



Needham Free Public Library Strategic Plan Review Fiscal Year 2025

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Letter from the Chair

The Needham Free Public Library is a community hub that provides access to countless resources and acts as a vital “third space” for its patrons. The Trustees of the 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 the fiscal year ended June 30, 2025, or FY25. 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 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 substantial progress on its goals and objectives during a year that saw record-setting circulation. The Library has also welcomed several new full-time staff members during FY25, including Assistant Director Diana Fendler and Reference Supervisor Liam O’Keefe, and it marked the first fiscal year for Library Director Robert MacLean.

Select Highlights:

- We completed design work for the renovation and expansion of the Teen and Tween (Young Adult) area of the Library, obtained approval at the May 2025 Annual Town Meeting, and entered into a contract for construction of the space following a public bid process. Construction is expected to be completed during the winter of 2025/2026.
- Library staff worked to enhance the Library’s outreach and visibility in the community, including an upcoming StoryWalk on the town’s rail trail, coordination with the Needham History Center &

Museum, digitization of Needham High School yearbooks, and reorganization of the Genealogy and Archives section of the Library’s website.

- We created a plan to reduce wait times for popular materials, including digital materials, so that acquisition of new materials will be better informed by patron demand.
- We continued to audit our collection for equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging and can now create monthly reports tracking materials selections against our EDIB categories. We submitted an operating budget request for fiscal year 2026 to expand the English Language Learner (ELL) collection.

Fiscal year 2026 will be a busy one, with construction of the expanded Teen and Tween space requiring significant time and attention from Library staff. We express our thanks to Town Meeting for approving funding of that project and look forward to inaugurating a beautiful new space for the many teens who use our Library. This project also sets the stage for the remaining three phases of our renovations, with renovation of the Children’s Room being next in order of priority. Keeping the Library as a functional and welcoming space for patrons during the disruptions of construction will be a challenge, but Director MacLean, Assistant Director Fendler, and Library staff have done excellent work during the past year preparing for this exciting project.

The Needham Free Public Library continues to enlarge its role as a critical community institution that expands horizons, is committed to diversity, equity and inclusion, and is welcoming for all its patrons. The annual strategic plan review is a continuous process of reflection and improvement, and the Trustees are dedicated to working with our excellent Library administrators and staff members to make fiscal year 2026 a success for the Library and all who use its many resources.

Sincerely,

/s/ Robert A. Petitt

Robert A. Petitt
Chair, Needham Library Board of Trustees

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

Objective	Priority Action Items for FY2025	Progress during FY2025	Notes/Comments
1. Offer superior customer service to all library users	Review and enhance the Library’s onboarding documentation for new employees with information specific to the Library, Library Departments, and the Town of Needham.	Completed. Onboarding documentation has been created and used with new hires to help them acclimate to the Library and serve patrons.	Excellent progress to improve the onboarding process. We look forward to seeing the final documentation.
	Investigate hiring a full-time Reference/Outreach Librarian to add to the Library’s ability to meet the community where they are and provide additional staff support for expanding programming and marketing efforts.	Completed. Included the position in a DSR4 form, a request for additional operating funds, for FY2026. Will continue research on need and bolster key arguments for future requests.	We understand this position was subject to town budget approval. Library staff will conduct a staffing analysis that will consider the need for this position along with other staffing issues. We appreciate Library leadership’s efforts to determine staffing priorities. We look forward to reviewing the results of the staffing analysis.
	Begin the process of reviewing current policies and procedures for updates and identifying gaps in policies and procedures.	Completed. The Library has begun to revise internal procedures and brought revised policies to the Trustees for review and approval. Some new policies and procedures have been identified and drafted.	Excellent collaboration and great progress by Library staff and trustees in reviewing and updating Library policies. This work will be continued on an ongoing basis.
	Review the Library website for redundancies, broken links, and underused webpages. Create a plan for regular review of Library website.	Completed. Library website has been reviewed for redundancies, broken links and the removal of underused or webpages. Regular review is scheduled for twice a year, on March 1 and September 1.	Thanks to Library staff for this important work (special thanks to the Technology Specialist/Archivist). It makes sense for the town to assume responsibility for funding Stirling’s annual fee for website upkeep.

