



Image by Shannon Wright, Richmond artist and author

# RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY STRATEGIC PLAN 2022-2027

Approved: February 23, 2022

# Introduction:

Free access to information and literacy are vital to making the City a great place to live, work and raise a family. In Richmond, Virginia, the Richmond Public Library (RPL) is foundational in achieving this goal. RPL's nine branch system affords 226,000+ residents of our City with access to a wide range of professionally selected resources for literacy, education, lifelong learning and enjoyment. Our libraries offer both safe and trusted places to find information and ideas, and community spaces that offer discovery, entertainment, and personal growth. The Richmond Public Library system holds a trusted and special place in the hearts and minds of the children and adults we serve.



Strong libraries strengthen communities, and Richmond Public Library's mission to **Inform, Enrich, and Empower** encapsulates the Library's purpose as we celebrate and support individuals and their achievements, and serve as anchors within neighborhoods and communities. The five strategic goals below demonstrate our dedication to providing critical resources to a vibrant and engaged Richmond community. These goals, developed by the Richmond Public Library Board of Trustees and informed through community engagement, support this mission:

**Goal 1: Accessible Libraries:** Increase access to library locations and ensure availability of information and resources to residents.

**Goal 2: Children's Literacy:** Provide services and programs that build and cultivate literacy and a love of reading.

**Goal 3: Lifelong Learning:** Expand our role as the only educational institution that serves the entire community from birth to 100+.

**Goal 4: Organizational Strength:** Ensure the Library is positioned to anticipate and respond to the changing service needs of the community.

**Goal 5: Uniquely Richmond:** Civically engage and connect residents to information and resources to solve problems and discover Richmond's past, present and future.

First, this document will review our methodology and clearly articulate the need for each of our goals. Second, we will explain our approach to each goal, and how a successful plan will benefit Richmond's residents. We conclude with our Equity, Diversity and Inclusion statement in recognition of the importance of all Richmond's voices. This Strategic Plan outlines our path forward as we seek to do more to help everyone in our city prosper and thrive.

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***"If you ever want to go anywhere in life, pick up a book in the library, and it will take you there."***

***- East End Branch Library patron***

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## Methodology:

As we enter the third year of the COVID-19 pandemic, we recognize the ongoing daily impacts on our City, as mitigation strategies continue to impact nearly all areas of public life. In the Library, we have seen an increase in the use of e-cards and online resources. Social distancing continues, though there is no longer a need for the curbside services offered by the Library early in the pandemic. COVID-19 required us to rethink the traditional strategic planning process. Originally, we planned in-person discussion sessions with both RPL staff and the greater Richmond community. However, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, adjustments were made to gather input virtually through a series of internal and external surveys, data gathering, and research analysis.

In early 2021 the nationally-known architectural firm of Steinberg Hart and local award-winning firm KEi were selected by the City of Richmond to prepare a Main Branch Library Master Plan. This process involved a top to bottom review of the Main Branch Library. Services, scrutiny of materials and space, as well as benchmarks of library systems serving populations and communities of a size similar to Richmond were all assessed. The United States 2020 census provided helpful, detailed demographic data, including economic status and social characteristics on the communities Richmond Public Library serves.

Q1: What do you value most about your community?



Additionally, the Library distributed a community survey and reviewed responses from more than 800 respondents. This important input from the Richmond community, combined with detailed census data, expert benchmarking, and input from the Library Board of Trustees and RPL staff were integral in the development of this Strategic Plan.

This extensive process enhanced and confirmed our understanding that the Richmond Public Library system is both integral and crucial in the communities we serve. Each library location uniquely reflects the interests of surrounding neighborhoods, and provides authoritative and curated materials collections and programs open to library users of all ages and backgrounds throughout our vibrant City.

With research in hand, The RPL Board of Trustees created a committee led by Emily Altman, with contributions by William Yates, Christine Peterson and Garrett Sawyer. Library staff prepared an initial Strategic Plan draft drawing from a survey of the Strategic Plans prepared by benchmarked library systems in the United States. Working cooperatively, Library staff and the Trustees committee created and fine-tuned multiple iterations of the Strategic Plan, until the version you see before you was finalized.

