



Image by Shannon Wright, Richmond artist and author

RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY STRATEGIC PLAN PROGRESS REPORT 2022-2027

September 23, 2026

Approved: February 23, 2022

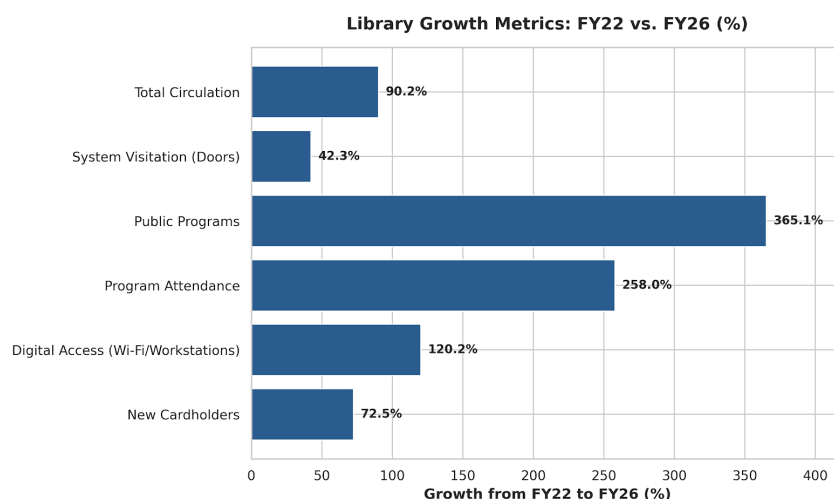
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

The Richmond Public Library (RPL) Strategic Plan (2022–2027) established a foundational roadmap designed to move the city's nine-branch library system from post-pandemic recovery to expansion and improvement. Built around the core mission to **Inform, Enrich, and Empower**, the plan outlines five strategic goals focused on expanding physical and digital access, advancing childhood literacy and learning, supporting lifelong learning, strengthening internal organization operations and end user service, and preserving Richmond's unique heritage.

Between Fiscal Year 2022 and Fiscal Year 2026, RPL transitioned from Covid-19 impacted, limited operating schedules to record-setting community engagement across all core service metrics:

- **Circulation Expansion:** Total material circulation nearly doubled, growing from **701,027** in FY22 to **1,333,618** in FY26—driven largely by a 347% surge in digital e-content usage.
- **Increased System Visitation:** Annual door counts rose from **428,474** in FY22 to **609,796** in FY26 (a 42% increase), led by a 125% increase in physical visits to the Main Library.
- **Programming Surge:** Total public programs expanded from **889** offerings in FY22 to **4,135** in FY26, driving total attendance from **12,525** to **44,838** patrons.
- **Digital Access:** Public Wi-Fi and workstation connections more than doubled, increasing from **107,507** total uses in FY22 to **236,755** in FY26.
- **Cardholder Growth:** Annual new patron card issuances increased by 72.5% (from **13,071** in FY22 to **22,545** in FY26), bolstered by a 152% rise in online e-card registrations.



GOAL 1: ACCESSIBLE LIBRARIES

2022 Baseline Challenge

Historically, City of Richmond budget impacts forced the Library to cut hours, reducing programs and limiting public access. During Covid-19 RPL libraries were forced to close at 6:00 PM during the week, 5:00 PM on Saturdays, and remaining closed on Sundays, working parents and daytime employees struggled to access library resources.

To restore access, RPL set key strategic objectives in the “Accessible Libraries” Goal:

- Expand operating hours systemwide.
- Improve access to technology and upgrade hardware, network speeds, and public technology.
- Design and construct modern spaces and meeting facilities for current and future community needs.
- Expand access to library services beyond physical walls using mobile outreach.

2026 Strategic Progress

- **Service Hours & Operations:** Restored evening service past 6:00 PM and Sunday operations across key locations, expanding total system capacity to **518 operational hours per week**.
- **System Visitation Growth:** Total annual branch visits grew from **428,474** (FY22) to **609,796** (FY26).
- **Main Library:** Visits surged from **81,680** (FY22) to **183,891** (FY26).
- **Belmont Branch:** Grew from **45,234** to **65,192** annual visits.
- **Westover Hills:** Increased from **35,013** (FY23) to **69,508** visits (FY26).
- **Technology Overhaul:** Public Wi-Fi connections grew from 48,300 (FY22) to 164,103 (FY26). Replaced public printers and fax machines systemwide, modernized public workstations, and updated specialized children's educational software. Reallocated laptop program resources toward high-speed branch computing.
- **Facility Action Planning:** Approved a systemwide Facilities Action Plan in Fall 2025 focusing on expansions and improvements for high-demand, oldest branch buildings (Belmont, Westover Hills, East End), and future site development South of the James (Districts 8 and 9) and lastly structural code updates at the Main Library. RPL secured support for this initiative of \$1,000,000 in FY26 and an additional \$1,000,000 in the FY27 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) funding to launch architectural designs, and address urgent facilities, fixtures and equipment needs.
- **Mobile Outreach:** Commissioned a 22-foot all-electric bookmobile equipped with Wi-Fi, borrowing collections, and mobile programming. This is on order and will arrive in late 2027.



