



Strategic Plan

FY 2022 – FY 2026

East Bridgewater Public Library

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A. Library Mission and Vision

Mission Statement

To serve the informational, educational, cultural and recreational needs of our community by providing access to professional staff and the highest levels of materials, programs, and library services in a welcoming environment.

Vision Statement

To be the complete civic, educational, cultural and recreational resource for each citizen of East Bridgewater.

Slogan

"Start here. Go Anywhere!"

B. Planning Process

In November 2020, the East Bridgewater Board of Library Trustees evaluated the library's existing strategic plan and launched a new planning process. They authorized Library Director Christopher McGhee to form a committee to oversee the process and submit a new plan for their approval.

The Planning Committee, consisting of five members from a cross section of library staff, met several times throughout spring 2021. The Committee began by reviewing the library's existing strategic plan, discussing the Library Trustees' thoughts from their November meeting, and determining the focus for a community survey. At subsequent meetings, they drafted and refined the library's community survey questionnaire.

The questionnaire was available online July-August 2021 and was distributed using the library's social media accounts and e-mail newsletter. At the same time, paper copies were made available at the library's circulation desk and distributed at an outdoor community event in late August. Over 1,500 people responded to the survey, representing more than 10% of the library's service population.

Throughout the summer and fall of 2021, the Planning Committee gathered additional data. Members of the Committee met with the Friends of the East Bridgewater Public Library, the Board of Library Trustees, and other community stakeholders in a series of informal planning chats. The library staff also participated in a SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results) exercise. Notes from these meetings and the exercise were combined with the results from the community survey.

From the collected data, the Planning Committee identified five areas of strategic priority: DEI (diversity, equity, inclusion), staff, facilities, services, and promotion. They prepared a strategic plan for the library that addressed all five areas and submitted it to the Board of Library Trustees.

The East Bridgewater Board of Library Trustees voted to approve and adopt the plan on October 21, 2021.

C. Community Profile

Situated twenty-seven miles southeast of the city of Boston, what is now referred to as East Bridgewater is the traditional and ancestral land of the Pokanoket, Wôpanâak (Wampanoag), and Massa-adchu-es-et (Massachusetts) peoples. This land was stewarded by these peoples for thousands of years prior to the advent of European colonization in the 1630s. As the European population grew, the area became an inland industrial center, and the Town of East Bridgewater was incorporated in 1823.

Today, East Bridgewater is largely a residential town with a population close to 14,500, according to 2018 US Census Bureau estimates. Most residents of the Town are white with all other races making up less than ten percent of the total population, though this does represent an increase of more than six percent from 2010. The two largest age groups consist of children under the age of eighteen and seniors over sixty-five. The majority of households consist of families with children under the age of seventeen, and the median household income is slightly higher than the state average. Nearly three quarters of the population over the age of sixteen is employed, and the average daily work commute is more than thirty minutes in length.

D. Organizational Description

1. History

In 1894, \$10,000 in stocks was transferred by Deed of Trust to the Trustees of the library, Benjamin M. Keith, George M. Keith and Robert Orr Harris through the generosity of Cyrus Washburn. Plans for the Library were drawn up by Waldo V. Howard and the East Bridgewater Public Library was erected as the "Washburn Public Library" in 1896. The building was dedicated on September 22, 1897. In 1979, an addition was constructed that nearly tripled the Library space to 14,163 square feet. In 2000, the library became a member of the SAILS network.

2. Present – Excerpts from the 2020 Annual Report

Recently, the East Bridgewater Public Library has worked to adapt to the shifting requirements of the Covid-19 pandemic and continue to fulfil its mission in these difficult times. During parts of recent years, library staff were not permitted to work in the library building, but they continued to work from home to purchase materials, update library cards, respond to patron requests, and assist patrons in using online resources. Library staff also used the time to participate in virtual workshops and courses to help them stay abreast of advances in librarianship and library services.

With limited access to physical library materials, the library took steps to meet increased demand for digital resources and internet access. We immediately expanded our licenses for digital materials through multiple vendors. This provided a greater range of digital content to the East Bridgewater community and also reduced wait times for materials from popular authors. We also began to offer Wi-Fi hotspots for check out and extended our free Wi-Fi access to the library parking lot. Patrons can now access the internet through the library from the safety and comfort of their homes or vehicles.

