

## INTRODUCTION

Since its founding, the Boston Public Library has been charged with helping patrons find the tools they need to become informed, educated, and engaged members of society. Today's BPL leverages our collections, services, spaces, programs and staff to ensure that legacy continues.

Today, "Free to All" takes on special significance as a charge to help remove barriers to opportunity such as: systemic racism, economic injustice, homophobia, transphobia, intolerance and ignorance.

Today's social and political climate means that many of the people we serve face additional economic uncertainty, workforce challenges and disenfranchisement. A global pandemic has presented us new challenges for our health and for the economy, and we also now welcome a strong, new societal appetite for engaging with longstanding systemic racism and racial injustice.

In the face of ever-widening gaps in equity, our patrons trust us to help them bridge those gaps with innovative thinking and bold action. The BPL has become a front-line institution in addressing the needs of all those who need assistance navigating the complexities of life, providing advice and connections to health, housing, literacy and other areas.

This work requires a strong, stable institution to make this vision a reality. To best serve our patrons and staff, the Boston Public Library must have a plan in place to further strengthen the institution, its culture, and its offerings; to clarify our mission, priorities, and initiatives. This plan will allow the library to fully and successfully serve all patrons -- regardless of age, identity, ability, physical need, economic status, or how they connect to the library.

This 'strategic roadmap' outlines the Library's proposed areas of focus for 2021 - 2025, and provides a bridge from the previous 'Compass' Strategic Plan to a future strategic planning exercise with deep and robust stakeholder engagement. As a living document, we fully expect that it will evolve to include and prioritize new developments, while recognizing that some of the work outlined here will live beyond this timeframe.

Key Supporting Strategic Documents:

- BPL Technology Plan
- BPL Racial Equity Statement & Action Plan
- BPL Capital Plan and Implementation Timeline

## How we will do this

Our goal in the next five years and beyond will be to **positively and concretely impact our patrons' lives by delivering the highest levels of service across all our offerings.**

We will uphold their trust in us by giving them the **information, knowledge, confidence and power** to improve their lives. We will help **mitigate systemic barriers** that could keep them from their goals; and we will **connect them** to their community, civic resources, and to full participation in a democratic society.

We will do this work **with** our communities; and not simply **for** them.

To support this goal, we have further outlined and updated our seven key priorities. To develop this set of priorities, we have focused on uncovering those areas most in need of attention and those most likely to have the most significant impact on the BPL's ability to serve its patrons well.

## From 2021 to 2025, the Boston Public Library will focus on the following seven priorities:

### Becoming an anti-racist organization

We will do everything in our power to become an organization that recognizes our challenges and fulfills our obligations to staff and patrons alike with respect to diversity, equity, and inclusion. We commit to following all actions outlined in the BPL Statement on Racial Equity, and building a staff culture for all based on respect and professional development.

### Delivering programs and services that build and maintain equity

We will continue providing opportunities, programs, and services for all patrons, while growing our special focus on the challenges and inequities faced by people of color, immigrants, and other underserved or disenfranchised communities.

We will specifically focus on the areas of workforce preparedness and development, civic engagement, and public health. We will continue to foster the love of reading in children from birth to 18; and to engage youth in education, culture, civics, STEAM, and social and emotional learning.

## **Building and maintaining our collections**

We will maintain, build, and make accessible collections that are diverse, inclusive and geared to understand and close equity gaps that anticipate users' interests and needs, and will practice responsible stewardship of all our collections.

## **Expanding our impact**

We will raise awareness on the local, regional and national level of our value as a preeminent urban public library and research institution. Through promoting our collections, programs, and services, and telling the story of their impact, we will also support efforts to increase private funding – funding that secures and expands our ability to play a role in patrons' lives.

## **Providing inspiring spaces to all**

We will provide welcoming spaces for patrons and staff that are safe, clean, and sustainable, while incorporating the latest and most appropriate technologies and strategies to do so.

## **Creating connections through technology**

We will develop and implement an innovative technology plan that will support our programs and services, enable the Library's operations to run seamlessly, and help eliminate the digital equity gap. We will deliver a range of accessible online offerings and digital collections, balancing preservation of our collections with increased accessibility and user engagement.

## **Expecting the unexpected**

We will expect -- and plan for -- the unexpected, so that our library can continue to operate with minimal disruptions to patrons, even when we face operational or communications challenges.

## NEXT STEPS – 2021–2025

The following outlines four phases of activity that the Library will undertake to begin to reach these goals. In a world where our operations have fundamentally shifted for an unspecified timeline, we must continue to be nimble in our operations, while keeping issues of equity, diversity, and injustice clearly in our sights.

### Phase I: January 2021 – June 2021 (may continue into second half of year)

#### Prioritizing our programs and services

Use the limitations of life during a pandemic to rethink public access to technology. Continue to support the digital literacy needs of targeted communities through Tech Goes Home, laptop/hotspot lending, and other services.

