

Westborough Public Library

Strategic Plan

FY2026 – FY2030

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Introduction

The Westborough Public Library began the strategic planning process in March 2024, and concluded the process in September 2024. This is a five-year plan which begins on July 1, 2025 and ends on June 30, 2029. The methodology and needs assessment are part of this document and will outline the ways in which information was gathered and analyzed to create this strategic plan.

Acknowledgements

There are a lot of people we would like to thank for being part of this strategic planning process. Key staff members and a member of the Board of Library Trustees were part of the internal Steering Committee working with the Deb Hoadley, Consultant from Hoadley Consulting, to recruit community members for focus groups, review the survey and results and they participated in a retreat to work on the final parts of the strategic plan based on all the information gathered.

We want to thank the Westborough Public Library Staff, the Board of Library Trustees, and community members for participating in the focus groups and also responded to the survey.

Strategic Plan Approval

The Westborough Public Library's Strategic Plan FY25-FY29 was reviewed and approved by the following Library Board of Trustees:

Mary Johnston, Chair
Kate Daly, Vice Chair
Julia Rissmiller, Treasurer
Debra Cushman, Recording Secretary
Dorothy Mello, Corresponding Secretary
Edward Baldwin, Trustee
Mary Botticelli Christensen, Trustee
Michael Karp, Trustee
Jeanine Mindrum, Trustee

The Strategic Plan was then submitted to the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners for approval.

Methodology

An Initial meeting was held between Assistant Library Director, Lynne Soukup and Deb Hoadley from Hoadley Consulting. They reviewed the previous strategic plan, goals for the future of the library and logistics of the strategic planning process. Ms. Hoadley facilitated a meeting of the internal Steering Committee, where library statistics and town demographics were shared. A discussion about recruiting community members for the focus groups was also discussed. Ms. Hoadley facilitated two Community Focus Group Meeting with 12 community members; a Library Staff Focus Group; and a Board of Library Trustee Focus Group. In each of these facilitations, the S.O.A.R. (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results) exercise was conducted to

explore the library's role and then later the groups addressed community challenges, issues and visions. These focus groups were held from March through May of 2024. Ms. Hoadley also led a retreat session with the Steering Committee to develop the main components of the plan once all the information had been gathered and analyzed.

To gather additional information from the larger community, a community-wide survey was made available in both print and online formats. The survey was accessible to all community members during the month of June, 2024. It was promoted on the library's website, included in the library's monthly emails, and distributed as paper copies. The survey received 143 responses. This was a lower turnout than expected. However, important information was still garnered from those who responded.

Needs Assessment

Scope of Needs

The Westborough Public Library actively engaged a diverse group of stakeholders in its strategic planning process, including library staff, trustees, community members, and local organizations. The purpose of these facilitated discussions was to gather varied perspectives. These stakeholders were crucial in identifying the community's needs and aspirations for the library.

The scope of the needs assessment evaluated the current services and infrastructure of the Westborough Public Library and identified opportunities for growth and improvement. The purpose was to align the library's services and resources with the evolving needs of the Westborough community, focusing on inclusivity, accessibility, and modernization to ensure it remains a vital resource for all community members.

As mentioned previously, data was collected through a combination of methods including:

- **Community Focus Groups:** Multiple sessions were held where participants discussed the current issues facing the community, such as economic disparity, housing challenges, and the need for more inclusive programming and resources.
- **Staff Meetings:** Discussions on the strengths and opportunities for the library staff to enhance service delivery and community engagement.
- **Trustee Meetings:** Strategic sessions with library trustees to discuss long-term goals and the library's role in the community.
- **Community Surveys:** Distributed both online and in print to gather a wide range of feedback from the community members.

