

Strategic Framework

2019 – 2022





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The public library is a vital contributor to the educational, economic, and social well being of the community it serves. It is a part of the solution to systemic problems many residents face: inequity, cultural dynamics, affordable housing, divisive politics—the list goes on and on. Globally, public libraries are experiencing a tremendous shift from transactional services to transformational experiences. As the City and industry continue to transform themselves, the Grand Rapids Public Library will transform as well. This strategic framework is in response to what we heard from over 500 city residents: we can't do it alone. We will work with civic leaders and community partners to come together to find innovative paths forward where all voices are heard and talent nurtured. This framework affirms our commitment to grow the value of the library as a trusted partner and civic asset to all who live in Grand Rapids. I look forward to working with other members of the Board of Library Commissioners, civic leaders, and library staff as we activate this strategic framework.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "William R. Baldridge". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "W" and "B".

William Baldridge,
President, Board of Library Commissioners

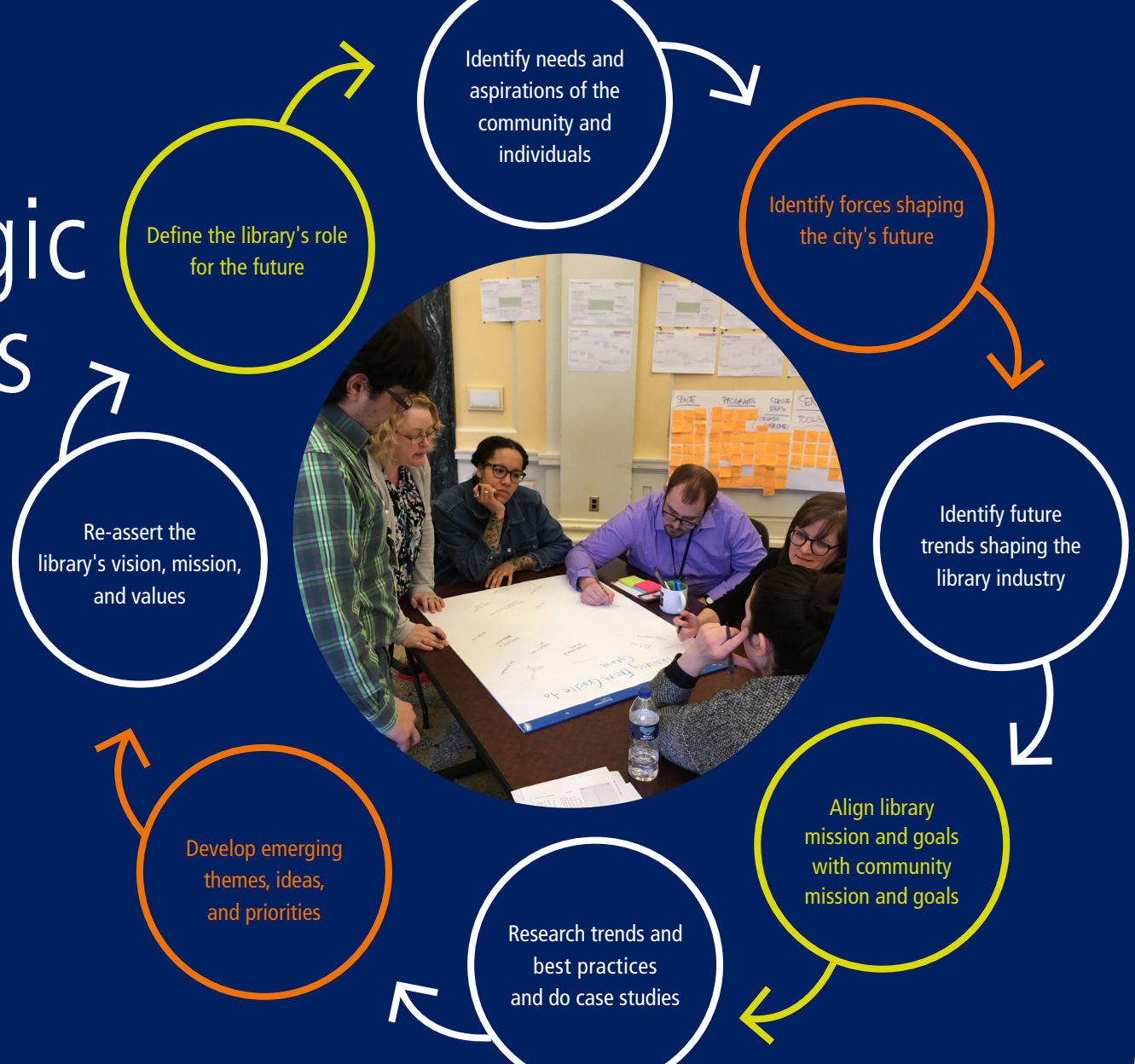
I am excited to share the Grand Rapids Public Library's new three year strategic framework. This patron-and community-driven plan was formed with input from the Board of Library Commissioners, staff, and community partners. These new strategic directions turn GRPL outward to better understand and respond to the needs of the people we serve. We will achieve this through seeking to understand the needs of our community, co-creating, and inspiring opportunity to connect for all the residents of Grand Rapids. This strategic framework lays the groundwork for growing new services and experiences that are hyperlocal, and have greater relevance and reach. We will start this process with a year of listening and learning to understand the community, what drives their curiosity, and what challenges them. We will focus on collaboration, innovation, and growth. This is a plan designed for our community and our library to create experiences that are built on shared values. Let's get started!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John McNaughton', with a stylized, flowing script.

