

# Washington Free Public Library Strategic Plan January 2023 – December 2025

## I. INTRODUCTION

Over the last several decades public libraries have been places where change has been ongoing, both in the way library spaces have been utilized, as well as in the resources and programming that have been offered. The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent service adjustments and interruptions accelerated the rate of this change in a dramatic way, both nationwide as well as locally, causing public libraries to energize planning processes aimed at re-imagining and reconstructing library services and programming for this new era.

This particular planning process allowed us to assess our progress and examine possible directions to shift our resources and priorities. We spent significant time gathering and reviewing data points so we could learn more about our community and how to best respond to their concerns while staying within our budget and scope of influence. We entered the strategic planning process with open minds, while adhering to the public library values of access, inclusion, and freedom of information. In order to create a data-informed, actionable plan, we talked to wide array of stakeholders using various tools. As patterns emerged in the data, our strategic goals took shape and measurable objectives supporting those goals were drafted.

The resulting plan represents the overall strategy for the Washington Free Public Library over the next three years. Library staff and the Board of Trustees will regularly review progress toward plan goals and make adjustments as necessary.

## I. INTRODUCTION & DATA HIGHLIGHTS

## II. DATA HIGHLIGHTS & RELATIONSHIPS

Some takeaways from the community survey, focus groups, existing programming/usage data and the benchmarking process that were key to crafting this plan are detailed below:

- One of our greatest strengths is our large, “newish” facility that contains space for us to grow and imagine new services and programs. Our library is tied for the largest Size E library in the State of Iowa and also ranks #1 in square footage per capita amongst our benchmark libraries.
- Another of our strengths, mentioned over and over in the survey, focus groups and in day to day conversation is the excellent service offered by our friendly, helpful and talented staff.
- The library’s collection of materials is a high priority for library users according to the survey and focus groups. Yet, WFPL spends a lower amount per capita on collection items than benchmark libraries, as well as compared to other Size E libraries in Iowa (average \$49.85). While a higher amount spent on new collection items does not always lead to higher circulation, the two data points do seem to have a relationship.
- The idea of programming focused on creativity and STEAM topics was a high priority expressed in the community survey, as well as in focus groups. Existing program attendance for these topics also supports this priority.
- Survey responses from the Hispanic community were difficult to elicit and it seems likely that usage from this part of the community is not as high as it could be if communication were better and resources more plentiful and targeted. Focus group discussions often centered on ways that library could bring the community together in meaningful ways to celebrate our diversity.
- The pandemic and resulting interruptions in programming seemed to cause decreasing levels of participation in tween/teen programming. This age group is difficult to recapture once lost and ways to change this trend are needed. Increased communication and partnerships with educators in school settings could be a way to improve this situation.

## II. STRATEGIC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

### OUR MISSION:

*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.*

### OUR STRATEGIC GOALS:

#### **DISCOVER**

Become the community's **center for discovery and adventure** for children and teens

#### **STRENGTHEN**

Strengthen community **awareness and support** for the Library's mission and services and build **staff competencies and talents** to fulfill the mission.

#### **CURATE**

Create opportunities for **enjoyment, inspiration and creation** through thoughtful **curation** of library resources, programs and spaces (digital & physical).

#### **CELEBRATE**

Celebrate **Washington**— the past, the present and the PEOPLE.

## DISCOVER

Become the community's **center for discovery and adventure** for children and teens.

*OBJECTIVES:*

1. Develop physical spaces that encourage self-directed play and discovery.
2. Provide programs/services that highlight the importance of developing early literacy skills and an early love of reading and literature.
3. Develop recurring programming that guides tweens and teens to discover and develop creative and critical thinking skills.
4. Develop recurring programming for tweens and teens that builds community and self-confidence.

## STRENGTHEN

Strengthen community **awareness and support** for the Library's mission and services and build staff competencies and talents to fulfill the mission.

*OBJECTIVES:*

1. Create a volunteer recruitment and retention plan utilizing both long and short-term volunteers.
2. Develop a marketing and communications plan for library programs and services.
3. Identify and form lasting connections with community partners by developing joint goals and responsibilities.
4. Update staff job descriptions and staffing plan.
5. Develop evaluation and survey methods for library programs and services.