Demographic and Community Needs

Westborough is a community experiencing diverse demographic shifts and faces challenges that impact its residents differently. Economic disparities and a growing number of refugee families have placed unique demands on local resources, including the public library. Challenges such as "rising food insecurity, housing challenges, and the need for more ESL education" reflect critical areas where the library can play a pivotal role in providing support. Additionally, transportation issues such as "lack of reliable public transportation" and inadequate pedestrian infrastructure suggest the need for enhanced accessibility to library services.

The information gathered revealed four (4) key areas related to the issues and challenges in Westborough:

1. Economic and Social Disparities:
 - Economic disparity and high taxes impacting affordability.
 - Rising food insecurity and housing challenges.
 - Increasing needs for affordable housing and support for the unhoused.
2. Transportation and Infrastructure:
 - Lack of reliable public transportation, making cars essential.
 - Safety concerns due to inadequate sidewalks and ineffective lighted crosswalks.
 - Need for safe bike paths and improved traffic monitoring.
3. Demographic Shifts and Cultural Integration:
 - Growing number of refugee families and cultural gaps within the community.
 - Challenges with ESL education beyond schools and need for English learning centers.
 - Social polarization and misconceptions about community missions and services.
4. Community Participation and Engagement:
 - Decline in participation in organizations and volunteerism, highlighting the need for succession planning.
 - Rising isolation, loneliness, and substance abuse.
 - Cultural and societal challenges with civic responsibilities and voting participation.

In addition to looking at the challenges and issues, these four (4) community visions were also identified:

1. Inclusive and Welcoming Community:
 - A place where everyone feels they belong, regardless of cultural, economic, or ethnic background.
 - An inclusive town accepting of all ages and abilities, providing homes, jobs, food, and accessible transportation.
2. Connected and Supportive Environment:
 - A community where people come together to support, learn from, and enjoy each other's company.
 - Promoting connections between generations and creating "third places" for communal interaction.
3. Safe, Pedestrian-Friendly Growth:
 - Ensuring safety for residents with pedestrian-friendly infrastructure.
 - Growing in a way that new residents can afford to live and thrive in Westborough.
4. Thrive Through Change and Innovation:
 - Embracing change as an opportunity for growth and turning obstacles into opportunities.
 - Engaging with new public art policies and maintaining educational excellence.
 - Being a model community known for building bridges and connections, fostering civic-mindedness and succession planning.

Library Services and Program Development

The Westborough Public Library is at a crucial juncture where it must evolve to meet the changing needs of its community. Feedback from residents indicates a strong desire for "a larger selection of up-to-date video game titles and dungeons and dragons' resources" for younger patrons and expanded adult learning opportunities to include more "daytime adult learning classes/experiences." There is also a call for the library to address

scheduling biases that currently limit accessibility for working families, who are unable to participate in children's programming offered during traditional working hours.

Based on the information gathered, these top four (4) priorities were identified:

1. Embracing and Leading with Technology:
 - Upgrading equipment and making technology accessible through virtual and online means to meet community needs.
 - Offering classes on AI and new technologies, allowing community members to learn and create using modern tools.
 - Providing diverse books and physical resources in multiple languages, promoting the interlibrary loan service to ensure everyone finds books that represent community diversity.
2. Community Support and Resource Center:
 - Becoming an informational center for new residents and those transitioning through different life phases.
 - Serving as a guide to help residents get the best from Westborough, connecting them with resources and organizations like the food pantry and volunteer opportunities.
 - Establishing connections with other organizations to address community needs such as food insecurity and volunteerism.
3. Central Hub for Collaboration and Partnerships:
 - Functioning as a hub that facilitates the activities of various organizations and individuals, supporting partnerships and collaborations.
 - Hosting town-wide events and creating initiatives like a "Volunteer Fair" to promote inclusiveness and community engagement.
 - Engaging educational institutions and other organizations to promote missions of freedom, democracy, and civil responsibilities.
4. Maintaining Core Focus and Stability:
 - Preserving its primary role in providing information through books and technology while evolving into a cultural hub.
 - Offering a stable, safe, and welcoming space for learning and personal growth.