As soon as library staff were allowed to return to the building, the East Bridgewater Public Library implemented a contactless curbside pickup service to allow library patrons to borrow materials again. Patrons could request library materials by placing a hold through the library's online catalog, calling the library, or sending us an email. These requests could be for specific titles or authors, or patrons could talk with library staff about their reading, viewing, or listening interests and allow us to select items for them to try. Patrons could then arrange to collect the materials from a cart

located outside. As a result, there were nearly one thousand contactless pickups of library materials in 2020.

While the library building was closed to the public, we also made changes to our layout and services to keep everyone as safe as possible once patrons were permitted to enter once again. We closed off areas of the library where sufficient social distancing and reduced capacity limits were difficult to achieve. In other areas, we established one-way traffic patterns and erected clear barriers at all points of service. These and other adaptations allowed the East Bridgewater Public Library to be one of the first libraries in Massachusetts to welcome patrons back inside.

However, the East Bridgewater Public Library knows that the library is more than its building and materials. We recognize the importance to our community of our entertaining and informative library programs and activities; consequently, we endeavored to maintain that vital service despite the pandemic. In 2020, we were able to offer three in-person programs, five virtual presentations, and a number of craft activities for adults. Our Teen Advisory Board continued to meet virtually, and we also began offering a monthly "Take & Make" bag for teens to pick up at the library. While we weren't able to provide teen volunteer opportunities in the library building, our teens did volunteer their time to make holiday cards for the residents at the Sachem Center for Rehabilitation & Health. Likewise, our children's Story Time changed to an online program with weekly videos uploaded for the preschool crowd and another program introducing older children to newer chapter books. We held a robust summer program, which we opened to adults for the first time, and prizes were awarded for reading at all levels. We created craft kits for two children's age groups and continued them monthly. "Story Time to Go" bags with books, puzzles, coloring sheets and more for parents looking to continue reading to their children were very popular. We also had one Zoom program for children: author and illustrator Jonathan Hall led tweens and teens through an excellent program on creating their own graphic novels. Later, we resumed in-person Story Time programs outdoors on the library lawn. After many trials, errors and adaptations, we feel we now have a set of programs for all ages that meet our community's needs as best we can during the pandemic.

E. Needs Assessment

The East Bridgewater Public Library is open six days (51 hours) each week and saw an average of 1,200 patrons visiting the library building weekly prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. There were 8,362 active library card holders at the end of fiscal year 2021, 7,385 of which were East Bridgewater residents, representing more than half of the town's population. In the fiscal year ending 2019, circulation reached 96,847 items in all formats. That is more than 11.5 items checked out per registered user or 6.68 items per East Bridgewater citizen over the course of the year. In addition, 6,538 people attended a program or event of some sort at the library in 2019. All of this shows the high value that the East Bridgewater community places on the public library and its services.

One of the most highly valued services the library provides is its friendly and knowledgeable staff. 78% of participants in the library's 2021 Community Survey rated the library's customer service as either "Excellent" or "Good," higher than any other service listed. Additionally, when asked to select five top priorities for library services, 28.5% of respondents included "Help finding reading materials" among their choices. Positive comments about library staff were also written in again and again in the comments area of the survey. From this data and the SOAR exercise responses from library staff, the Planning Committee determined that continuing to prioritize staff development and retention activities must be included in the strategic plan.

Traditional library services, such as quick and easy access to new and popular materials and the ability to participate in a variety of quality library programs, made up the top five priorities for library service listed by survey respondents. On the opposite spectrum, lack of quick and easy access to materials and services was given among the top three obstacles to greater use of the East Bridgewater Public Library and its resources. This strikes at the very heart of the library's mission, and working to improve these services must always have a place on the library's strategic plan.

Though providing quiet places to study or work and providing a safe space for teens and tweens to spend time after school both ranked low in priority among survey respondents, library staff and trustees are aware that the library struggles to meet these two community needs, as reflected during informal conversations as well as on SOAR exercise notes. On warm afternoons during the school year, the library can host anywhere from fifty to one hundred teens and tweens, largely due to its close proximity to East Bridgewater schools and a candy store located next door. Additionally, lack of quiet, comfortable seating for reading was given as both an obstacle to greater library use and written in frequently as a desire in the open

comment section of the community survey. The library building has not been significantly added to or updated since a new circulation desk was installed in 2009, and a costly renovation and expansion project was postponed in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Consequently, the Planning Committee sees the need for endeavoring to improve the uses and condition of the current library space to better serve community and staff needs.

