



NEEDHAM FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Final Report

Needham Free Public Library Strategic Plan 2017-2021

The conclusion of the library's five-year strategic plan on June 30, 2021, marked the end of an unprecedented period of change and progress for the library. The Needham Free Public Library Strategic Plan Fiscal year (FY) 2017 - 2021 (the Plan), launched in 2016, was the result of input from more than 800 community members, 50 library staff members and the library's Board of Trustees. Mission and Vision Statements were developed. Long-range and short-range goals were designed to move the library forward in an ever-evolving world of new technologies, changing demographics, and competing economic priorities.

Guided by the Plan, the library made meaningful progress in creating a welcoming and more diverse environment, advanced the use of new technologies, and expanded services for teens and pre-teens. While not every goal was met, much was accomplished in six high-priority areas.

Strategic Plan Accomplishments for High Priority Goals:

1. Create a welcoming place that meets the needs of all parts of the community.

- The library reaffirmed its Commitment to Inclusion and Equity by Trustees' resolution on June 9, 2020, and empowered staff and trustees to take part in Diversity and Equity and Inclusion (DEI) events and workshops.
- Reference staff created many useful topical booklists now posted on the website, and presented or hosted 5 diversity-related programs to the public.
- Library staff members participated in coaching sessions about providing a welcoming atmosphere to all. In FY 2020 and FY 2021, they attended over 140 webinars on DEI topics.
- Many new programs, books, films, and music recordings were introduced to bring greater racial and cultural diversity to the library experience. In FY 2020 and FY 2021, the library added 512 DEI-relevant non-fiction and fiction books and other resources for children, young adults, and adults to its collection.
- The Diversity and Discussion Book Club (Needham Connects), a collaboration between the Needham Free Public Library, the Needham Diversity Initiative, and the Needham Human Rights Committee, was created in 2017. The club held regular meetings providing opportunities for people to connect in conversation and learn about the lived experiences of people from underrepresented groups.
- Fines were eliminated for most overdue library materials.
- New non-English-language book collections were started in Chinese, Spanish, and Russian (Adult collection) and books in 21 languages may now be found in the Children's collection.

2. Increase resources and programing to meet the needs of teenagers and preteenagers.

- A full-time young adult (YA) librarian was hired. As a result, YA resources were increased and new programs and activities were provided to engage teens and pre-teens.
 - The young adult librarian worked with the Needham High School librarian to develop High School Book Club meetings and suggest book choices.
 - Zoom sessions were held with Needham High School students to train them to read aloud to young children for a volunteer project.
 - The library organized study nights for Needham High School students in which the high school librarian and students from the National Honors Society volunteered to help other students study.



3. Advance the library's use of the newest technologies and increase their availability to patrons.

- Librarians developed the technical skills to hold virtual programs, clubs, crafting sessions, story times, study sessions, and other activities to ensure the people of Needham had access to these services even during the pandemic.
- A new website improving public access to library services was developed as the result of several years of advocacy and planning by library trustees and staff. The new website was funded by the library's two supporting organizations: the Friends of the Needham Public Library (Friends) and the Library Foundation of Needham (Foundation).
- Access to downloadable books and streaming video and music increased with the addition of services such as Libby, Hoopla, and Kanopy. Use of these resources increased from six percent of library borrowing in FY 2016 to 29 percent in FY 2021, driven in part by the pandemic.
- A new center for STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math) opened with a successful state grant and the support of the library Friends and Foundation. The STEAM center acquired engineering kits, robot building kits, electrical circuit kits, books, and other technology learning tools. A 3D printer was installed (Foundation). Staff attended training sessions, and an impressive array of STEAM programs for children began. For a deeper dive into the STEAM programs and equipment, see STEAM Efforts in the Children's Department 2017-2021.
- Library staff held virtual visits with Sunita Williams Elementary School students.
- 15 Chromebooks were acquired for use with computer coding clubs for children.

4. Increase library hours to meet the needs of more library users.

- Sunday hours were extended to 12-6 p.m. after a successful pilot program.

5. Improve communication about Library programs, resources, and services.

- Library staff and trustees worked collaboratively with a design firm to develop a new, more engaging and navigable website with the support of the Friends and the Foundation.
- Social media use was expanded to include frequent use of Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.

6. Deepen community engagement with outreach to other Town of Needham departments, community organizations, and businesses.

- The library launched its first One Book One Community collaborative event in 2017 with Diane Guerrero's "In the Country We Love: My Family Divided" with discussions facilitated by Immigration Justice Task Force, Needham Clergy Association members, Needham Human Rights Committee, Needham Community Council ESL Program, Needham Diversity Initiative, the League of Women Voters Needham, the library Trustees, Friends, and Foundation. A total of 144 people attended 7 discussions.
- Launched summer reading partnerships with local businesses in which participants of the young adult and adult reading programs chose places around town from which to be awarded gift cards.
- Outdoor Story Walks with weatherproof story posters were set up at Mills Playground, the Needham reservoir trail, and the Needham Rail Trail, in coordination with Needham Park and Recreation Department.
- The library collaborated with the Needham Human Rights Committee for Juneteenth celebrations, creating a display of books highlighting the Black experience and sharing the Committee's Juneteenth Facebook post.
- The library supported the Needham Diversity Initiative's annual Diversity Summits and Martin Luther King, Jr. Day celebrations with information about DEI resources and relevant upcoming library programs.
- The Children's department collaborated with Needham Community Farm on curb-side pick-up kits for growing dwarf pea plants.
- Family day with the Needham Park and Recreation Department was held via the Ghost Walk project.
- The library hosted the Diversity and Discussion Book Group (Needham Connects), begun in 2017 with the Needham Diversity Initiative and the Needham Human Rights Committee.

In Conclusion



The COVID pandemic posed immense challenges during the final two years of the FY 2017-2021 Strategic Plan. In the first eleven months of FY 2021 alone, when the library building was still closed to the public, the library presented 419 virtual programs with 7,945 attendees, delivered 212,640 items to library patrons at “curbside,” and fielded 17,230 reference and technology questions. It provided wireless access to the internet from its parking lots and loaned Chromebook laptop computers.

The Board of Library Trustees thanks the library leadership and staff for their flexibility, innovation, and hard work in reacting swiftly and thinking creatively to continue to provide the basic library services to the public even while striving to make progress on the ambitious goals of the Plan.

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