Facility improvements are a significant concern for the Westborough Public Library. The community has expressed dissatisfaction with the current physical condition of the library, highlighting issues like the "poor condition of the children's area" and a general need for upgrading internal infrastructure to support modern technology use. There is a clear need for the library to renovate and modernize its spaces to better serve the community's needs, ensuring environments that are not only welcoming but also conducive to a wide range of library activities, from studying to community gatherings.

Prioritizing & Responding to Needs

Incorporating these strategic priorities and goals in the library's strategic plan will directly address the prioritized needs, aiming to transform the library into a more inclusive, accessible, and vital resource for the Westborough community. These priorities and goals focus on both immediate improvements and long-term sustainability. The strategic plan includes renovating library spaces, expanding digital resources, and enhancing program offerings across age groups and interests. Each year an action plan will detail the steps to implement, identify who is responsibility, timelines, and required resources necessary to carry out the plan over the next five years.

This needs assessment underscores the necessity for the Westborough Public Library to strategically address both its programmatic offerings and physical infrastructure to better serve its diverse and evolving community.

Responding to the identified needs will help the Westborough Public Library enhance its service to the community, ensuring it continues to be an essential hub for information, lifelong learning, and community involvement. These crucial insights have been incorporated into the library's strategic plan to develop a responsive and forward-looking institution.

Westborough Public Library Strategic Plan FY26-FY30

Mission Statement

(Our purpose and why we exist):

We are the heart of the community. We provide equitable access to services, inspire learning, literacy, and personal enrichment, and are a hub for collaborations and community engagement.

Vision Statement

(Aspirations we have for our library):

We are a trusted destination with dedicated staff, continually adapting to the evolving needs of our community, ensuring everyone feels welcome and valued.

Value Statement

(What we believe in):

We value:

- *Access to information for all*
- *Diversity*
- *Literacy & personal enrichment*
- *Exceptional service*
- *Intellectual freedom*
- *Principles of democracy*

Strategic Priorities & Goals:

Strategic Priority 1: *Embrace Emerging Technologies and Innovation*

Goal 1: Regularly update and maintain technology and equipment to ensure accessibility both in-person and online.

Goal 2: Offer educational programs on new and emerging technologies to foster creativity, innovation, and practical skills.

Goal 3: Invest in professional development for staff to further their skills and knowledge in librarianship and technology.

Strategic Priority 2: *Strengthen Community Engagement, Education and Collaboration*

Goal 1: Position the library as a trusted information center for residents of all ages, connecting them to vital resources to promote literacy and life-long learning.

Goal 2: Facilitate and advance partnerships with local community organizations, town departments and businesses to raise awareness of important social, environmental, and economic issues through activities and community conversations.

Goal 3: Promote community engagement and active participation in civic responsibilities and volunteerism.

Goal 4: Maintain and continue to preserve Westborough history and culture.

Goal 5: Intensify marketing efforts to enhance the library's visibility, using a mix of traditional media and advanced technologies to reach a broader audience.

Strategic Priority 3: Create a Dynamic, Welcoming and Safe Library Environment

Goal 1: Ensure the library is a safe and secure space for all age groups, creating an atmosphere that is welcoming, inclusive and accessible.

Goal 2: Undertake renovations to update and modernize the library's facilities, improving functionality while preserving the aesthetic appeal of the building making the library a cultural community landmark.

Goal 3: Develop a range of inviting indoor and outdoor areas at the library for reading and various activities.

Goal 4: Create designated areas tailored to meet different usage requirements.

Strategic Priority 4: Champion Diversity, Inclusion and Social Responsibility

Goal 1: Curate and maintain a collection of materials and resources that reflects the community's diversity.

Goal 2: Cultivate and foster an environment that accepts and respects diverse perspectives by implementing a range of activities and initiatives that brings varied community voices together.

Goal 3: Expand and create outreach programs to physically meet people in community spaces to ensure library services and resources are accessible to all segments of the population.