With 28.14% of the responses, the number one obstacle to greater use of library services revealed that respondents are not familiar with library offerings. When asked how they would prefer to learn about library events and services, 44.2% of respondents answered that the library's outdoor sign is an important information source, while the number one response, with 48.4% of the responses, referred to the library's website and online calendar system. As both of these tools are outdated and offer limited performance, the Committee sees a clear need to develop the library's promotional resources.

Finally, the library staff and trustees of the East Bridgewater Public Library recognize the importance of welcoming and affirming all members of its community in every aspect of its operations. This is seldom articulated as a direct need from library patrons, and the Community Survey results were no exception. However, SOAR exercise notes and informal conversations with various stakeholder groups made it clear that practices that seek to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) enhance quality of life for library staff, patrons, and potential users. This is such a vital part of library services that the Committee felt the library would do best by being methodical and thorough rather than taking a scattershot approach. Consequently, DEI planning was given its own strategic priority at the top of the list of goals.

F. Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: Establish a plan and take actions to provide accessible, equitable, and inclusive services, materials, and programming to East Bridgewater and the surrounding communities.

Objective 1.1: Create a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) plan in collaboration with members of the community.

Objective 1.2: Evaluate current patron and personnel policies, and revise them to reflect and support the needs of our diverse community.

Objective 1.3: Establish partnerships with local organizations doing social justice work and education.

Objective 1.4: Develop passive and active programming which educate patrons on a diverse range of identities and topics.

Objective 1.5: Promote programming and materials in an accessible and equitable way.

Objective 1.6: Actively and intentionally include a diversity of perspectives and topics in the expansion of our collections.

Objective 1.7: Provide opportunities for staff and trustees to regularly and meaningfully engage with and be educated on DEI topics and issues.

Goal 2: Provide a knowledgeable, innovative, and friendly staff to offer the highest levels of library services to the community.

Objective 2.1: Offer library staff benefits and wages that meet industry and community standards for competitive compensation rates.

Objective 2.2: Ensure Personnel Policies are equitable and fair in keeping with local industry standards.

Objective 2.3: Undertake annual performance reviews of all staff and offer opportunities for staff input in library operations and services.

Objective 2.4: Encourage and enable staff to pursue professional development opportunities.

Objective 2.5: Provide a pleasant and functional work environment.

Goal 3: Curate a variety of materials, resources, services, and programming to meet the needs of all in the community.

Objective 3.1: Ensure easy access to a wide variety of quality materials for all ages and interests that will meet the needs of the East Bridgewater community.

Objective 3.2: Keep up with current trends to provide access to innovative library materials, resources, and services as they become available.

Objective 3.3: Strive to meet patron demand and reduce wait time for new and popular materials.

Objective 3.4: Provide access to a quantity and variety of digital materials that will keep pace with patron demand.

Objective 3.5: Regularly evaluate staff resources, knowledge, and skills to provide library services that meet community needs.

Objective 3.6: Partner with other libraries and organizations to bring entertaining and informative programs to East Bridgewater.

Objective 3.7: Bring programs and services to the places they are needed through community outreach opportunities.

Goal 4: Maintain a facility that provides a comfortable, welcoming, and functional environment for library patrons and staff and is capable of accommodating 21st-Century library services.

Objective 4.1: Offer comfortable seating and spaces that facilitate reading, studying, and activities for groups of varying sizes.

Objective 4.2: Provide optimal functionality and attractiveness of public and staff spaces.

Objective 4.3: Ensure adequate climate control and air quality throughout the building.

Objective 4.4: Support the technological needs of patrons, staff, and services today and anticipate those needs for tomorrow.

Objective 4.5: Protect the safety and security of patrons and staff through regular building and grounds maintenance, efficient lighting, and optimal sight lines.

Goal 5: Use all available means to make residents aware of the variety of collections, services, and programs offered by the East Bridgewater Public Library.

Objective 5.1: Continue to ensure the visibility of the library and its collections, programs, and services through efficient and creative uses of the library website, e-newsletters, social media, and local access media.

Objective 5.2: Improve the library website to meet current trends, promote ease of use by patrons, and enable staff maintenance and updates.

Objective 5.3: Advertise library services to passers-by on Highway 18 with ease, flexibility, and appeal.

Objective 5.4: Highlight library programs, collections and services through active participation in community events.

Objective 5.5: Cross-train staff on various social media platforms to provide back up as well as broad perspectives for the library's social media accounts.

Objective 5.6: Apply marketing and merchandising techniques to help patrons learn about library collections and programs.