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2. Encourage feedback and constructive criticism from library users	Develop a short questionnaire for Children’s programming and collections to be distributed to interested patrons for feedback twice per year.	Work will be expanded into FY26 to create a uniform patron feedback questionnaire for all programs. Noted in FY2026 Action Plan.	We appreciate the Library’s thoughtful approach to create a patron feedback questionnaire that ensures consistency among Library departments. We look forward to seeing the updated questionnaire sometime in 2026, and to seeing patron feedback.
	Circulation Department pilots a new staff sheet to capture useful patron feedback during interactions at service desk.	Work will be expanded into FY26 to create a uniform patron feedback questionnaire for all ages. Noted in FY2026 Action Plan.	We look forward to seeing the staff sheet and to learning more about patron feedback. Perhaps we can schedule time during a Trustee meeting to hear the results of patron feedback.
3. Ensure staff will be appropriately allocated throughout the organization	Evaluate opportunities for cross-training between departments for continuity of service during department meetings and other short-term needs.	Completed. The Library has completed an assessment of staff who have already been cross-trained. Cross training for all Department Heads is currently underway and will be completed by the end of June.	We applaud the Library’s efforts to cross-train staff.
	Explore the costs and installation considerations to add a people counter for the Children’s Department.	Completed. Exploration of cost and installation to add a people counter for the Children’s Department was completed. The people counter was purchased and installed in April 2025.	Excellent news – we look forward to seeing the data that results from installation of the people counter. We appreciate the Library’s emphasis on using real-life data to inform and guide its strategic decisions.

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

Objective	Priority Action Items for FY2025	Progress during FY2025	Notes/Comments
1. Grow the Library's visibility and position as the heart of the community	Develop a proactive community outreach plan with flexible internal procedures to reach patrons beyond the Library building.	Work will be postponed to FY2026. Noted in FY2026 Action Plan.	The communication plan is important, and we appreciate that the Library is giving the plan the appropriate amount of time and attention. We understand this will be considered a priority in FY2026, to be part of a broader outreach and communications plan to be developed over the next year (see Goal 3). This is important and we look forward to this goal being focused on as part of the FY2026 Action Plan.
	Plan to bring a StoryWalk® back to Needham.	Completed. A book titled Wonder Walkers by Massachusetts author Micha Archer was selected. Location has been determined at the Needham Rail Trail. Installation is scheduled to be completed in June.	Great idea! We recognize and appreciate the Library's collaboration with the Town's Parks and Recreation Department and Rail Trail Commission on this.
	Engage with the Needham History Center & Museum to determine which resources by format each institution has available for local historians and genealogists.	Completed. Documentation has been completed which details digitized and physical resources available at the NFPL Local History Room/Archives. Documentation has also been established which showcases some areas of interest for patrons interested in the Needham History Center and Museum.	Excellent accomplishment!

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	Explore the costs and issues related to purchasing and installing an electronic messaging board for the Library’s Highland Avenue lawn to increase community awareness of Library programs and announcements.	Completed. Answers related to cost and issues of purchasing and installing an electronic messaging board were explored. The Library can use Town electronic signs to promote special events. The FY2026 Action Plan includes the creation of a holistic Library communications plan.	The Library determined we can use the existing town signs to display information about the Library. This will be part of a broader outreach and communications plan. We hope the Trustees will be consulted about the communications and outreach plan so we can help spread the good word about the Library’s offerings and accomplishments.
	Consider adding social media outlets geared specifically to promote programs and services for children and teens.	Completed. The Library has determined not to add new social media avenues to promote programs and services for children and teens.	OK—to be considered as part of the communications and outreach plan being developed.
2. Strengthen the relationship between the Town and the Library	Reevaluate and improve the onboarding for new Library Trustees including an orientation packet with information such as an organizational chart and primer of library specific functions by department.	Completed. An onboarding for new Library Trustees was completed and submitted for the Library Trustees’ review.	The orientation packet is a great resource—extremely useful for both new and long-serving Trustees. The Trustees and the Library are working together to update the information with the expectation it will be in place by the 2026 Town election.
3. Become a trusted and reliable resource for information about the Town	N/A	N/A	The Library does this in many ways. Providing information about the Library is part of its regular practices, with news or announcements appearing in News You Need(ham), Hometown Weekly, and the Needham Observer. The Library is working with News You Need(ham) to increase its email list. We also acknowledge the Library’s efforts to collect and digitize town-related content, such as a recent project on Needham High School yearbooks.