## CURATE

Create opportunities for enjoyment, inspiration and creation through thoughtful **curation** of library resources, programs and spaces (digital & physical)

*OBJECTIVES:*

1. Develop a schedule and method for maintaining (selection, inventory, evaluation, weeding) all library physical collections.
2. Create opportunities for alternative shelving/display of certain collections designed to increase usage.
3. Develop a makerspace for all ages in the lower level of the library that utilizes community skills and talents in the selection and implementation of equipment and programming.
4. Continue to grow and develop programs for writers and readers, including group activities, as well as multimedia channels for sharing reading/writing.

## II. STRATEGIC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

5. Continue to develop the library's web page and digital collection and build awareness of these resources.

### CELEBRATE

Celebrate **Washington**— the past, the present and the PEOPLE

#### *OBJECTIVES:*

1. Offer opportunities for local artists, writers and musicians to share their work.
2. Offer opportunities, such as Tuesday's @ 2 for community members to share their talents, skills and stories and to highlight and celebrate our community's diversity
3. Partner with the Grayson Archives/Washington County Genealogical Society and other organizations to develop shared goals for organizing, cataloging and digitizing local history collections in order to make them easily accessible to the community.

## Focus Group and Survey Summary Points:

During August of 2022 the Library conducted a survey, both online and on paper, as well as in English and in Spanish. In addition, in December 2022, several focus groups were held that represented a variety of viewpoints: community stakeholders, “power” library users, parents, educators and teens. Below are some summary points that arose in the survey and in the focus groups that were key in planning for the future:

Teens want more hands-on activities such as sewing, art, etc.

Teens want guidance when learning new things—they don’t want online activities or self-directed ones.

Teens are more likely to read what has been suggested to them by peers and family.

We need to find better ways to communicate (especially to teens and busy families) about what is available at the library, as well as to find ways to communicate to non-traditional library users that everyone is welcome here. Communication doesn’t seem to be really bad, but it could be better.

Hours (especially for kids’ programs) aren’t convenient for working families

The Library is a good model to communicate the differences and diversity in our community

Washington (as a City) doesn’t have a good “brand”

People love the library’s physical spaces—they are welcoming and comfortable, these could be further developed into even more ways for community members to connect and interact

The Genealogy/Archives room is a great resource that not enough people know about.

The Library is an anchor for downtown, helps to keep downtown active and relevant



### III. SUPPORTING DATA

The children's area could be a more interactive space with activities—Lego tables, trains, etc.—things that make families want to stay for a while.

Look at electrical outlets, amenities for adults who may want to come and work/study at the library.

Library staff is friendly, welcoming and helpful (this was repeated over and over both in focus groups and the survey).

The pandemic changed many kids—especially younger ones—they aren't as confident, don't socialize well, need lots of guidance and coaching.

Community wide, we aren't doing a good job of communicating and connecting the community (i.e. not just library communication). Language can be a barrier to communication.

Communication with schools can be made better through building dependable and consistent structures, i.e. attending key events, utilizing school newsletters, school liaisons, etc. Be persistent in building these.

Many students don't read for enjoyment (why is that?). Also, they have a lot going on and even those who do read for enjoyment don't have as much time for it.

Students don't always know how to navigate the library environment and can be overwhelmed/confused. And they don't like looking like they don't know how to do something.

Our services/collections for Spanish-speakers are minimal and what little we have is not even known by many Spanish speakers.

People are busy—both adults and teens—we have to be a priority for them to make time to come to the library.

People are often embarrassed to ask questions about how to find things in the library.

Many people use Bridges to read so they may not be aware of new services offered within the library since they don't visit it physically.

A significant number of people still aren't aware that the Library offers digital content

### III. SUPPORTING DATA

Survey respondents (who were mostly current library users) still prioritize our collections (both physical and digital) over everything else.

Programming for adults was popular with survey respondents (the majority of respondents were above 50 and didn't have children in their homes)

For those wanting adult programming, creative/crafting programs, book clubs and author events, speakers on local history or community topics and musical/dramatic performances were the most popular. Movies and job skills/small business development were the least popular.

