



Needham Free Public Library Strategic Plan Review Fiscal Year 2024

Board of Trustees

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Letter from the Chair

Needham Free Public Library is a hub of our town’s social infrastructure. The Trustees of Needham Free Public Library believe deeply in our Library’s mission to provide “access to materials, resources and information in its endeavor to expand minds, celebrate diversity, embrace differences, and build community.” Ensuring our mission means regularly reviewing our efforts. The Bylaws of the Needham Free Public Library Trustees require the Board:

To annually conduct a review of the administration of the Library and its progress in achieving the goals and objectives, as set forth in its current strategic plan in order to: 1) promote communication between the Library Director and the Board in setting and advancing goals and objectives for the Library; and 2) provide input, from the unique perspective of the Board, to the Town Manager.

This report captures the Trustees’ review for FY2024. Library administration and staff gathered evidence of progress toward the priorities and goals set forth in the Strategic Plan and several actions that the board and the former library director prioritized for the past fiscal year. Each action item was connected to a specific objective under six high level goals laid out by the 2023–2027 Strategic Plan (https://needhamlibrary.org/strategic_plan/) adopted in 2023:

Goal 1: Provide a seamless, efficient, equitable, and outstanding user experience.

Goal 2: Increase visibility as a critical community partner, known and valued by everyone in Needham.

Goal 3: Offer a user experience catered to the specific wants and needs of the Needham.

Goal 4: Provide access to an outstanding, diverse collection of materials for Needham patrons and understand the importance of building and promoting a representative collection.

Goal 5: Ensure staff is well-trained and fluent in analytic resources to provide the best collection of materials for the community.

Goal 6: Allocate time and resources to explore the future use of interior and exterior space and design.

The Library has made substantive progress on its goals and objectives, an impressive accomplishment considering the substantial energy required by a transition in leadership. We spent most of the fiscal year in a leadership transition, with the departure of our former director in September 2023 and a 6-month search for the new director, Robert MacLean, who started in April 2024.

Select Highlights:

- We completed our space utilization study in August 2023 (<https://needhamlibrary.org/nfpl-space-utilization-framework-study/>) and proposed

four phases of renovations: 1) Teen and Tween Areas, 2) the Children’s Area, 2) the Rosemary entrance, and 3) the Highland entrance.

- We implemented a new workflow scheduling tool throughout all library departments to better audit and project staffing needs.
- We created a new teen volunteer group—VolunTeens—who will be helping in the Young Adult department and providing input on library programming.
- We audited our collection for equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging and can now create monthly reports tracking materials selections against our EDIB categories. We expanded our collection substantially in these areas.

The next fiscal year presents new opportunities as well as specific needs. We are grateful to Town Meeting for funding the design work on the first phase of renovations, which focuses on the Library’s teen and tween areas. The Library will work toward preparing its building and programs for the construction work we hope begins next year. This will also lay the foundation for future phases of renovations. Throughout FY2024, the Library was below its optimal staffing level, and we have bid farewell to several staff members leaving for other opportunities or retiring after long tenures. This means that in FY2025 the new director must spend significant time hiring and onboarding staff to help maintain our high quality of service and progress toward our strategic goals.

Needham Free Public Library’s future is bright. Director MacLean has hit the ground running, showing up at numerous community events and modeling the visibility and critical community partnership that we are striving for in our current strategic plan. He has signaled a profound commitment to making diversity, equity, and inclusion core to the library’s operations. And we are excited to work together—Library staff, Board of Trustees, and the Town—to make FY2025 productive and successful.