John McNaughton,
Director



The Strategic Process





**A Library of
Listening**

**A Library of
Learning**

**A Library of
Impact**

For six months, the Grand Rapids Public Library worked with human-centered design firm Margaret Sullivan Studio to develop a three-year strategic framework that seeks to understand and respond to the systemic problems that face Grand Rapids. The plan shifts the library to be an outward facing organization that plays a larger role in the community. The move from a strategic plan to a strategic framework allows the library to be responsive to a rapidly changing city and to align with national trends in library service. In Year One, the library will engage the community to help understand and refine the library's role in the lives of the community. Year Two will use the data gathered in the first year to prototype changes and prioritize addressing community needs. Year Three will see the implementation of the changes. The framework was designed to be flexible and iterative so that the library can adapt to an ever-changing community.

Our Vision

The Grand Rapids Public Library is key to a dynamic, creative, livable city where people come together to learn and be heard.



Our Mission

Inspiring opportunity, connection, and innovation.

Our Values

Inclusion

We model respect and embrace difference. We are a welcoming place for all.

Access

We are flexible, transparent, and trusted. We provide equal access to information, programs, and services.

Collaboration

We seek partnerships and build strong teams. We co-create with our community.

Learning

We embrace life-long learning. We support literacy, curiosity, and cultural enrichment. We uphold everyone's right to privacy, to seek information, and to voice diverse points of view.

Innovation

We take risks, we fail forward, we seek feedback, we create, and we discover. We embrace change.

Excellence

We put people first. We provide exceptional experiences and hold ourselves to the highest standards. We are empathetic and responsive.

Sustainability

We make strategic decisions with intentionality for a strong present and future library.

Strategic Initiatives of the Grand Rapids Public Library



1

Looking Outward:
Understanding
Our Community



2

Creating Inspiring
Spaces and
Experiences



3

Transforming
Our Culture



4

Being Visible
and Valuable
to the
Community

Looking Outward

Understanding Our Community



We will:

- Identify opportunities to know our community better.
- Understand the infrastructure and systems within our community that affect the lives of those in Grand Rapids.
- Create a library responsive to the needs of Grand Rapids.

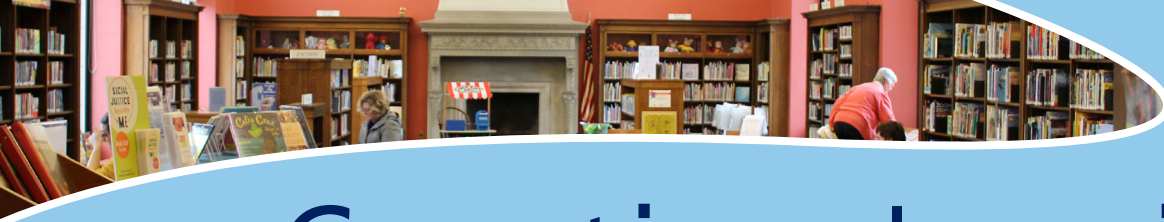


This will result in:

- Active and strong relationships with the City, the schools, the business community, and neighborhood agencies.
- New and deeper relationships with key partners, collaborators, and stakeholders.
- A more meaningful understanding of our patrons.

Success Indicators:

- GRPL has deepened relationships and is seen as a trusted partner, connector, collaborator, and community asset.
- GRPL has deeper institutional learning that informs programs and services.
- GRPL staff has confidence in active listening, using skills that they have practiced throughout the year.



