

Washington Free Public Library



2026 - 2029 Strategic Plan

*Collecting ideas,
creating experiences,
connecting people*

Approved by the Library Board on February 6, 2026

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LIBRARY MISSION STATEMENT

The Washington Free Public Library believes in the freedom to read and learn, and the freedom to compare and express ideas.

WFPL strives to provide educational, cultural and social enrichment for all residents of the city of Washington and surrounding areas.

INTRODUCTION

The Iowa Public Library Standards require each public library to maintain a current strategic plan that guides decision-making and defines the library's mission and goals for a three- to five-year period. These plans are intended to reflect community needs and to provide a clear framework for future growth and service.

In keeping with this requirement, the Washington Free Public Library Board of Trustees and library staff worked together to review the previous three-year plan and to gather community input through a public survey. This feedback helped identify the community's priorities for library services. Based on this assessment, three new strategic goals and related objectives were developed and reviewed by both staff and the Board. Each goal is supported by projects designed to advance the plan's outcomes and meet community needs.

This strategic plan covers the period from January 2026 through June 2029, organized into three planning years:

Year 1: January 2026 – June 2027 (18 months)

Year 2: July 2027 – June 2028

Year 3: July 2028 – June 2029

COMMUNITY PROFILE

Washington, Iowa is a vibrant small city located in southeast Iowa and serves as the county seat of Washington County. Founded in 1839, the community combines a rich history with an active downtown, local events, parks, and cultural assets that contribute to high quality of life for residents and visitors alike. A demographic snapshot (taken primarily from the latest American Community Survey) shows the following:

Population & Age (2020 Census):

- Total population: **7,352** (2020 Census))
- Median age: **~39.6 years (2023 ACS)**

Age Distribution (approximate, based on ACS & Census insights):

- **Under 5 years:** ~7.3%
- **Under 18 years:** ~22.3%
- **18–24 years:** ~8.9%
- **25–34 years:** ~13.1%
- **35–54 years:** ~22.5%
- **55–64 years:** ~10.5%
- **65+ years:** ~22.7%

Economic Indicators (2023 ACS):

- Median household income: **\$56,536**
- Poverty rate: **~15%**

Race & Ethnicity (2020 Census):

- White: **~84.1%**
- Hispanic or Latino (of any race): **~13.8%**
- Other races / two or more races: remainder (minority populations)

Educational attainment: (Among adults 25 years and older in Washington):

- **Less than high school diploma:** ~7.8%
- **High school graduate or equivalent:** ~38.4%
- **Some college or associate degree:** ~31.5%
- **Bachelor's degree or higher:** ~22.3%

LIBRARY PROFILE

The Washington Public Library was established by a group of dedicated volunteers in 1877 with a combination of private donations of money and books and a small public tax. For the first several years the library was housed in various locations until 1901 when Jane A. Chilcote, widow of Dr. Alexander Chilcote, bequeathed her house at 120 E. Main to the City of Washington to use as a public library. In 1952 the Chilcote house was demolished and a new 7,100 square foot facility was constructed and was remodeled later to be 11,200 square feet.

The current library building opened on Oct. 1, 2009 located on the town square in the heart of Washington, Iowa. The library occupies a **30,000 square foot, three-story facility** designed to be both functional and welcoming. The building's warm and inviting interior supports a wide range of uses, from quiet study and research to creative exploration and community gatherings.

The library maintains a collection of approximately **35,000 books and media items**, serving readers of all ages and interests. In addition to its physical collection, the library provides access to **eBooks and eAudibooks** through the State Library of Iowa's **Bridges digital consortium**, expanding access to over **139,000 eBooks, eAudibooks and eMagazines** beyond the library's walls.

Flexible and well-used public spaces are a key strength of the facility. The library includes **two large meeting rooms, a small conference room, and three study rooms**, supporting everything from public programs and community meetings to small group collaboration and individual use. Additional amenities include a **used book room, public computers, and printing and fax services**, ensuring access to essential technology and resources.

A signature feature of the library is its **2,500 square foot makerspace**, which supports hands-on learning, creativity, and skill-building for all ages. The makerspace includes a **pottery studio, memory lab, 3-D printing, a recording studio**, and dedicated spaces for **STEM and craft activities**, reflecting the library's commitment to innovation and experiential learning.

The library also houses a **genealogy and local history room**, operated in partnership with the **Washington County Genealogical Society**, providing residents with access to historical records and expertise that support family history research and preservation of local heritage.

Programming is offered year-round for all age groups. Regular offerings include a **weekly storytime for young children, afterschool activities for youth, and lifelong learning programs for adults**. The library also hosts a **monthly Writer's Workshop** and a **concert series**, creating opportunities for creative expression, cultural engagement, and community connection.

Together, these resources, spaces, and services position the Washington Free Public Library as a dynamic hub for learning, creativity, and connection in the community.