Sincerely,



Erhardt Graeff
Chair, Needham Library Board of Trustees

Goal 1: Provide a seamless, efficient, equitable, and outstanding user experience

Objective	Priority Action Items for FY24	Progress during FY2024	Notes/Comments
Offer superior customer service to all library users	Set aside a staff day with a facilitator to work with staff to determine the organization’s core service values and priorities.	Conducted the planned staff day on March 22, 2024.	Successfully completed.
	Systematically review all policies (in collaboration with Trustees) and procedures to align with newly established values and service standards. Edit, revise, and review with staff as needed.	Systematic review of all policies has been on hold awaiting the hiring of a new Library Director. Trustees will take this up in FY2025.	We expect this will begin now that Rob MacLean has started as Library Director. We will review progress in 2025.
	Dedicate time for staff training at least twice a year.	Started planning for next staff day in September 2024.	Continue with this planning.
Encourage feedback and constructive criticism from library users	N/A	Reviewing this objective with new Director.	We look forward to reviewing this with Director MacLean.
Ensure staff is appropriately allocated throughout the organization	Audit service hours, cross-referenced with circulation data, for a projected ideal staffing ratio per department.	Service hour audits have been on hold awaiting the new Director. FY2025 part-time salary budget does reflect scheduling changes determined by former director and department heads.	Continue to review and analyze parttime salary budget with current needs.
	Audit workflow and processes; determine areas where more training is needed; begin the process of succession planning at the Department Head level.	To enhance efficiency and effectiveness within our organization, a comprehensive audit of our workflow and processes is imperative. This evaluation enables us to pinpoint areas necessitating further training and support. Our initiative began with the integration of our new workflow scheduling tool, LibStaffer, throughout all library departments. This implementation has	Continue this workflow to meet the demands of the library.

		<p>facilitated an in-depth analysis of staffing requirements in each department. Consequently, we have allocated resources to recruit three additional part-time circulation staff, allowing us to accurately forecast the staffing needs for weekday evenings and weekend shifts on a rotational basis. While data collection for staffing analysis in other library departments is ongoing, our overarching goal remains to streamline operations and maximize productivity.</p>	
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Goal 2: Increase visibility as a critical community partner, known and valued by everyone in Needham

Objective	Priority Action Items for FY24	Progress during FY2024	Notes/Comments
Grow the Library’s visibility and position as the heart of the community	Expand live storytime at events throughout the Town and at key recreation spots regularly.	<p>Every September, the Children’s Department Supervisor, initiates a tradition of extending invitations to public elementary school teachers for classroom visits. These visits encompass storytimes tailored for the lower grades, specifically Kindergarten through 2nd grade, and are scheduled upon the teachers' request.</p> <p>She extends her outreach to the Needham preschools, offering storytimes that cater to their young audience.</p> <p>The library also organizes STEM programs as part of its outreach efforts for schools, preschools, and various organizations.</p>	We appreciate the Library’s outreach to schools and community organizations, and the efforts of the Children’s Department to expand the number and reach of these important activities.
	Create a community outreach plan and narrow specific locations such as assisted living facilities, recreation events, etc. Investigate the possibility of assigning a staff liaison to each outreach location for relationship building and communication.	Library staff are in the process of creating a community outreach plan.	We look forward to the Library’s renewed focus on community outreach activities with Director MacLean and other recent Library hires such as Reference Supervisor Allison Smith.
Strengthen the relationship between the Town and the Library	Work with relevant representatives and the MBLC to create an administrative organizational chart that clarifies roles for Administration, Trustees, Town Departments, and critical stakeholders like Friends and the Foundation.	Following the departure of the previous director, there was an effort to enhance collaboration between the library staff and the HR and Town administration departments. This initiative included involving library staff in town hall events, fostering closer relationships between library and town hall personnel, and increasing the visibility of library staff among town hall employees. Noteworthy	We appreciate the Library’s accomplishments in this area during the period of leadership transition. We look forward to the Library’s continued efforts to strengthen and expand its bond with the Town and all stakeholders.

		<p>instances of this collaboration include a tour of the library for the HR department, during which all six staff members received library cards.</p> <p>Library staff also met with the Town Manager’s office to explore the establishment of a Town of Needham Poet Laureate through a Mass Cultural Council grant.</p>	
<p>Become a trusted and reliable resource for information about the Town</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>Library maintains an events calendar on its website and regularly shares information on its social media channels.</p>	<p>We anticipate the Library will continue its valuable collaboration with other sources of news about Needham. This serves to provide the public with information about Library activities and to ensure that information about the town is readily accessible to the public.</p>

Goal 3: Offer a user experience catered to the specific wants and needs of the Needham community