A makerspace area for adult/teens was the most popular new development idea for survey respondents. STEAM programming for youth was second. Enthusiasm was shown for both in all focus groups

Programs for homeschool students were suggested. More services/programs to the Latino community. Some additional ideas for programming were proposed in focus groups: health and wellness, home maintenance

Things people love the most: friendly staff, concerts, summer reading, Writer's Workshop, ebooks and eaudiobooks, printing/faxing, Wee Read and Miss Jo, Sticks and Strings, large print books, meeting rooms, interlibrary loan, movies, book clubs.

Suggestions: vary hours for programs for children so that families with working parents can attend, help with learning technology, programs for homeschool children.

### III. SUPPORTING DATA

## BENCHMARKING DATA

**Benchmark Libraries:** While all communities have different needs for library services, there is still much that can be learned by comparing data, observing patterns between inputs and outputs and learning from best practices. Libraries selected to benchmark with were chosen due to their size, proximity or community characteristics.

#### A. Expenditure Benchmarks

	State Size Code	Population City Served by Library	Legal Service Area Served by Library	Total Collection Expenditures	Collection Expenditures per capita	Collection Expenditures Rank	Total Operating Expenditures	Operating Expenditures per capita	Operating Expenditures rank
Coralville Public Library	F	18,907	23,485	\$ 294,435	\$ 15.57	1	\$ 2,173,616	\$ 114.96	1
Kalona Public Library	C	2,363	8,060	\$ 22,414	\$ 9.49	2	\$ 260,407	\$ 110.20	2
Decorah Public Library	E	8,127	15,515	\$ 49,582	\$ 6.10	6	\$ 715,223	\$ 88.01	3
Perry Public Library	E	7,702	8,990	\$ 47,054	\$ 6.11	7	\$ 502,787	\$ 65.28	4
Washington Free Public Library	E	7,266	10,678	\$ 33,181	\$ 4.57	10	\$ 471,184	\$ 64.85	5
Pella Public Library	F	10,352	17,715	\$ 61,821	\$ 5.97	8	\$ 654,684	\$ 63.24	6
North Liberty Community Library	F	18,299	19,400	\$ 105,722	\$ 5.78	9	\$ 1,129,720	\$ 61.74	7
Knoxville Public Library	E	7,313	11,312	\$ 46,548	\$ 6.37	5	\$ 440,415	\$ 60.22	8
Oskaloosa Public Library	F	11,463	20,282	\$ 35,781	\$ 3.12	14	\$ 672,181	\$ 58.64	9
Clear Lake Public Library	E	7,777	12,111	\$ 58,854	\$ 7.57	3	\$ 434,123	\$ 55.82	10
Oelwein Public Library	E	6,415	7,967	\$ 22,083	\$ 3.44	13	\$ 354,391	\$ 55.24	11
Keokuk Public Library	F	10,780	10,963	\$ 41,350	\$ 3.84	12	\$ 542,603	\$ 50.33	12
Fairfield Public Library	E	9,464	17,143	\$ 65,796	\$ 6.95	4	\$ 429,121	\$ 45.34	13
Mount Pleasant Public Library	E	8,668	12,731	\$ 42,609	\$ 4.92	11	\$ 339,010	\$ 39.11	14
Size E Libraries Average				\$ 49,895				63.38	

### III. SUPPORTING DATA

#### B. Circulation Benchmarks

	Population City Served by Library	Total Circulation	Circulation per capita	Circulation rank	Circulation of downloadable material	Circ of downloadable material per capita	Circ of downloadable material rank
Pella Public Library	10,352	253,179	24.46	1	26,390	2.55	4
Kalona Public Library	2,363	41,686	17.64	2	11,614	4.91	1
Coralville Public Library	18,907	229,877	12.16	3	87,001	4.60	2
Decorah Public Library	8,127	91,194	11.22	4	31,244	3.84	3
Clear Lake Public Library	7,777	63,473	8.16	5	11,189	1.44	8
Fairfield Public Library	9,464	77,080	8.14	6	17,068	1.80	7
Knoxville Public Library	7,313	54,748	7.49	7	10,507	1.44	9
Mount Pleasant Public Library	8,668	53,306	6.15	8	11,257	1.30	10
Oelwein Public Library	6,415	36,335	5.66	9	3,983	0.62	14
Oskaloosa Public Library	11,463	62,830	5.48	10	14,563	1.27	11
Washington Free Public Library	7,266	37,762	5.20	11	15,221	2.09	6
North Liberty Community Library	18,299	91,289	4.99	12	44,283	2.42	5
Perry Public Library	7,702	38,215	4.96	13	6,222	0.81	12
Keokuk Public Library	10,780	25,806	2.39	14	8,489	0.79	13
Size E Libraries Average		55,549	8.11		11,265		