At all times, the needs of the residents of Richmond were front and center of our thoughts. The result is a five-year plan that responds to critical needs across the City, captures opportunities to do more and addresses the future in a deliberate and thoughtful way. Our vision is of a Library that is better, more accessible, stronger — the lifelong resource that all Richmonders deserve.



# GOAL 1: Accessible Libraries

Libraries transform lives through the crucial, free services they provide. However, budget impacts have forced the Library to cut hours, reducing the number of programs, and limiting our ability to offer services to patrons. This means that accessing the Richmond Public Library presents challenges for those who work during the day and must rely on evening or Sunday hours to use the library. With libraries closing at 6pm during the week, 5pm Saturdays and closed Sundays, our community's ability to access our resources is severely curtailed. Working parents struggle to find time to take their children to a library after school and work hours. And though some Richmonders may be able to travel to neighboring county library systems (which offer relatively expanded evening and weekend hours) transportation and time are barriers for many City residents.

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***"People come here to use the computer, many don't have a computer at home. This meets a lot of needs."***

***- North Avenue Branch Library patron***

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We know from our community survey and research that Richmond residents rely on our libraries to serve as vital centers for connection, engagement, leisure and learning. However, they also must be open at a time that works for busy family schedules. When we invest in Richmond neighborhoods by having libraries that are open and accessible, our shared spaces and resources strengthen communities. RPL seeks to make our libraries more accessible to the Richmond community through the following strategic objectives:

- Expand library hours of operation across the entire library system
- Improve access to technology and the Internet by ensuring computers and equipment are state-of-the-art, maintained, high-speed networked and in sufficient numbers to meet patron needs, including during times of heavy demand
- Design and construct libraries to provide inviting and appropriate spaces, study rooms, meeting rooms, quiet and active areas to meet the current and future needs of Richmond residents
- Expand access to Library resources beyond the physical walls of our branch libraries using a mobile library to deliver books and programs remotely

More days of the week and increased public service hours will give our residents greater opportunity to utilize all of the resources and programs that inform, enrich and empower.



## GOAL 2: Children's Literacy

Reading changes lives. Evidence shows that young children exposed to books and reading do better academically and achieve more in adulthood. This holds true for all children but we note troubling achievement gaps in reading often affect children in low-income communities, creating a serious challenge to future success in school and life. Richmond has a high school graduation rate of 78%. In grades 3-8 only 35% of the Richmond Public School students were proficient in reading and only 10% were proficient in math for their grade level. Our aim is to help Richmond children succeed.



- Expand early literacy services and parent education program that build and cultivate literacy for preschool-age children and their caregivers. Nurture a love of reading and build critical life skills
- Identify opportunities for collaboration and connect library services to students and educators by supporting Richmond Public Schools, education focused partners, and non-public schools
- Offer a diverse and rich book collection that connects with the children who live in our neighborhoods

The Library will continue to be a community champion for children's literacy, with emphasis on our children living with poverty. Children's books and expanded programming can foster a love of reading and help children develop the skills they need as they start school. We know that our role in literacy development does not end once a child enters kindergarten. As they enter school, we can be a full partner to schools and parents in achieving academic goals, supporting and fostering literacy, and helping Richmond students build a better future.

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***"I think it's important for Richmond to have libraries, so kids can experience reading at an early age. They can interact with other kids and they can just get out of the house."***

***- Westover Hills Library patron***

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## GOAL 3: Lifelong Learning

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*“The library is a fascinating place. I could find pretty much everything my mind could not wrap my mind around. Find a book about it, and begin to understand just how the world works.”*

*- East End Branch Library patron*

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Lifelong learning is a key to prosperity, social inclusiveness and personal fulfillment. Throughout our lives, changes within work, personal, and community spheres force each of us to learn and adapt over time. In today’s digital world, libraries must address the needs of lifelong learners with both electronic and physical information resources in all of the different ways people learn.

- Increase physical and electronic book collections to meet the evolving needs and demands of Richmond’s diverse community
- Offer programs that promote engagement, reduce isolation, and build community and connections
- Support residents seeking employment or career changes in an evolving information economy

Life doesn’t happen in a straight line and education doesn’t stop with a degree. Richmond Public Library provides resources and programming to support adults through inevitable personal and professional changes and opportunities. From books about health, life skills, or travel, to resources for learning English as a second language or gaining new technology skills, the library responds to the needs of Richmond residents throughout their lifespan.