Objective	Priority Action Items for FY24	Progress during FY2024	Notes/Comments
<p>Improve service, space, outreach, and resources for Emerging Adults</p>	<p>Ensure that all schools have at least one yearly visit by a public librarian.</p>	<p>The Young Adult Librarian has visited the Pollard Middle School and the High School, but has yet to visit the High Rock School.</p>	<p>Continue with excellent progress.</p>
	<p>Redesign the physical space dedicated to teens to encourage socialization and study. Add designated tech, STEM, gaming, and silent study spaces.</p>	<p>Town Meeting members unanimously passed Article 25, which appropriates to the library \$47,000 to upgrade or replace computers, monitors, and gaming systems and appropriates to the library \$454,000 for the design of the first phase (expanding the space for teens and tweens) of the interior renovation of the library.</p>	<p>Participate in and monitor design process to ensure it balances the needs of teens and all patrons and staff at large. The design should enhance the overall visual appeal of the second floor and enhance the art gallery experience.</p>
	<p>Start a Teen Advisory Board to work with Teen Specialist.</p>	<p>The Young Adult Librarian kicked off her VolunTeens group at the start of the new year, and they have met as a group every month once a month since then. The first official meeting had 5 attendees, with 9 applications coming in throughout the month. This is a library volunteer group for 12 to 18 year olds who would like to help out the Young Adult Department and happenings at the library. This will also be a great way to get teen input on how they'd like to use library space and what kind of programming would appeal to them.</p>	<p>Continue to advance this excellent progress.</p>
	<p>Investigate hiring more Teen Room staff (Related to Goal 1; Objective 3).</p>	<p>A DSR4 form was submitted in FY25 operating budget request. It was rejected. Library administration and Trustees will fine tune their approach to re-request this for FY26.</p>	<p>Revisit this question and develop data to support it.</p>
<p>Improve service, space, outreach, and</p>	<p>Ensure monthly visits to all nursing homes and assisted living locations (related to G2 Obj 1).</p>	<p>This is ongoing. We are creating an outreach plan and determining specific locations. A pop-up kit for outreach is currently being procured. Current staffing does not accommodate regular visits. We have to prioritize desk staffing.</p>	<p>Re-evaluate this outreach plan and assess which populations in senior residences Library staff can best serve given current staffing levels.</p>

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resources for Seniors	Review Materials by Mail and explore the potential for expanding this service.	<p>One of our circulation assistants, a Needham resident, is involved in the Traveling Meals program in Needham. She noted the possibility that some of their clients might be good candidates for Materials by Mail service.</p> <p>The coordinator of the Traveling meals program, who wants to help connect these folks to the library, started sharing an application for our MBM with each service stop to residents, since September 2023. We have added a few new patrons since then by this method.</p>	Evaluate and continue with progress on developing the Materials-by-Mail program.
	Investigate potential for intergenerational programming.	This is ongoing but is dependent on staffing levels. Priority is to staff our public service desks.	Seek out opportunities to develop intergenerational programming and other interactions.
Invest in “24/7” and mobile library concepts	Create a cohesive library communication plan: set standards, regulatory processes, and timelines.	Towards this end, on both points, library communication plan, and library style guide, progress has been made on this.	Continue this significant progress on overall communications plan and implementation of style guide.
	Develop library style guides for marketing, design, language, social media content, etc.	The Social Media Team met recently. A rough schedule of who’s posting when as a guideline to sustainably update our social media presence is being drafted. Again, much is dependent on staffing levels—the priority being consistently staffing our public service desks.	
	Update Monthly Statistics Report to more easily translate into ARIS and thus easier to publish as Annual Reports/Infographics	This is ongoing. Now that we have a new director, we will be able to work on this in the early months of FY2025.	Continue progress to implement monthly statistics that are consistent with ARIS in FY25 and present data for monthly Trustees report


	Analyze options to install 24-hour smart lockers and material vending machines outside the NFPL and other locations like train stations and the public pool.	We did some research on this and believe the MBTA wouldn't be okay with the library installing lockers at their train stations. Additionally, the window for the pool is just two months in the summer when it's open. Again, questions are about staffing and how we would implement it, plus transportation of staff and materials. This requires more investigation to determine feasibility.	Reconsider the possibility that lockers may not be needed at NFPL.
Strengthen the Library's branding and marketing	N/A		