### III. SUPPORTING DATA

#### C. Resource Benchmarks

	Population City Served by Library	Physical Collection size	Physical volumes per capita	Collection size rank	Library Square feet	Library Square Feet per capita	Library Square Feet rank
Kalona Public Library	2,363	33,213	14.06	1	10,000	4.23	2
Fairfield Public Library	9,464	81,695	8.63	2	21,000	2.22	8
Pella Public Library	10,352	81,102	7.83	3	21,000	2.03	11
Clear Lake Public Library	7,777	60,279	7.75	4	15,814	2.03	10
Coralville Public Library	18,907	115,723	6.12	5	49,500	2.62	4
Mount Pleasant Public Library	8,668	50,685	5.85	6	23,000	2.65	3
Washington Free Public Library	7,266	40,669	5.60	7	30,000	4.13	1
Knoxville Public Library	7,313	40,873	5.59	8	18,280	2.50	5
Oelwein Public Library	6,415	35,650	5.56	9	14,700	2.29	7
Oskaloosa Public Library	11,463	62,592	5.46	10	25,000	2.18	9
Decorah Public Library	8,127	42,855	5.27	11	18,600	2.29	6
Perry Public Library	7,702	35,482	4.61	12	12,850	1.67	12
Keokuk Public Library	10,780	37,604	3.49	13	17,623	1.63	13
North Liberty Community Library	18,299	48,138	2.63	14	17,900	0.98	14
Size E Libraries Average		45,360			15,209		

# Survey Report

Washington Public Library Strategic Plan Survey  
Please respond by Sept. 15, 2022

## A. Let's get started!

### 1. Where do you live?

- |   |        |
|---|--------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Within the city limits of Washington | 66.89% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rural Washington County              | 26.49% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Another Washington County city       | 2.65%  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Outside of Washington County         | 3.97%  |

### 2. Do you have a Washington Public Library card?

- |                                   |        |
|-----------------------------------|--------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes      | 91.72% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No       | 5.63%  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not Sure | 2.65%  |

### 3. How often do you visit the Washington Public Library?

- |   |        |
|---|--------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all                             | 4.30%  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Once a year or so                      | 7.28%  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A few times a year                     | 37.42% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Regularly (every week or couple weeks) | 40.40% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Multiple times/week                    | 5.96%  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not Sure                               | 4.64%  |

### III. SUPPORTING DATA

4. If you haven't used the Washington Public Library, would you take a few minutes to tell us why not? See report for responses

5. Do you have a card from any of the following libraries?

<input type="checkbox"/> Kalona	26.13%
<input type="checkbox"/> Wellman	9.01%
<input type="checkbox"/> Iowa City	32.43%
<input type="checkbox"/> Coralville	11.71%
<input type="checkbox"/> Cedar Rapids	7.21%
<input type="checkbox"/> Mount Pleasant	3.60%
<input type="checkbox"/> Fairfield	8.11%
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)	38.74%

6. If you use other libraries regularly, what are your reasons?

<input type="checkbox"/> Convenience (I work or live near the other library)	37.18%
<input type="checkbox"/> They have books or other materials that the Washington Public Library doesn't have	51.28%
<input type="checkbox"/> They offer programs not offered by the Washington Public Library	12.82%
<input type="checkbox"/> If you chose b or c please let us know what types of materials and programs you use from other libraries:	

#### B. Library Services & Programs – Your preferences & priorities

7. Do you use the Library's downloadable eBook, eAudiobook and eMagazine collection?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, regularly	16.80%
<input type="checkbox"/> Every once in awhile	21.72%
<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all, though I know you have it	40.16%
<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all—I didn't know you had this service	21.31%

### III. SUPPORTING DATA

#### 8. To improve your library experience, what are your priorities for the library to focus and improve on (Pick no more than 3)

