Draft Framework, Version 1.0
2034 Library Strategic Plan

The
Seattle
Public
Library

Introduction

For more than 130 years, the services offered by The Seattle Public Library (SPL) have been highly valued, well used, and well supported by the people of Seattle. It offers access to books and information to hundreds of thousands of Seattle area residents.

As SPL now looks ahead to its next 10 years, it recognizes that the changing needs of our community and increasing pressures of our era place a new level of importance on how the Library approaches the future.

Between 2000 and 2022, Seattle experienced transformational growth, increasing inequity, and growing racial disparities. While profound social and technological changes were occurring globally, SPL also found itself on the frontline of multiple extraordinary crises: homelessness, mental health, addiction and the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic amplified existing inequity, accelerated technological and social change, and stressed SPL's ability to carry out its mission.

SPL is drafting a plan for its next decade that is driven by a pivotal question: How do we respond to these challenges and remain relevant in a rapidly evolving landscape of technology, culture and community? This question necessitates a reevaluation of "access" and "information," and an innovative approach to preserving the core ideals of our traditional service while addressing the needs of our city, its neighborhoods, and its people.

The Seattle Public Library believes it is uniquely positioned to help the residents of Seattle navigate the pressures facing our region, acting as a hub of community connection to the information, services, and resources they need.

In our future, we envision:

- The Library continues its core services, providing free access to books and information.
- The Library serves as a hub of community connection.
- The Library prioritizes equity in its actions, services, and outcomes.
- The Library works to ensure all voices and viewpoints can be represented and heard.
- The Library commits to putting people first.

How to Use this Draft Framework

This document outlines a framework for the Library's new Strategic Plan. Some elements of this framework – such as our values and the impacts we want to make in our community – have been fully drafted and are undergoing community review, while other elements – such as the specific actions we will take to realize those impacts -- are still in development. This is due to the Library using a "Theory of Change" planning model, which starts by identifying the impacts we want to make in our community, the activities we must do and the resources we must have to achieve those goals.

The Library is now identifying the details that will make those impacts possible, such as what resources we will need, what specific actions we will take, and how we will measure our successes. Future versions of the Library's in-development plan will include these details and will be presented according to the "good, better, best" implementation structure identified below. More information about the implementation structure and the planning model can be found in the sections below.

Once the Library's Strategic Plan is finalized in early 2024, it will serve as a strategic roadmap for the Library's budget development, funding proposals, and operational plans. These elements will continue to be evaluated and refined throughout the life of the Strategic Plan. The Library will continue to ask for feedback along the way from patrons, staff and other stakeholders to ensure it is aligning with the needs and interests of the community.

Theory of Change

The Library used a Theory of Change planning model to develop, assess and decide which activities and goals should be included in a new strategic plan. This model allows us to work toward the future we want to see at the Library and in our community.

A Theory of Change articulates:

- the **impact** we want to make for our community;
- the **outcomes** from our work that make that impact possible;
- the **outputs** that will be used to measure progress towards our goals;
- the **activities/actions** we will pursue to support those outcomes; and
- the **resources** we must have to engage successfully in those activities.

The key to a successful Theory of Change approach is starting with a strong mission, a clear vision, and organizational values that align with the values of the community. These elements will be our guideposts as we work toward our future vision.

In the following pages, we outline our intended mission, vision and values, as well as the impacts we seek to make in the community and the outcomes we anticipate as a result of our activities. In future drafts, we will begin to identify our measures of success, the actions we will need to take, and the resources we will need to realize our intended future vision.

Good, Better, Best Implementation Structure

Throughout this Strategic Plan Draft Framework, the final Strategic Plan and subsequent updates, we will be using a "good, better, best" structure to set milestones and identify goalposts that will keep us on the right path towards achieving the Hub Future.

We define "good, better, best" according to the following parameters:

Good: the short term, realistic initiatives than can be completed within the next 3 years;

Better: medium term initiatives that may not be fully resourced now but may be accomplished within the next 5 years;

Best: the long-term, aspirational initiatives that require up to 10+ years to accomplish and will have transformative impacts on the Library system and community.

Mission, Vision and Values

The Library has drafted the following mission, vision and value statements to provide direction to the organization that aligns with community needs, interests and values.