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

Objective	Priority Action Items for FY2025	Progress during FY2025	Notes/Comments
1. Improve service, space, outreach, and resources for Emerging Adults	Increase funding allocation in FY2025 for teen and children’s circulating collection of video games supporting a variety of gaming systems.	Completed. The Library increased funding allocation in FY2025 compared to FY2024. The funding has been spent on the circulating videogame collection.	Good expansion of this popular collection.
	Allocate staff time to inform the design of Phase 1, the expansion and renovation of the Teen Room.	Completed. Library staff continue to be involved in all aspects of Phase 1 design to ensure a new space that represents the best input from staff.	Library staff and leadership have contributed significant insights into this process. We suggest press releases and other communications to inform patrons about Phase 1.
	Seek new funding in FY2026 operating budget for additional Teen Librarian	Completed. The Library submitted new funding for additional Teen Librarian and persuasive arguments as part of the FY2026 operating budget request.	Library to revise and resubmit this request for a part time teen librarian as a DSR4 for FY27.
2. Improve service, space, outreach, and resources for Seniors	Explore the careful expansion of the Books by Mail service to homebound patrons based on staff availability and other resources.	Completed. We have explored and want to expand the service and will continue to plan in FY26.	Excellent work on carefully expanding this excellent service.
	Review and replace end-cap signage on shelving in adult and teen collections to increase collection accessibility and clarity for patrons.	Completed. New end-cap signage on shelving in the adult collection has been installed.	New end caps provide clear and easy navigation for patrons.

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	Investigate re-launching “Seniors Helping Seniors,” an intergenerational technology help service.	Completed. The Library investigated re-launching “Seniors Helping Seniors” and determined it was not sustainable at this time, but Reference staff will be offering new technology classes.	We encourage new technology classes to help adults navigate Library technology, and the Library should develop outreach to attract attendees.
3. Invest in “24/7” and mobile library concepts	Monitor the success of the new module for online booking system for study rooms and investigate adding the Community Room.	Completed. The Community Room is currently being explored to be available on the Library’s online booking system.	The Library will explore adding the Community Room to the online booking system.
	Reorganize the Genealogy and Archives section of the Library website to create easier access for patrons.	Completed. The Genealogy and Archives section of the Library’s website has been reorganized and is completed.	Library staff will consider use of a consultant to assist in organizing archives digitally. Tutorials for patrons would be helpful.
4. Strengthen the Library’s branding and marketing	After obtaining staff feedback, finalize the social media plan and begin implementation and monitoring.	Completed. Feedback from staff has been obtained and a social media plan on types of posts and scheduling them accordingly has begun.	Important goal achieved. We encourage Library staff to share the social media plan with interested members of the public.

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 FY2025	Progress during FY2025	Notes/Comments
<p>1. Anticipate an ongoing need for accessible and current collections in various formats</p>	<p>Begin the relocation of the Large Print collection.</p>	<p>Project has begun. Full relocation of the project will be completed in FY26 after shelving from the second floor is relocated to the ground floor during Phase 1 construction. Noted in FY2026 Action Plan.</p>	<p>Good progress on the hard work of relocating this and other collections.</p>
	<p>Begin to weed and re-arrange the collection in the Archives for better staff access to assist patrons.</p>	<p>Completed. A weeded and re-arranged Archives collection ensures room to grow and a better user experience.</p>	<p>We support this effort.</p>
	<p>Engage with the Needham History Center & Museum to determine which resources by format each institution has available for local historians and genealogists.</p>	<p>Completed. Documentation has been completed which details digitized and physical resources available at the NFPL Local History Room/Archives. Documentation has also been established for staff to determine when to guide local historians, researchers and genealogists to the Needham History Center and Museum.</p>	<p>Great initiative was shown on this project coordinating with the History Center.</p>
	<p>Increase marketing and training efforts for patrons, especially Seniors, for our digital collections and resources, and use of devices.</p>	<p>Completed. Marketing and training efforts have begun for our digital collections. Our Reference Librarian/Digital Media Specialist has offered technology help and visited an assisted living facility.</p>	<p>This is a good initiative to help the public and patrons learn about digital collections and resources. This is especially important as the Library considers the possible reallocation of physical resources (such as CDs and DVDs) in a streaming media environment.</p>

