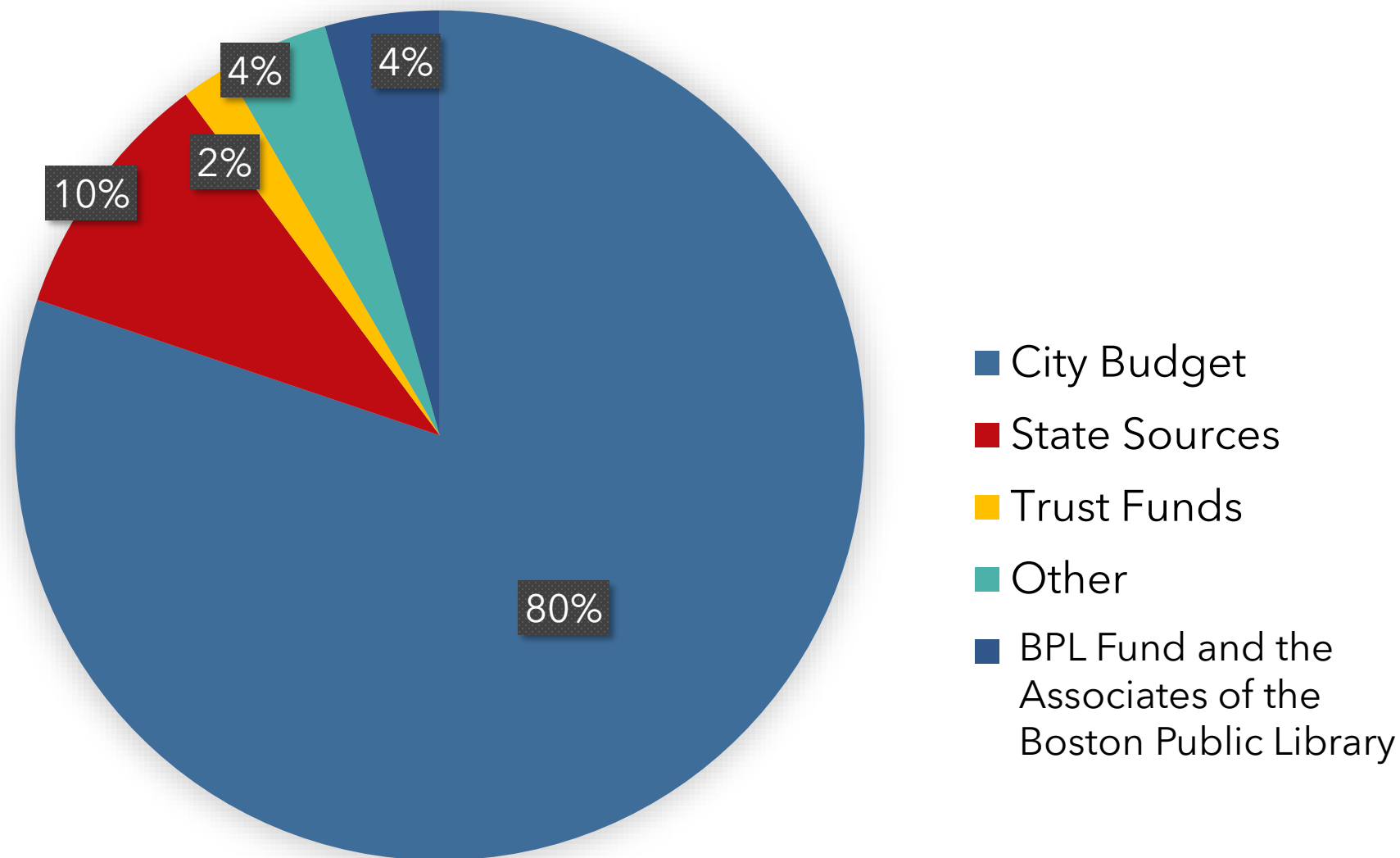


*Note: This comparison only considers Boston's population of 700,000.

Additional Context: Current Budget Funding Sources

Currently, the **majority of the operating budget for BPL is made up of allocations from the City and State**, supplemented by additional sources beyond the budget amounts.

BPL FY 25 Operating Budget: \$61 M + by Funding Sources



The annual operating budget is supplemented yearly by the BPL Fund, providing **over \$12 M in additional funding since 2019** and an **average of \$2.3 M annually** in the past 5 years.

Appendix

Organizational Benchmarks

BPL oversees the largest Central Library in the country and 25 branches, **managing significantly more square footage system-wide.**

Boston Public Library
Central – 1,000,000 sf
Total Branches - 300,000 sf

1.3 million SF

DC Public Library
Central – 400,000 sf
Total Branches - 500,000 sf

900,000 SF

Enoch Pratt Free Library
Main – 349,713 sf
Total Branches - 250,000 sf

572,278 SF

Seattle Public Library
Central – 360,000 sf
Total Branches - 250,000 sf

610,000 SF

San Francisco Public Library
Main – 376,000 sf
Total Branches - 227,000 sf

602,636 SF

Denver Public Library
Central – 540,000 sf
Total Branches - 200,000 sf

740,000 SF

Columbus Metropolitan Library
Main – 230,000 sf
Total Branches - 370,000 sf

600,000 SF

Appendix

Organizational Benchmarks

The Boston Public Library, with over 23 million items, boasts one of the largest collections in the country, including materials dating back to the 10th century.

No other public library matches the scale and complexity of BPL's holdings relative to its budget.



Movies and Music DVDs, CDs and Audiobook Collection Newspapers, Novels, Books and More



Research and Archives



Rare Books Collection

The New York Public Library is the **only analogous research library**, but its governance and funding are structured inversely to BPL.



Written Manuscripts and Paper Documents



Leventhal Map Collection

Appendix

Performance Metrics

| Library | Materials Circulated | Physical Collection | Library Visits | Registered Cardholders | Children & Adult Program Attendance | Website Visits |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|----------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------|
| Boston Public Library | 5.7 Million | 8.2 Million | 2.3 Million | 498 K + 50 K* | 246 K | 6.6 Million |
| DC Public Library | 5 Million | 1.1 Million | 901 K | 330 K | 45 K | 3.5 Million |
| Enoch Pratt Free Library | 1.7 Million | 2.2 Million | 804 K | 288 K | 50 K | 1.6 Million |
| Seattle Public Library | 9.2 Million | 1.7 Million | 78 K | 344 K | 1006 | 5.2 Million |
| San Francisco Public Library | 11.4 Million | 4.2 Million | 2.4 Million | 438 K | 101 K | 6.2 Million |
| Denver Public Library | 6 Million | 1.5 Million | 1.2 Million | 395 K | 23 K | 5.3 Million |
| Columbus Met. Library | 11.2 Million | 1.5 Million | 2.2 Million | 604 K | 133 K | 7 Million |
| Richland County Public Library | 2.3 Million | 822 K | 149 K | 197 K | 35 K | 1.7 Million |
| Los Angeles Public Library | 15.2 Million | 6.3 Million | 4.6 Million | 2.8 Million | 41 K | 10.2 Million |
| Brooklyn Public Library | 7.6 Million | 29 Million | 1.8 Million | 534 K | 13 K | 4.5 Million |

Data extracted from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) FY22 Public Libraries Survey and/or annual reports from each library.

* 50,196 New library cards issued in 2023