<input type="checkbox"/> Physical materials (print books, DVD's, audiobooks, music and magazines)	53.69%
<input type="checkbox"/> Downloadable and streaming media (eBooks, e-audiobooks, music and movies)	40.57%
<input type="checkbox"/> Early literacy programs for babies, toddlers, and preschoolers & their caregivers	24.18%
<input type="checkbox"/> STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Math) programming for youth K-6	24.59%
<input type="checkbox"/> STEAM programming for teenagers	14.34%
<input type="checkbox"/> Lifelong learning programming for adults	43.85%
<input type="checkbox"/> Increased technology services within the library building	14.75%
<input type="checkbox"/> Increased access to genealogy and local history resources	19.67%
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)	9.43%

#### 9. If you have an interest in attending programs for adults, which topics interest you the most? (Pick no more than 3)

<input type="checkbox"/> Book clubs and author presentations	30.33%
<input type="checkbox"/> Speakers on local history/community topics	34.43%
<input type="checkbox"/> Musical or dramatic performances	34.02%
<input type="checkbox"/> Movies	9.84%
<input type="checkbox"/> Artistic and/or cultural speakers/topics	27.87%
<input type="checkbox"/> Discussion of current events and community concerns	15.98%
<input type="checkbox"/> How to use technology more effectively	20.49%
<input type="checkbox"/> Job skills or small business development	4.92%
<input type="checkbox"/> Creative/crafting programs	37.30%
<input type="checkbox"/> Learning to speak another language	19.26%
<input type="checkbox"/> I have no interest in this type of programming	6.56%
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)	4.51%



### III. SUPPORTING DATA

**10. Libraries are always changing and taking on new roles. Below are some possible areas for expansion that other public libraries have developed. Please choose up to 3 options that you would like to see at the Washington Public Library**

- Makerspace area for adult and teens to utilize technology and equipment SUCH AS: 3-D printing, vinyl cutter (Cricut), sewing/quilting/embroidery machines, weaving loom, sound recording/video recording equipment, ceramics or jewelry making equipment 57.79%
- STEAM programming for children and teens such as robotics, coding and other science/engineering related programs 40.57%
- Resources and programming for adults and teens for writing and self-publishing (writing groups for adults and teens, book creation software, book printing/binding machines) 31.97%
- Increased technology services within the library building (laptops & tablets for checkout, study rooms equipped with computers and virtual meeting capability, online reservations for study/meeting rooms, gaming technology or virtual reality technology) 33.30%
- Local history and genealogy: Expand digitization of local history resources and make collections available online. Provide genealogy programming and reference services. 34.43%
- Other (please specify): 7.38%

**11. How do you think your Library could better partner with other community organizations? See Report for responses**

**12. What is ONE program or service that we do NOW that you LOVE about the library the most and don't want us to change? See Report for responses**

**13. Is there anything else about our services and programs you'd like to share with us? See Report for responses**

**14. If you would be willing to participate in a 30 minute focus group please give us your name and email/phone number.**

### III. SUPPORTING DATA

#### C. To make our survey results better, tell us a little about yourself

15. What is your age?

- |   |        |
|---|--------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Under 18                 | 6.15%  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 18-29                    | 9.02%  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 30-49                    | 24.59% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 50-64                    | 19.26% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 65 or Over               | 33.93% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I'd prefer not to answer | 2.05%  |

16. If you're the parent of children, what age groups do they fit into? (check as many as apply)

- |  |        |
|--|--------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Birth through Age 4 | 18.71% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5-8                 | 19.30% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 9-12                | 15.20% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 13-17               | 13.45% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No Children         | 58.48% |

17. What category summarized below best describes you?

- |  |        |
|--|--------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> White (e.g. German, English, Italian, Polish, French, etc)  | 92.50% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin (e.g. Mexican or Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Salvadoran, Dominican, Columbian, etc) | 4.58%  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black or African American (e.g. African American, Jamaican, Haitian, Nigerian, Ethiopian, Somalian, etc.)                         | 0%     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian (e.g. Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, etc)   | .42%   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian or Alaska Native  | 0%     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Middle Eastern or North African   | .42%   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander)  | 0%     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Some other race, ethnicity or origin:   | 2.08%  |

### III. SUPPORTING DATA

#### 18. If you live in Washington County, how long have you lived here?

- |  |        |
|--|--------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 1 year                  | 4.12%  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1-3 years                         | 10.29% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4-10 year                         | 14.40% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> More than 10 years                | 67.08% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I don't live in Washington County | 4.12%  |