Creating Inspiring Spaces and Experiences



We will:

- Examine how people use our spaces and experience library services.
- Evaluate how our spaces are aligned with our programs, our services, and our communities.
- Prototype, experiment, and engage patrons to make connections between user experience and our facilities.
- Learn about and apply best practices in service design.



This will result in:

- Staff skills to effectively assess how our facilities and programs align with future needs.
- Understanding how our physical environments shape patron experiences.
- Opportunities to encourage participation and feedback from patrons.

Success Indicators:

- The community uses our facilities in new and engaging ways.
- Responsive and improved patron experiences.
- Assess and design programs and services with informed feedback and strategy.



Transforming Our Culture

We will:

- Embed diversity, equity, and inclusion into the culture of the library.
- Create an environment of open communication and collaboration.
- Foster an internal culture of learning, growth, risk taking, and innovation.

This will result in:

- Updated policies and procedures using the lenses of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Staff working more collaboratively across departments and throughout the community.
- Engaged and empowered staff with new skills, outlooks, and professional experiences.

Success Indicators:

- Through understanding diversity, equity, and inclusion, staff have new ways of working and are able to recognize their greater impact.
- Library programs and services reflect a deeper awareness and empathy for all of the patrons we serve.
- Staff are proud of their contribution and exhibit confidence and competencies in understanding institutional values.



The background of the slide is a vibrant yellow. In the top left corner, there is a partial view of a classical building facade with stone columns and arches. In the top right corner, there is a decorative graphic featuring autumn leaves in shades of red, orange, and brown, along with a sign that reads "COLOR YOUR WORLD" and "Discover a lifetime". The main title is centered on the yellow background, with the words "Visible" and "Valuable" underlined.

Being Visible and Valuable to the Community

We will:

- Assess and evaluate our City's and community's perception of our credibility, value, and assets.
- Be an active participant in solving complex community problems.
- Strategically cultivate relationships which support friend-raising and funding opportunities.
- Build staff advocacy skills in development and fundraising.

This will result in:

- Increased awareness and visibility of the library as a part of the solution.
- Staff and Library Commissioners understand and see their potential in advocacy and fundraising.

Success Indicators:

- GRPL prioritizes future work around being more visible, credible, and valuable.
- Increased staff and Library Commissioner engagement in community groups.
- Enhanced staff and Library Commissioner awareness of funding opportunities.



Strategic Framework in Context

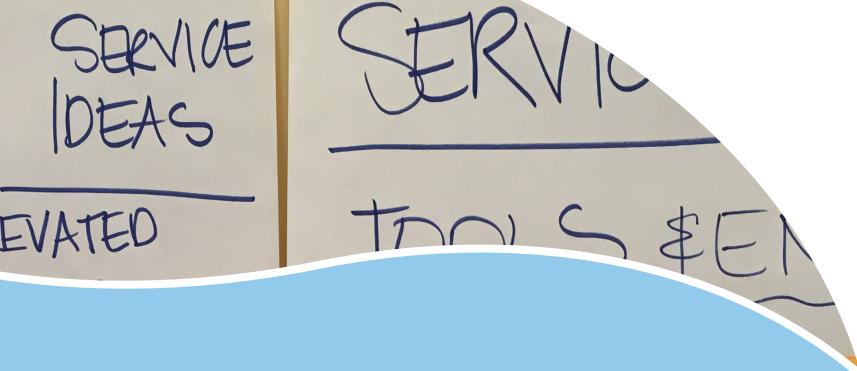
PROGRAMS

PROGRAMS

more
branch
programming

This isn't your momma's strategic plan. In the past, strategic plans were based on best practices and metrics. Our new strategic framework is informed by civic goals and citizen concerns. In-depth interviews, focus groups, and community meetings have revealed important ways that GRPL can strengthen our presence in the community and our role in creating social impact. When fully implemented, service directions will be designed for the goals, hopes, and interests of local residents, backed by data and stories that document the library's contributions. No longer will we measure success by comparing our organization to other communities or industry standards. Instead we will know the library's true impact when we authentically listen to the public, build meaningful relationships, and are viewed with trust and credibility. GRPL will evolve from an organization that provides tools for the community to one that makes social impact by being a partner on life journeys. We will shift from transactional to transformational.

This strategic framework was developed using community input and intended to align with the City of Grand Rapids' Strategic Plan. It is a vulnerable time in Grand Rapids. The city is experiencing economic and opportunity disparity that prevents equity and mobility for all residents. As with the city's plan, GRPL will assist with smart, equitable growth for all. We will be a part of the creation, retention and growth of local business. We will be essential to increasing residents' educational attainment and employment and wage growth. We will contribute to make Grand Rapids a destination city.