COMMUNITY SURVEY FEEDBACK

The full survey results can be found as an appendix to this document, but some insights that informed the creation of the current plan are listed below:

The **top five priorities** named by survey respondents were:

1. **Physical materials (print books, DVDs, audiobooks, music, and magazines)**
2. **Downloadable and streaming media (eBooks, eAudiobooks, music, and movies)**
3. **Lifelong learning programming for adults**
4. **Additional MakeIT Place equipment and programming**
5. **STEAM programming for youth K-6**

Survey respondents indicated that they hear about library programs in a variety of ways, with **Facebook** receiving the highest number of responses, but other responses were also popular.

37% of respondents use the Library's digital library; 28% of respondents were unaware of this service and 35% are aware of the service but don't currently use it. Those respondents who DO use the digital library (the Libby app) showed great enthusiasm for it when asked what they don't want us to change!

When asked what some of the unmet community needs were that the library might address, **literacy and services for non-English speakers** were mentioned frequently.

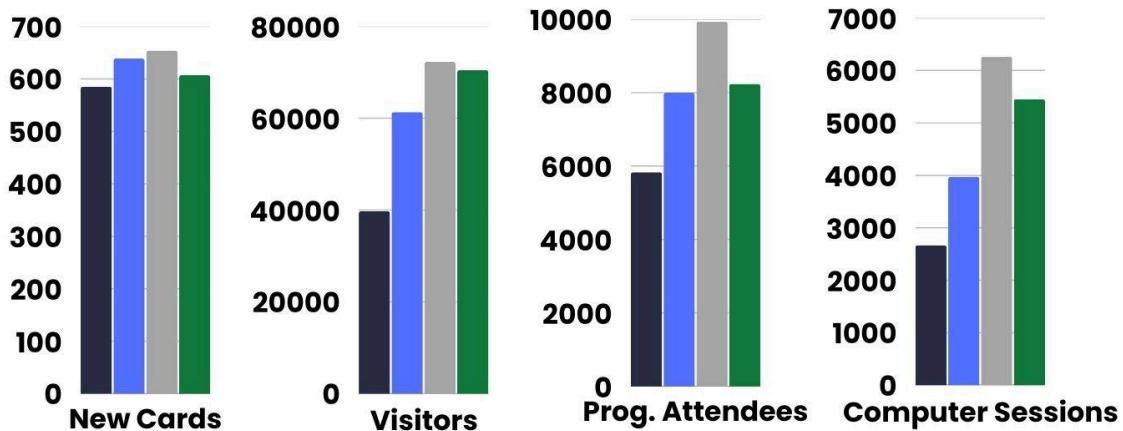
When asked what service or program respondents LOVE and don't want us to change, some of the most frequently named were **Libby, Summer Reading program, the MakeIT Place, Thursday noon concerts and Writer's Workshop.**

When asked how important the Washington Public Library is to the quality of life of Washington residents:

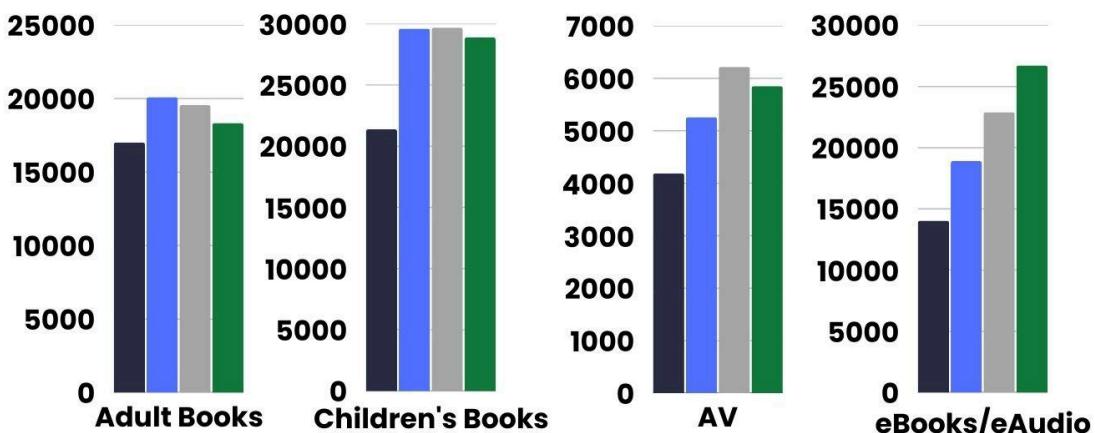
- Extremely important: 63%
- Important: 30%
- Somewhat Important: 5.5%
- Not Important: 1.5%