## GOAL 4: Organizational Strength

Our greatest asset is our Library staff, and without them a library would be just a building with books. Investment in developing staff knowledge, skills and abilities will enhance customer experience and improve our ability to provide information as accurately and efficiently as possible.

It is vital that Richmond Public Library focus on how we can do more for our patrons despite current staffing levels. Dedicated volunteers can be a significant enrichment to an organization that is not fully staffed or is in the midst of building capacity. With this in mind, RPL will build a robust volunteer program. An organized volunteer team offers engagement opportunities to Richmonders of all ages and builds a cohort of Library supporters. We envision a library system that is strong inside and outside.



- Increase professional development and training to enhance library staff members' ability to better serve our patrons
- Develop a volunteer program to provide opportunities for people of all ages to help the Library serve the community
- Strengthen partnerships with RPL Foundation, RPL Friends of the Library to fundraise and friend raise
- Ensure a strong workforce through inclusive recruitment and retention in hiring

Investing in our staff, enlisting volunteers to help us and deepening our bonds with our supporters will build library capacity to better serve our community.

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***"I really appreciate RPL and their efforts to continue to meet our educational needs and to be a bright spot in the community. I hope it continues."***

***- Belmont Branch Library patron***

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## GOAL 5: Uniquely Richmond

The Library is uniquely positioned within our communities as a place where citizens can come together for civic engagement, challenging conversations, and problem-solving. Our libraries provide venues for the ready exercise of free speech and assembly, civic and artistic expression.

In our City of Richmond, the library offers an environment where the exchange of information and ideas is free, safe and protected. The Library can facilitate deeper explorations of our City's many lives — past, present, and future — through intentional and responsible engagement with non-profits, community groups and partners.

- Provide a safe space for community members to come together and discuss issues that need to be resolved
- Expand Richmond history and Special Collections holdings in thoughtful collaboration with community partners
- Provide a unique opportunity for scholars, donors, students and the public to engage with Richmond history through increased programs and exhibitions on local history and culture

These strategic objectives, bolstered by our mission to Inform, Enrich, Empower, fosters an increased understanding of our past and supports our efforts to build a better future for all City residents.



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***“Expand your mind, help you begin to think outside the box.”***

***- East End Branch Library patron***

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# Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Statement:

Richmond Public Library is committed to advancing equity, diversity and inclusion. We recognize that awareness and transformation must occur on the individual, collective, and institutional levels, and RPL can facilitate this growth and learning within our own ranks and for our patrons.

The Library will advance equity, diversity, and inclusion in the communities we serve by:

- Recognizing and eliminating racial, social, and access barriers in library programs, services, policies and practices, staffing, salaries, and leadership structure when encountered
- Nurturing an environment supportive of diversity, inclusion, and respect, both in the Library system and in the communities we serve
- Serving as an unbiased convener and facilitating conversations and partnerships to address community challenges, and being forthright on tough issues that are important to the communities the Library serves



# In Appreciation...

Recognition for the success of the strategic planning process and the development of this Five Year Strategic Plan is shared with the following individuals:

## **RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

William Yates, *Chair*  
Christine Peterson, *Vice Chair*  
Emily Altman  
Barbara Burton  
Sheron Carter-Gunter  
Brent Graves  
Garrett Sawyer  
Janet Woody  
Gail Zwirner

## **Strategic Planning Committee**

Barbara Booth, Belmont Branch Library  
Lisa Crisman, West End Branch Library  
Cheryl Clarke, Superintendent of Facilities, RPL  
Clayton Dishon, Deputy Director, RPL  
Jennifer Deuell, Young Adult Services, RPL  
Ben Himmelfarb, Main Library  
Heather Montgomery, Broad Rock Branch Library  
Elizabeth Morris, Youth Services Coordinator, RPL  
Tori Nunnally, Westover Hills Branch Library  
Gianna Pack, CAP, Senior Executive Assistant  
Kerry Phillips, Ginter Park Branch Library  
Meg Raymond, Technical Services, RPL  
Susan Revere, RPL Foundation  
Dianne Wilmore, North Avenue Branch Library  
Adam Zimmerli, East End Branch Library

Friends of the Richmond Public Library  
Richmond Public Library Foundation  
Richmond Public Library Staff

## **Library Director**

Scott Firestine