But first, we need to develop the library's infrastructure and skills sets before adding more projects on our plate. The first year of the strategic framework will be spent learning about the communities we serve and training staff. The second year will be spent co-creating and prototyping new services and new ways of doing things. The third year of the framework we will refine and implement our new ideas. We want to get it right. We want to understand what the community wants and needs so that we can best serve them. This takes time. Time to innovate and recreate. Time to listen and learn. Time to seek feedback and re-evaluate. Trust us, it is time well spent.

Additional Reading

Building Equitable Cities: How to Drive Economic Mobility and Regional Growth

City of Grand Rapids Strategic Plan

Evaluating Complex Social Initiatives, Stanford Social Innovation Review

Museums, Libraries, and 21st Century Skills, Institute of Museum and Library Services

New Americans in Kent County: A Snapshot of the Demographic and Economic Contributions of Immigrants in the County

Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life, Eric Klinenberg

Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries, The Aspen Institute

Community Contributors

One-on-One Stakeholders

Margaret Sullivan Studio engaged community leaders identified by the Executive Team in one-hour long conversations to learn about possible alignments with the library's strategic mission. Participants provided key insights regarding the city's strengths, needs, challenges, and future goals, and how the library can be a better community partner.

Rick Baker, President and CEO of the
Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce

Jesse Bernal, Ph.D., Vice President
for Inclusion and Equity at Grand Valley
State University

Rosalynn Bliss, Mayor of the City of
Grand Rapids

Eric DeLong, Deputy City Manager

Ken Fawcett, MD, Vice President of
Healthier Communities for Spectrum Health

Reyna Garcia, Grassroots Activist with
the Latinx community of Grand Rapids

Cesar Gonzalez, Board Chair with the
Hispanic Center of Western Michigan

Janelle Hill, Director of Community
Engagement & Advancement at Arbor Circle

Andrew Johnson, CEO of The Rapid

Rich Jones, Advocacy Project Manager for
Disability Advocates of Kent County

Tim Kelly, AICP, President and CEO of
Downtown Grand Rapids Inc.

Angie Morales, Director of La Mejor
Grand Rapids

Eleanor Moreno, Co-Founder of CO2,
Food and Community Specialist for The Other
Way Ministries, Project Manager for Kids' Food
Basket, Chair of the Roosevelt Park Neighborhood
Partner Committee

Tim Mroz, Vice President of Strategic
Initiatives for The Right Place

Kathryn Mullins, Ed.D., Vice President
of College Advancement and Executive Director for
the Grand Rapids Community College Foundation

Carol Paine-McGovern, Director of
Kent School Services Network

Julie Ridenour, President of the
Steelcase Foundation

Cesi Rivas-Cardenas, Community
Health Worker for Strong Beginnings at
Cherry Health, member of the Roosevelt Park
Neighborhood Partners Committee

Steffanie Rosalez, Director of the
Cook Arts Center for the Grandville Avenue
Arts & Humanities

Suzanne Schulz, Managing Director of
Design, Development and Community Engagement
for the City of Grand Rapids

Diana Sieger, President of Grand Rapids
Community Foundation

LaKiya Thompson-Jenkins,
Operations Director of LINC UP

Michelle Van Dyke, President and CEO
of Heart of West Michigan United Way

Mark Washington, City Manager of
the City of Grand Rapids

Community Contributors

Community Partners

GRPL hosted four forums for area partners, including mission-aligned non-profits and community organizations, political leaders, and community activists. Participants engaged in meaningful dialogue enabling us to gain insight, perspectives, and a deeper understanding of the variety of needs, challenges, and aspirations of Grand Rapids.

Additionally, GRPL conducted numerous meetings and engagement opportunities to incorporate feedback from community members. This included two town hall-style meetings and conversations, 30 individual patron interviews conducted by staff, and over 500 online surveys responses. All materials for the meetings and surveys were offered in English and Spanish.