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	Begin to serialize parts of the physical collection starting with Young Adult and Adult Graphic Novels.	Completed. The Young Adult and Adult Graphic Novel collections have been serialized for ease of use by patrons and staff.	We support this initiative.
2. Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging (EDIB) are core tenets of all collections.	With LibraryIQ, update the work done in early CY2023 to create an updated EDIB collection report.	Completed. With LibraryIQ staff can create a live EDIB collection report. Methods used in early CY2023 will continue to be used.	We greatly appreciate this excellent use of LibraryIQ. We expect continued discussion and work on the Library's efforts to develop a collection reflecting the Library's values.
3. Investigate the development of an English Language Learning (ELL) Collection in the Children's Room	With the successful introduction of the ELL and World Languages collections for children, seek additional funding in the FY2026 operating budget to support ongoing growth of these needed collections.	Completed. The FY2026 operating budget request included additional funding for the development of the English Language Learners (ELL) collection in the Children's Room.	As a result of this initiative, children now have access to these additional resources. We hope the library will consider expanding outreach and resources to ELL patrons of all ages.
4. Consolidate and refocus World Languages, emphasizing Needham patrons.	N/A	Completed in FY2024	Excellent visible and accessible shelves of World Language materials have been created.

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 FY2025	Progress during FY2025	Notes/Comments
1. Evaluate and standardize Collection Development practices	Review subscription database usage in order to determine additional marketing opportunities.	Work on reviewing usage has begun, but marketing opportunities have not been explored yet. Noted in FY2026 Action Plan.	<p>We understand this project was on hold for most of FY2025 as we worked to fill the Reference Supervisor vacancy. There is also a larger issue in reevaluating our subscriptions to ensure that this part of our collection is fit to our patrons’ needs and interests.</p> <p>We applaud Library staff for thinking strategically about this action item. We will need to effectively market our databases and subscriptions to ensure a baseline awareness of offerings so that usage numbers accurately reflect patron needs.</p> <p>We expect Library staff to pursue a careful review of subscription usage and weigh decisions about subscription opportunities, use, and costs to ensure the best collection for our patrons.</p>
2. Reduce wait times associated with popular physical and digital materials.	Inform FY2026 materials expenditure decisions for ordering additional copies and licenses of popular physical and digital materials based on holds data.	Completed. A plan for additional copies/licenses related to patron holds and funding will be ready for FY2026.	<p>It is hard to keep up with the demand for the most popular physical and digital materials. Audiobooks and eBooks on Libby are wildly popular. We also know the license costs per item can vary widely.</p> <p>We are pleased to see Library staff develop a protocol for purchasing additional copies/licenses based on local demand from Needham patrons. The root of our collection development should always start with patron needs and interests.</p> <p>We understand expenditures cannot scale linearly with the demand for the most popular items because they would quickly exhaust our budgets. Our Library</p>

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			<p>staff are rightly focused on reducing wait times, while monitoring purchases of physical copies and digital licenses across the Minuteman network to strike a balance between being responsive and prudent.</p> <p>We expect this situation to evolve as we reevaluate the whole collection, deprioritizing low circulation items like CDs, and tuning our budgets for Libby and Hoopla.</p>
3. Clarify the process and create an SOP for patron requests for purchase	Update the patron purchase request form to create greater staff efficiencies to result in shorter wait times for patrons.	Work on exploring a suitable purchase request form has been done, but implementation will be completed in FY2026. Noted in FY2026 Action Plan.	We are excited to see the implementation of the new purchase request form during first quarter of FY2026. As Library staff explore potential process efficiencies like automatic alerts to appropriate materials selectors and user experience improvements like hold requests for requesting patrons, the new form is poised to unlock much value for the Library and its patrons. A digital system can be integrated directly into the Library's website.
	Promote the understanding of the Library's Collection Development Policy by patrons.	Postpone to FY2026. Noted in FY2026 Action Plan.	<p>This action item is rightly being revised and pushed to FY2026. Trustees and Library staff are eager to update our Collection Development Policy, not simply promote the current one. Our policy deserves new language speaking to our evolving digital collections. We want to separately address accession and deaccession of Archive materials. And we hope to make the language more consistent across all our policies.</p> <p>We expect that after revision and approval by the Trustees, Library staff will investigate strategies for how best to promote the policy, such as by connecting it to the new patron purchase request form.</p>