DATA & PERFORMANCE 2022 - 2025

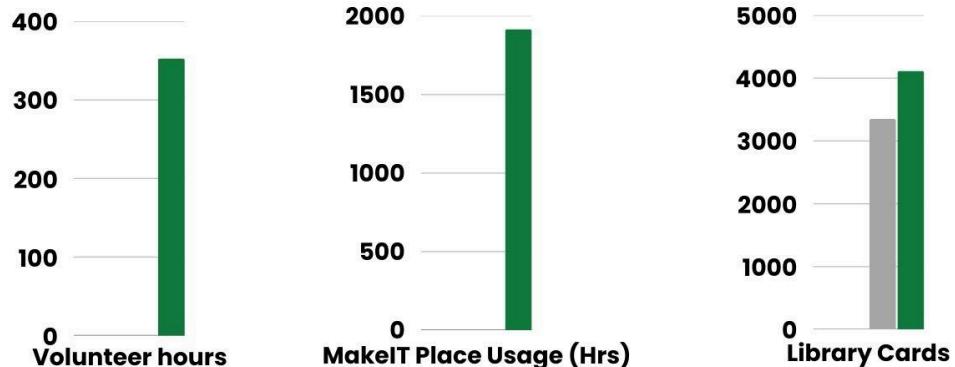
Library Usage



Circulation



Other Measures



■ FY22 ■ FY23 ■ FY24 ■ FY25

2023 - 2025 Strategic Plan

HIGHLIGHTS

DISCOVER

- Implemented 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten and Dolly Parton Imagination Library
- New shelving for picture books in the children's area
- Added Lego tables, new computers and a play kitchen in the children's area
- Implemented new children's STEAM programming in the MakelT Place

STRENGTHEN

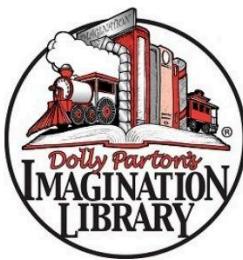
- Launched a volunteer program
- Updated job descriptions and staffing plan
- Developed evaluation and survey methods for library programs and services

CURATE

- Opened the MakelT Place!
- Implemented a regular weeding and inventory process
- Improved digital collection development, resulting in a 90% increase in digital circulation between FY 22 and FY 25
- Reclassified the Young Adult Fiction collection into genres

Celebrate

- Began digitization of the Washington Evening Journal photos
- Expanded the MakelT Place Memory Lab hardware and software
- Partnered with the Washington County Genealogical Society to upgrade technology in the Grayson Archives Room
- Held successful Authorfest, Photofest, Fiber Arts February and Noon Concert series programming



2026 - 2029 Strategic Goals



COLLECT

Build and preserve collections that reflect our community's interests, history, and future.



CREATE

Create spaces and experiences that inspire curiosity, enjoyment, and growth.



CONNECT

Connect our community to ideas, opportunities, and each other.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES & INITIATIVES



COLLECT

Build and preserve collections that reflect our community's interests, history, and future.

Objectives	Planned Initiatives (Reviewed Annually)
Organize collections so readers of all ages can easily find books they enjoy.	Year 1: Classify and arrange the picture book collection into child-friendly subject groupings. Year 1: Explore ways to increase room for the Large Print collection and arrange it in sections that match reader interests. Year 2: Classify and arrange the juvenile fiction collection into fiction genres. Year 1-3: Study alternative arrangements for adult nonfiction and phase in implementation.
Digitize and make local history materials accessible to the community.	Year 1: Continue to process the Washington Evening Journal collection and upload significant photos to Fortepan Iowa. Year 1: Investigate and implement a digital asset management system to make the WEJ collection accessible to the community. Year 2: Explore the addition of other collections to the digitization process. Year 3: Begin the process of adding local historical texts and images to the digital asset management system.
Collaborate with community members to create exhibits that tell Washington's stories.	Year 1: Install new special collection shelving on the 2nd floor of the library and make the Scofield collection accessible. Explore possibilities for displaying additional community collections. Year 1-3: Explore ways to exhibit WEJ photos and other local history images and stories out in the community (e.g. wheat-pasting, murals, podcasting, videos etc.)
Balance print and digital materials to meet changing community needs and preferences.	Year 1: Begin a deeper analysis of circulation trends, both physical and digital. Design and implement a quarterly collection satisfaction survey to card holders. Year 2-3: Continue analysis and data collection; make adjustments to purchasing patterns and monitor results.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES & INITIATIVES



CREATE

Create spaces and experiences that inspire curiosity, enjoyment, and growth.