Tommy Allen, Publisher of Rapid Growth Media

Sally Andreatta, Executive Director of Grand Rapids Student Advancement Foundation

Kate Avery, Grand Rapids Public Library Foundation Board Trustee

Tony Baker, Ph.D., Executive Director for Community Engagement at Ferris State University and Trustee of Grand Rapids Public Schools

Salina Bishop, Director of Communications & Marketing at the Grand Rapids Student Advancement Foundation

Fran Dalton, South East Neighborhood Organizer for the Garfield Park Neighborhoods Association

Jeremy DeRoo, Executive Director of LINC Up

Anne Ellermets, Director of Contract Services and Program Development at the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan

Wendy Falb, Ph.D., Executive Director of the Literacy Center of West Michigan

Sue Garza, Director of the Cook Library Center at the Grandville Avenue Arts & Humanities

Linda Gellasch, Executive Director of the Grand Rapids Community Media Center

Kelli Grimm, Resource Office Supervisor of Dégagé Ministries

Anne Hackathorn, Contracting & Funding Specialist of the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan

Lynn Heemstra, Executive Director of Our Community's Children

John Helmholdt, Executive Director of Communications & External Affairs at Grand Rapids Public Schools

Araceli Hurtado, Accountant at the Hispanic Center of Western Michigan

Shelley Irwin, Host and Producer of The WGVU Morning Show

Roberto Jara, CEO of the Grandville Avenue Arts & Humanities

Jes Kramer, Accounting and Office Administrator at the Grandville Avenue Arts & Humanities

Megan Kruis, Executive Director of the Creston Neighborhood Association

Israel Ledesma, Neighborhood Resident Development Manager at Habitat for Humanity of Kent County

Senita Lenear, Third Ward Commissioner for the City of Grand Rapids

David Marquardt, Director of Parks and Recreation for the City of Grand Rapids

Eva Martinez, Community Engagement Manager of the Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative

Verah Narh-Kamara, Marketing and Communication Coordinator of the Early Learning Neighborhood Collaborative

Dan Poortenga, Chair of the Grand Rapids Public Library Foundation Board of Trustees

Amy Snow-Buckner, Acting Managing Director of Communications for the City of Grand Rapids

Rebecca Smith-Hoffman, Board Liaison of the Grand Rapids Historical Commission

Jesus Solis, Executive Director for the Garfield Park Neighborhoods Association

Adnoris Torres, Executive Director of the Hispanic Center of Western Michigan

LaTarro Traylor, JD, Esq., Former Community Relations Coordinator for Downtown Grand Rapids Inc.

Shayla Willis, Coordinator T2C Studio (To College, Through College)

Betty Zylstra, Retired Director at The Salvation Army Booth Family Services of Kent County

Library Contributors

Board of Library Commissioners

The Grand Rapids Public Library is governed by a publicly elected Board of Library Commissioners. Throughout the planning process, the Commissioners worked with the Executive Team to lead and develop the implementation plan. The Commissioners were actively involved in community meetings and community partner events.

William Baldridge, President

Kent Sparks, Vice President

Rachel S. Anderson

James Botts

Sophia Brewer

M. Jade VanderVelde

Caralee Witteveen-Lane

Library Contributors

Executive Team

The Executive Team is a group of nine staff members who led the strategic process with collaborative strategic thinking; engaged with the Board of Library Commissioners to establish the mission, vision, and priorities; were participants in the Staff Working Group to build the capacity necessary for the implementation of the strategic direction; and engaged in community conversations to respond to critical community needs and opportunities. The team collaborated to develop the strategic initiatives and is responsible for leading the organization into its preferred future.

Robert Adcock, Business Manager

Amy Cochran, Public Services Coordinator

Marla Ehlers, Assistant Library Director

Jason Hendrix, Human Resources Manager

Kristen Krueger-Corrado, Marketing & Communications Manager

John McNaughton, Library Director

Rebecca Near, Collection Services & Customer Service Coordinator

William Ott, Information Systems Manager

Briana Trudell, Executive Administrative Assistant

Library Contributors

Staff Working Group

A team of 30 members, consisting of library staff from across the organization, including the Executive Team, participated in workshops and organizational capacity-building led by Margaret Sullivan Studio. The Staff Working Group assessed community and staff member input, to assist in developing strategic priorities, and to learn service design thinking to better understand and respond to customer and community needs. The Staff Working Group was selected from across the organization. They represent a variety of different locations, job titles, and years of experience to achieve a diversity of perspectives.

Robert Adcock

Julie Beukema

Zandra Blake

John Bosma

Shayla Boyce

Jessica Anne Bratt

Alex Bultman

Amy Cochran

Marla Ehlers

Brian Hall

Vincent Harriger

Jason Hendrix

Mark Jemerson

Kelly Karr

Kristen Krueger-Corrado

Doug Kyle

John McNaughton

Rebecca Near

William Ott

Osvaldo Perez Rios

Madison Perian

Meghan Pitsch

Jean Sanders

Natasha Sanders

Jeanessa Smith

Julie Tabberer

Briana Trudell

Jen Vander Heide

Misha VanVaerenbergh

Elizabeth Zandstra