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			We look forward to combining the Collection Development Policy with the new patron request form so patrons of the Library can understand how the Library decides on what to add to (and not add to) the collection.
4. Ensure library staff is fluent in statistical analysis for all circulation functions	N/A	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 FY2025	Progress during FY2025	Notes/Comments
1. Audit interior and exterior use of space	N/A	N/A	
2. Reorganize the Children’s Room	Standardize and document the cataloging and processing of physical items for the Children’s Room	Work has begun and will continue into FY2026. Noted in FY2026 Action Plan.	Library usability starts with cataloging and processing, and it’s important our procedures be standardized across departments. We are pleased that careful attention was paid this year to aligning practices between Tech Services and the Children’s Department. We expect continued efforts on this through FY2026 will ensure all staff are comfortable and able to be efficient in following standardized procedures.
3. Emphasize sustainability in any plans	Continue to work with the Town of Needham’s Sustainability Manager on the location and installation of EV charging stations at the Library.	Postpone to FY2026. Noted in FY2026 Action Plan.	We understand the Town Sustainability Manager focused on the Newman School for charging stations during FY2025. We are glad to hear we are still on the Sustainability Manager’s list of upcoming sites. Library staff and the Town will prepare for the opportunity to construct charging stations when negotiating a new lease on the Christ Episcopal Church parking lot.
4. Phase 1: Design of Teen Area	Recommend needed technology improvements including additional electrical outlets, RJ45 ports, and security cameras.	Completed. The Phase 1 design included technology improvements to meet patron and staff known technology needs well into the future.	We are confident the Phase 1 design will meet the technology needs for our young adult area. We appreciate the care taken to select security cameras that will be compatible with our current legacy system as well as the future security camera system we hope to move to as stated in our capital improvement plan.

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	<p>Staff input will drive the design of Phase 1 while ensuring a manageable construction budget and timeline.</p>	<p>Completed. Staff outside Library Administration have been included in meetings with Utile architects to lead discussions of the design of Phase 1. The Library’s Technology Specialist and Teen Librarian have been regularly included in planning and decisions.</p>	<p>We are thrilled by the final design for Phase 1 and impressed by the efforts of the Library’s Technology Specialist and Teen Librarian to ensure careful attention to patron input and to opportunities to create a space that will open so much potential for the Library as a whole. Overall, the budgeting and timeline process has been expertly managed. Adopting a September start for construction helped to ensure we received the most competitive bids.</p>
	<p>Working with Town Hall decision makers and the Trustees, an affordable and convincing plan to move forward with construction of Phase 1 will be presented to ATM in Spring 2025.</p>	<p>Completed. Article has been put forward by the Town Manager. In March, the Finance Committee recommended approval by Town Meeting of Article 29 to fund the construction of Phase 1. In May it was approved at the Annual Town Meeting.</p>	<p>We are proud Finance Committee and Town Meeting recognized the importance of this project. And we recognize the hard work put in to communicate the value of Phase 1 by Library staff, Trustees, and other Town officials.</p> <p>We look forward to continuing to work with Library staff and Town officials to provide any support needed for this necessary project.</p>

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Fiscal Year 2025 Statistical Report

Annual Statistics Report	FY2025	FY2024	% Change
Circulation			
Checkout of all materials	595,828	557,056	6.96%
Checkout of physical materials	436,276	417,357	4.53%
Checkout of digital materials	159,552	130,035	22.70%
Highlights of collection use			
Physical adult	176,687	160,303	10.22%
Physical teen	23,163	23,724	-2.36%
Physical children	236,426	233,330	1.33%
Digital books	69,121	60,748	13.78%
Digital audio	61,343	46,030	33.27%
Digital video	10,464	7,245	44.43%
Digital magazines	18,624	16,012	16.31%
Video games	4,775	2,503	90.77%
Library of Things	3,401	1,350	151.93%
Museum passes	1,836	1,725	6.43%
Library Cards			
Massachusetts residents with Needham library cards	*16,777	16,777	0.00%
Needham residents with Needham library cards	16,631	16,462	1.03%
New library card registrations	1,359	1,684	-19.30%
Patron Use of Library			
Library visitors	277,878	264,074	5.23%
Website visits	182,735	203,087	-10.02%
Total questions answered	28,286	31,137	-9.16%
Public computer use	27,612	22,785	21.18%
Study Room use	5,470	3,498	56.38%
Community Room use	466	461	1.08%
Programs			
Total number of programs	709	562	26.16%
Total attendance	21,249	18,544	14.59%
Library programs - Adults	220	112	96.43%
Attendance	5,094	3,919	29.98%
Library programs - Teens	136	60	126.67%
Attendance	2,000	1,144	74.83%
Library programs - Children	353	390	-9.49%
Attendance	14,155	13,481	5.00%
Volunteers			
Number of volunteers	97	75	29.33%
Number of hours by volunteers	3,484	2,876	21.14%

*Minuteman Library Network confirmed the numbers for FY24 and FY25 are the same.