- A **mission statement** guides an organization's efforts every day as it strives to achieve its vision.
- A **vision statement** is the future an organization hopes to see as a result of its work.
- **Value statements** guide an organization's actions, behaviors and priorities as it works toward its goals. Values are the standards to which an organization holds itself accountable.

Mission:

The Seattle Public Library's mission is to bring people, information, and ideas together to enrich lives and empower community.

Vision

We envision The Seattle Public Library as the central hub of an equitable and connected city that improves people's lives.

Values

Care

- The Library cares about the well-being of our community.
- We are committed to patron safety and confidentiality, in person and online.
- We are committed to supporting intellectual freedom and a healthy democracy.
- We are committed to transparency, accountability and good stewardship.

Connection

- The Library values patrons and partners by listening and responding to their needs.
- We are committed to seeking equitable outcomes for historically underserved people.
- We build positive connections, emphasizing respect and dignity for all people.
- We are committed to teamwork and collaborative community building.

Curiosity

- The Library is an all-ages destination for curiosity and discovery.
- We offer a large and diverse collection of books and other materials for free.
- We host engaging programs tailored to community needs and interests.
- We promote and support early learning and lifelong literacy and learning.

Impacts

As the Library develops its new plan and future vision, we are focused on **areas of impact** within our library system and the greater community**.** Our vision for the future of the Library is ambitious. We will know we have achieved our future vision when the following impacts are realized.

Impacts the Library seeks to make:

Belonging: The Library will be the central hub of a connected community. The Library will create a sense of belonging for Library patrons, visitors and staff.

Literacy: The Library will help people develop the skills they need to live.

Enrichment: The Library will bring joy, curiosity, and recreation to the community.

Empowerment: The Library will help people feel empowered to access opportunities. The Library will help people pursue their chosen pathways.

Staffing: The Library will be a desirable workplace and an employer of choice. Staff will also feel a sense of belonging, enrichment, and empowerment.

Sustainable Systems: The Library will have appropriate and stable resources that enable it to expand collections, maintain facilities, provide information services, and support community events.

Outcomes

In each of the areas where the Library believes it can make a positive impact, we must identify specific outcomes of our work that will help make our desired impacts possible.

We believe the following outcomes will be the result of our work throughout the next ten years, and that these outcomes will contribute to our future vision for our Library system and our community:

Belonging

- Programming will become even more reflective of community needs and interests.

- Staffing will be inclusive and representative of the community.

- Materials, programs and services will work better for underserved communities.

- Participatory policy reviews will allow the community to shape its Library system.

- Community organizations will be better supported and amplified by Library resources.

Literacy

- Youth in Seattle will have the opportunity and resources they need to read at or above grade level.

- People in Seattle will have access to the resources and support they need to become digitally literate.

- People in Seattle will have the skills to navigate systems that they encounter in their daily lives.

- People in Seattle will have the skills and resources they need to make reading fun.

- The Library will advocate for and show the benefits and importance of literacy.

- People in Seattle will have access to the skills and resources they need to successfully live their lives.

Enrichment

- The Library will have collaborative partnerships with arts and cultural organizations.
- The Library's collections and programs will reflect the needs and interests of Seattle's diverse cultures and communities.
- The Library's collections and programs will provide opportunities for joy, curiosity and recreation.
- The Library will be is a destination for connection and discovery.
- The Library will be a destination for getting to know your community.

Empowerment

● All communities will have access to the Library services and resources they need to support their educational learning and growth.

● All communities will have access to the Library services and resources they need to support their socio-economic well-being.

● All communities will have access to the Library services and resources they need to fully access Library services.

● All communities will have access to the Library services and resources they need to participate in community and civic engagement opportunities.

● The Library will prioritize its services equitably to best support community empowerment.

Staffing

● Library staff will feel their work brings value to the organization and the community.

● Library staff will feel an increased sense of belonging and appreciation for the work they do.

● There will be more opportunities and support for staff seeking upward mobility.

● Supervisors and managers will have more resources to better support their staff.

● Library staff will feel empowered to be nimble, efficient, and good stewards of public resources.

● Library staff will have the skills, training and support they need to do their work.

Sustainable Systems

● The Library will be appreciated locally and recognized nationally for its approach to capital improvements, facilities management, and beautification of physical locations.

● The Library will leverage data-driven design and decision-making in policies, procedures and operations.