GOAL 2: CHILDREN'S LITERACY

2022 Baseline Challenge

In 2022, significant achievement gaps affected children in low-income neighborhoods. In grades 3–8, only 35% of Richmond Public School (RPS) students were proficient in reading and 10% in math.

To champion youth success, RPL established core objectives:

- Expand early literacy services and parent education programs for preschool-age children. Nurture a love of reading and critical life skills.
- Identify and strengthen collaborations with Richmond Public Schools and local educational partners.
- Offer diverse book collections reflect and connect with children in our local neighborhood communities.

2026 Strategic Progress

- **Youth Program Expansion:** Total juvenile public programs offered systemwide increased from **486** (FY22) to **2,468** (FY26).
- **Youth Attendance Impact:** Systemwide juvenile program attendance expanded over fivefold, from **6,268** attendees (FY22) to **32,258** (FY26).
- **Main Library:** Juvenile attendance rose from **1,657** (FY22) to **7,500** (FY26).
- **Westover Hills:** Attendance grew from **1,953** (FY22) to **8,186** (FY26).
- **Belmont:** Attendance expanded from **23** (FY22) to **3,526** (FY26).
- **North Avenue:** Attendance grew from **269** (FY22) to **3,389** (FY26).
- **Early Literacy & School Integration:** Expanded early phonetic story times and caregiver workshops to build home reading habits before kindergarten. Streamlined library card access with RPS to connect student cards directly to school curricula and summer reading initiatives. Upgraded specialized early literacy learning stations across all branches.



GOAL 3: LIFELONG LEARNING

2022 Baseline Challenge

Personal and career transitions require continuous education and skill adaptation. In a digital economy, RPL aimed to support lifelong learners through three strategic objectives:

- Increase physical and electronic book collections to meet evolving community demands of Richmond's diverse community.
- Offer adult programs that promote engagement, reduce social isolation, and foster connection.
- Support residents seeking employment, career advancement, or technology skills.

2026 Strategic Progress

- **Circulation Expansion:** Total material borrowing grew by 90.2%, rising from **701,027** items (FY22) to **1,333,618** items (FY26).
- **E-Content Growth:** Digital circulation (e-books, audiobooks, streaming) increased from **148,386** checkouts (FY22) to **663,490** (FY26). Digital content now accounts for nearly half of all system borrowing.
- **Branch Circulation Highlights (FY26):**
 - **West End:** 139,869 checkouts.
 - **Belmont:** 115,699 checkouts.
 - **Westover Hills:** 113,914 checkouts.
 - **Main Library:** 112,271 checkouts.
 - **Ginter Park:** 68,261 checkouts.
- **Adult Programs & Workforce Support:** Adult program offerings grew from **319** (FY22) to **1,152** (FY26), increasing attendance from **5,263** to **9,523** patrons. Enhanced computer lab support, job application assistance, resume building, and ESL workshops across neighborhood branches.



GOAL 4: ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTH

2022 Baseline Challenge

Library staff represent the system's greatest asset. To maximize operational effectiveness, RPL established key objectives:

- Expand and increase professional development and training opportunities for staff.
- Develop and formalize a volunteer program to build operational capacity.
- Deepen philanthropic partnerships with the RPL Foundation and Friends of the Library.
- Ensure workforce strength through inclusive recruitment and retention practices.

2026 Strategic Progress

- **Programming Output:** Staff capacity improvements enabled the system to scale public programming output from **889** offerings (FY22) to **4,135** (FY26).
- **Technical Services Output:** Added **22,726** new physical and digital items to the catalog in FY26. Conducted systematic weeding (**20,367** items removed in FY26) to maintain relevant collections.
- **Patron Registration:** Annual new library card issuances increased from **13,071** (FY22) to **22,545** (FY26). Online e-card registrations rose to **11,348** accounts in FY26 (up from **4,499** in FY22).
- **Partner Alignment:** Deepened fundraising alignment with the RPL Foundation and Friends of the Library to support capital project planning, summer literacy programs, and mobile service assets.



GOAL 5: UNIQUELY RICHMOND

2022 Baseline Challenge

Libraries serve as unique community centers for free expression, civic discussion, and local reflection. RPL established objectives to:

- Provide safe spaces for community members to discuss civic topics.
- Expand Richmond history and Special Collections holdings in partnership with local groups.
- Offer public exhibitions and programs celebrating Richmond's heritage and diverse narratives.

2026 Strategic Progress

- **Public Assembly & Civic Space:** Activated meeting rooms across all nine branches to host civic groups, neighborhood forums, non-profit workshops, and public hearings.
- **Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion:** Applied Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) principles across collection curation, public programs, and branch service delivery.
- **Special Collections & Local History:** Expanded the Main Library's Special Collections through oral history projects, a local Memory Lab, and grant-funded public history initiatives documenting underrepresented narratives in Richmond's history. A grant from the Mellon Foundation, \$1 million over 5 years, was a transformative and amplifying input to accelerate our effort to tell the entire Richmond story.
- **Cultural Partnerships:** Partnered with local historical organizations, educational institutions, and neighborhood associations to host exhibitions and community history discussions.