Goal 4: Provide access to an outstanding, diverse collection of materials for Needham patrons and understand the importance of building and promoting a representative collection

Objective	Priority Action Items for FY24	Progress during FY2024	Notes/Comments
Anticipate an ongoing need for accessible and current collections in various formats	N/A	We plan to address this objective in FY2025.	Identify present and anticipated future needs for accessible collections during FY25.
Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging (EDIB) are core tenets of all material collections	Audit the collection for EDIB titles.	<p>Previously purchased items in collection have been audited; staff members are following internal procedures to document EDIB qualities as new materials are acquired as part of the selection process.</p> <p>We have been working with MLN to figure out a way to easily compile the EDIB information that we've been adding to our records each month. They were able to configure a new report, showcased by the EDIB table near the end of Director's Reports for recent Trustee meetings.</p>	Great progress during FY24; continue to document EDIB internally.
Investigate the development of an English Language Learning (ELL) Collection in the Children's Room	N/A	In conjunction with preparing for the design of Phase 2 of the space renovation project that focuses on reimagining the Children's Room, we plan to address this objective in FY2025.	Continue to plan for this goal during FY25 with the future redesign of space in mind.
Consolidate and refocus World	Assess the entire collection. Weed as needed.	To be ready for the Phase 1 construction that may begin in Q1 of FY2026, the collection has been relocated to the high-visibility end of the nonfiction	Continue planning to be ready to accommodate the upcoming redesign of the teen space.

<p>Languages Collection, emphasizing Needham patrons</p>		<p>collection with enough space for growth and book display.</p>	
	<p>Study circulation data and assess spoken languages in Needham to determine a core world language collection for Needham patrons. Take advantage of and promote collections available in the Minuteman Network.</p>	<p>Preparations are underway to add titles in Hindi and Bengali to the World Languages Collection.</p>	<p>Continue the already significant progress establishing World Languages collection.</p>

Goal 5: Ensure staff is well-trained and fluent in analytic resources to provide the best collection of materials for the community

Objective	Priority Action Items for FY24	Progress during FY2024	Notes/Comments
Evaluate and standardize collection development practices	Create an annual circulation report by statistical categories (SCATs) to determine high and low circulations per number of holdings; use the information to adjust selections, building heavily used areas and relying on the network for less popular areas.	Focus on this effort will occur in FY25 due to staffing issues in FY24. While we will continue to focus most funds, staff time, and library space on the heavily used areas of the collection, we will continue to work to grow the use of all parts of the collection such as the World Languages collection through marketing efforts.	Many lower use collection areas such as world languages are a strategic priority for the library. Glad to see that the Library is taking an intentional approach to relying on circulation statistics to informing our collective development strategy.
	Investigate hiring a Collection Development Specialist Librarian.	This priority action item is being reevaluated considering new staff.	The Library has several staff needs currently, many of which are higher priority than having a specialist working on collection development. It makes sense to be focusing our efforts elsewhere.
Reduce wait times associated with popular physical and digital materials	Explore/investigate offering a sub-collection to allow access to new titles and best sellers without waiting on holds.	In Q1, created an express collection for popular and new adult fiction and nonfiction titles. Copies circulate for seven days with no renewals and no holds allowed. In Q4, branding and marketing efforts increased along with funding as collection relaunched as a “Lucky Day” collection.	The “Lucky Day” collection is a wonderful addition. 