● The Library will build capacity to improve sustainability and achieve our future vision.

● The Library will have strong partnerships with community organizations and local and state government agencies.

● The Library will increase public awareness of the role and importance of public libraries.

● The Library will exhibit resiliency against political and social pressures.

● The Library will establish systems, policies and procedures to improve the safety and security of its physical and virtual spaces.

● The Library will assess its financial and operational systems that manage public and donor funding.

Community Input and Participation

The Library first began conducting community listening to guide development of the Library's strategic plan in 2022, when Chief Librarian Tom Fay held Community Conversations at four neighborhood branches. Conversations focused on how community needs have changed since the pandemic and how the Library can be responsive to those needs.

Following initial community listening, the Library contracted with Houston Foresight (the University of Houston) in early 2023 to conduct a "Future of the Library" study. To inform this visioning exercise, the Library engaged internal and external stakeholders in workshops, interviews and surveys. More information about this study can be found in the following section.

Following the foresight study, the Library contracted with Territory North America Inc. to develop a long-term plan. Territory conducted additional community engagement to ensure the plan's direction is resonating with Library patrons, staff, Seattle residents and other stakeholders. This work included a citywide survey, focus group meetings with community partners, staff and stakeholders, and one-on-one interviews.

Participants who helped to shape the Foresight Report and the Strategic Plan Framework included Library staff, the Library Board of Trustees, the Library's Friends' and Foundation partners, and dozens of community partners serving Seattle's diverse communities. Partner participation included organizations such as Atlantic Street Center, CID Coalition, Daybreak Star, East African Community Services, El Centro de la Raza, Low Income Housing Institute, Mary's Place, Refugee Women's Alliance, Solid Ground, Wa Na Wari and more. Over 50 organizations were contacted to participate.

The Library also worked with a third-party qualitative analyst, Práctica Consulting, to ensure stakeholder feedback the Library received was accurately understood and reflected in the plan's framework.

Understanding Our Future: The "Future of the Library" Study

The Library's "Future of the Library" study was a commitment made in the $219.1M 2019 Library Levy, a plan overwhelmingly approved by Seattle voters. This study provided the Library and its stakeholders an opportunity to better understand possible future outcomes for public libraries, including what a "preferred" future might look like.

Houston Foresight researchers identified over a dozen issues that will impact public libraries in coming years, such as climate change, artificial intelligence, social services gaps, censorship and more. The Library was then presented with scenarios in which these issues present various challenges and opportunities the organization is likely to face in its short-term and long-term futures. A team of Library leadership, staff and stakeholders considered how the organization might best respond to these scenarios and envisioned a preferable future.

The resulting foresight report has created a foundation for the development of a well-informed, nimble and impact-focused plan. Learn more about the [Library's strategic foresight report](#) on our website.

What to Expect in Future Drafts

This document is the first draft of a strategic plan framework that will develop into the Library's guiding plan over the next ten years. The Library has been seeking public feedback on the first elements of the plan as outlined in this draft, and we will update this document in future versions to reflect that feedback.

The Library will also include new elements in future drafts, including:

- **Outputs:** The measurements we will use to track progress towards outcomes.
- **Activities:** The actions we will take to achieve the outcomes.
- **Resources:** These are the things we will need to complete the activities, such as funding, staffing, facilities, and time.
- **Methods:** The methods used in the development, analysis, and decision-making for the Strategic Plan.
- **Evaluation:** The post-implementation timeline for reviewing the effectiveness and long-term goals of the Strategic Plan.
- **Accountability:** Our commitment to the community, describing how we will communicate our successes and challenges through the lifetime of the Strategic Plan.
- **"Good, Better, Best" Implementation Structure:** The final Strategic Plan Framework and subsequent updates will include specific details on how we intend to use a "good, better, best" structure in our implementation plans. This structure will allow us to identify milestones and measure our progress towards realizing the Hub Future goal.

Next Steps

An updated version of this document will be made available to the public during the first quarter of 2024. The updated version will reflect community and stakeholder input we have received on this draft and will be available for public review.

The Library Board of Trustees will consider and vote on adoption of the final document by the end of Q1 2024.

The Library will continue to listen to patrons, community members and stakeholders throughout the development of this plan. If you have feedback about the document, you can email SPLStrategicPlan@spl.org.