Objectives	Planned Initiatives (Reviewed Annually)
Provide inviting spaces for children that support play, discovery, and early literacy.	Year 1-2: Convert the children's program room into an engaging early childhood playspace. Year 1: Add materials and supplies for checkout in the children's area for continued play and exploration by school-age children. Year 2-3: Explore enhanced programming options, such as adding sensory-friendly play-times in the playspace.
Expand the MakeIT Place with tools and classes that encourage creativity.	Year 1: Explore and implement methods for receiving regular feedback from the community on expanding MakeIT Place equipment and programs. Year 2-3: Expand equipment/class offerings according to feedback given.
Maintain a safe, comfortable, and welcoming library facility.	Year 1: Investigate methods of developing a long-range plan for facility maintenance. Year 2-3: Develop a plan for facility maintenance, as well as methods for funding.
Offer interactive technology that supports learning and engagement for young people.	Year 1: Add an interactive light wall to the early childhood play place. Year 2: Add technology to the young adult area to allow for gaming. Year 3: Add technology such as a light wall or STEM/engineering wall to the juvenile area of the library.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES & INITIATIVES



CONNECT

Connect our community to ideas, opportunities, and each other.

Objectives	Planned Initiatives (Reviewed Annually)
Host programs and platforms that bring writers, readers, and listeners together.	<p>Year 1: Create and promote a monthly “Author Spotlight” series highlighting local and regional authors.</p> <p>Year 1: Retool and rebrand the Library’s concert series.</p> <p>Year 2-3: Work with the WFPL Foundation to explore possibilities for creating signature events with nationally known authors.</p>
Promote library resources and events to strengthen community awareness and partnerships.	<p>Year 1: Develop a marketing plan for the library.</p> <p>Year 2-3: Continue to implement initiatives arising from the marketing plan.</p>
Build literacy skills for children and adults, including English language learners.	<p>Year 1: Offer Spanish/English conversations groups for adults</p> <p>Year 1-3: Implement enhancements to the Library’s summer reading program that combat “summer slide” and promote reading skill development.</p>
Provide technology and AI learning opportunities that help residents build skills and stay connected.	<p>Year 1: Promote and expand Tech Thursday to offer a series of “sound bytes” on technology (including AI) for adults given by community practitioners.</p> <p>Year 2-3: Explore ongoing programming concepts that spotlight the library’s role in educating the community about new technology trends.</p>

YEAR 1 Work Plan: January 2026 - June 2027

Collect

Create

Connect

Classify and arrange the picture book collection into child-friendly subject groupings. Explore ways to increase room for the Large Print collection and arrange it in sections that match reader interests.	Convert the children's program room into an engaging early childhood playspace.	Create and promote a monthly "Author Spotlight" series highlighting local and regional authors. Initiate a book discussion group on Facebook.
Begin to study alternative arrangements for adult nonfiction.	Add materials and supplies for checkout in the children's area for continued play and exploration by school-age children.	Retool and rebrand the Library's concert series.
Continue to digitize the Washington Evening Journal collection.	Explore and implement methods for receiving regular feedback from the community on expanding MakeIT Place equipment and programs.	Develop a marketing plan for the library.
Investigate and implement a digital asset management system to make the WEJ collection accessible to the community.	Investigate methods of developing a long-range plan for facility maintenance.	Offer Spanish/English conversations groups for adults.
Install new special collection shelving on the 2nd floor of the library and make the Scofield collection accessible.	Add an interactive light wall to the early childhood play place.	Implement enhancements to the Library's summer reading program that combat "summer slide" and promote reading skill development.
Formulate and implement an introductory wheat-pasting project in the downtown area that demonstrates the power of historical images. Study methods of increasing distribution channels for the Library's podcast.		Promote and expand Tech Thursday to offer a series of "sound bites" on technology (including AI) for adults given by community practitioners.
Begin a deeper analysis of circulation trends, both physical and digital. Design and implement a quarterly collection satisfaction survey to card holders.		

HOW DO WE KNOW WHEN WE'RE SUCCEEDING?

Milestones and metrics help us track our progress and understand whether we are moving in the right direction. They give us a way to measure success, stay accountable, and make informed decisions along the way. At the same time, we recognize that some factors affecting our work—such as community conditions, partnerships, and external events—are outside of our control. For that reason, these measures are meant to guide learning and improvement, not just to judge outcomes, as we adapt to changing needs and circumstances.

Collect



Metrics

- Circulation of reclassified collections
- Collection satisfaction rating
- # of digitized images/videos/documents
- Visitor count
- Digital circulation



Milestones

- Special collections shelving installed
- Digital Asset Management (DAM) system launched
- Collection evaluation methods established for print & digital materials

Create



Metrics

- Usage of MakeIT Place
- Program satisfaction rating
- Visitor count



Milestones

- PlayIT Place opens
- Long-range building maintenance plan established
- Interactive technology installations identified and completed
- Community wheat paste mural installed

Connect



Metrics

- Volunteer hours
- Summer Reading Program participation
- Program satisfaction rating
- Patrons assisted with technology issues
- Author & concert series attendance



Milestones

- Marketing Plan completed
- Technology assistance programs expanded