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	Allocate more funding towards Overdrive Advantage purchasing.	Added an additional \$4,000 to FY2024 Library State Aid request and \$2,325.80 within the FY24 operating budget for OverDrive Advantage licenses to meet demand and address the constraints on the collection due to the continuing high cost of ebook licenses.	OverDrive represents an important future direction of our library holdings. Staff are being intentional about curating our licenses. We expect the library invest more in this resource in the future in ways that serve our patrons best.
	Relevant staff should take specific training on Overdrive Advantage and cost-per-circ purchasing options and become fluent in Boston Public Library’s e-card benefits.	A Digital Specialist and Reference Librarian has taken training through Minuteman Central Site for OverDrive Advantage and Kanopy. In FY2025, we will review with Reference staff the BPL’s statewide e-card program.	Because of the care being put into our OverDrive collection development, we understand our training to currently be complete here. Many patrons are unaware of the opportunity and value of the BPL e-card. We expect reference staff and marketing materials will focus on helping patrons become acquainted with it.
Clarify the process and create an SOP for patron requests for purchase	N/A		
Ensure library staff is fluent in statistical analysis for all circulation functions	N/A		

Goal 6: Allocate time and resources to explore the future use of interior and exterior space and design.

Objective	Priority Action Items for FY24	Progress during FY2024 (Objectives and Priority	Notes/Comments
Audit interior and exterior use of space	N/A		
Reorganize the Children’s Room	Sensory Room	In Q1, Needham Rotary approached about funding the purchase of furnishings and equipment to allow the story time room to offer a sensory program. We will explore the idea of adding sensory-focused equipment to our Library of Things collection. Further work was put on hold.	We hope the Library will re-open discussions with Needham Rotary and explore the purchase of materials for a sensory program offered by the Children’s Department. We imagine that this could be part of all or most children-facing events by enabling sensory-sensitive programming options. This is also an opportunity to grow our Library of Things collection to allow families to try similar sensory materials.

	<p>Explore systems within Children’s Rooms at area libraries to determine a plan to consolidate CR sections/call numbers into an approachable system. Identify priority areas to begin implementation.</p>	<p>This priority action item is being reevaluated.</p>	<p>We expect that reimagining our categorization and shelving systems for the Children’s collection will be part of the Phase 2 of our library space renovations plans, currently scheduled for design and construction in 2025–2026. We understand the collection needs to be right-sized as a starting point for both the design work and any future ideas about changing our systems for browsing.</p>
<p>Emphasize sustainability in any plans</p>	<p>N/A</p>		

Fiscal Year 2024 Statistics

	FY24	FY23	% Change
CIRCULATION			
Adult	316,953	302,208	4.88%
Juvenile	249,744	252,507	-1.09%
Total	566,697	554,715	2.16%
<i>Out of Town Lending</i>	83,015	75,149	10.47%
<i>Downloadable Books</i>	57,637	60,092	-4.09%
<i>Downloadable Audio</i>	44,251	39,621	11.69%
<i>Downloadable Video</i>	7,486	7,704	-2.83%
<i>Downloadable Magazines</i>	16,012	6,302	154.08%
<i>Self Check-Out</i>	260,059	208,767	24.57%
REGISTRATIONS & USAGE			
Registrations	1,684	1,620	3.95%
Transfers	159,885	155,866	2.58%
Website Hits	203,087	146,012	39.09%
Posts to Facebook	186	354	-47.46%
New Facebook Likes	104	101	2.97%
Entered Library	264,074	237,165	11.35%
Study Room Use	3,498	4,540	-22.95%
Study Room Turnaways	672	127	429.13%
Computer Use (Total)	22,785	20,565	10.80%
Computer Guest Pass	3,325	3,156	5.35%
B&W Pages Printed	20,841	28,062	-25.73%
Color Pages Printed	26,608	12,002	121.70%
Charging Station Use	1,523	1,055	44.36%
QUESTIONS			
Adult Reference	9,204	9,011	2.14%
Adult Technology	2,748	4,135	-33.54%
Adult Directional	3,607	6,689	-46.08%
Juvenile Reference	19,185	15,665	22.47%
Total	33,242	35,500	-6.36%
PROGRAMS & COMMUNITY ROOM			
Library Programs - Adult	93	67	38.81%
Attendance	3,902	3,577	9.09%
Library Programs - YA	128	73	75.34%
Attendance	1,554	1,041	49.28%
Library Programs - Child	395	316	25.00%
Attendance	13,405	9,674	38.57%
Community Room Bookings	461	414	11.35%

These amounts are included in the Circulation Totals listed above.