#### Continuing to improve our operations

Complete development of a longer-range technology plan to help meet the goals of all library departments, with special attention to digital and repository services.

Define and articulate goals and targets for our strategic partnership program and key City of Boston departments to strengthen programs and services in our key priority areas and guide our relationship with affiliates and partners-in-residence.

Roll out complete package of brand standards and new templates

Develop communications strategy aligned with this 5-year plan, addressing skills and capacity gaps.

#### Stewarding our collections

Improve the security of our collections, especially in preparation for the return of Special Collections by developing and implementing a Collections security policy and procedures

Begin to execute on the \$2.1 million donation to clean, catalog, and preserve a significant portion of the Founding Research Collection. Launch Research Collection Storage Study to evaluate the space needs of the research collection.

Complete collections work in branches undergoing capital improvements.

Continue implementation, evaluation and iteration of collections ordering plan for circulating collections.

Launch committee to develop digital preservation plan.

## Equity, diversity, and inclusion

Finalize a cohort/working group to work with our partners, YWBoston, to develop an action plan over the next year, focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion

Prepare for a committee to address diversity, equity, and inclusion principles in collection work

Activate and Report on all actions called for in the Racial Equity Statement and action plan, in concert with YW Boston process and timeline.

Analyze our recruitment and hiring practices to ensure more equitable recruiting and hiring; review department and team level demographics to understand where there are challenges of diversity and representation.

## COVID Recovery

Review existing and future reopening plans with an equity lens to ensure upcoming waves of services focus on those who need us most and who may not yet be well connected to us.

Develop new and efficient ways to determinedly return services to the public, keeping health and safety protocols at the forefront.

Continue to balance virtual and physical services to best serve the needs of our patrons both in Boston and across the State and beyond.

Focus efforts across the board on vulnerable populations most struggling with life during the pandemic and recovery, and those to whom we are least connected.

## Phase II: Jun 2021 – Dec 2021

### Prioritizing our programs and services

Prioritize our programming and promotion of those programs that focus on creating an equitable society. Priorities will include youth engagement, economic and psychological recovery, health and human services, civic engagement, and media literacy.

Define a plan for youth engagement work, including expanding the Homework Assistance Program, and developing school support programs to improve children's scholastic success in a virtual world.

Develop a neighborhood outreach strategy that blends branch and system-wide work and aligns with the priorities in this document.

Expand the client-based service model piloted by Community Learning

Expand programs and services for workforce development, Health and Human Services, and Youth Engagement

Explore and begin developing a multi-faceted, multi-year, strategic partnership with selected organizations who share our strategic goals and values to create and offer a slate of innovative and collaborative programs and services.

### Continuing to improve our operations

Improve and simplify the contracting process, to include a broader outreach strategy to potential partners.

Develop a data analytics program within the BPL organization in order to better understand and communicate impact and outcomes in the communities we serve.

Adopt new room booking software to provide more efficient staff requests, inventory lists, staffing schedules, and financial projections.

Relaunch Special Events business

Execute strategic communications plan

Develop communications strategy

## Stewarding our collections

Complete collections work for branches currently undergoing capital projects.

Prepare to re-open Rare Books, including Aeon implementation, web site information, and layout of collections

Continue work of defining goals and principles to guide our collections strategy in order to more formally incorporate our diversity, equity and inclusion values.

Issue RFP's and commence work on Founding Research Collection project

Expand access to regional newspaper collections through web development, grants, and new digitization opportunities

Complete Research Collection storage study and use findings to determine next steps for storage needs.

Continue development and implementation off collections security procedures

Develop digital preservation plan and identify short term measures to address collections most in need.

## Equity, diversity, and inclusion

Review our protocols for engaging with first responders and public safety organizations to ensure appropriate levels of response based on the needs of the patron in difficulty. Responses must include opportunities for de-escalation and referral and must be appropriately balanced with the safety and security of staff, patrons, and library property.

Identify and execute on opportunities to become an institutional member of caucuses or affinity groups within professional library organizations such as the American Library Association.

## COVID Recovery

Continue to balance virtual and physical services to support patrons as we enter the recovery phase of COVID.

## Phase III: Jan 2022 – Dec 2023

### Prioritizing our programs and services

Expand programs and services that support patrons who need assistance in the areas of workforce development, and the health and human service needs of our vulnerable communities, both virtually and in person where possible.

Launch a social worker/peer navigator program to better serve communities at risk.

Expand early literacy programs through the Future Readers Club, including books for newborns, and explore new, innovative ways of promoting the importance of early literacy.

Work with the BPL Fund to further expand services to support workforce development and economic recovery by increasing outreach services, partnership opportunities, and career placement services.

Focus on adding additional out-of-school time programs, with a focus on non-users and underserved populations

Explore stronger collaborations with the Boston Public Schools to better provide scholastic support and racial equity.

### Continuing to improve our operations

Develop metrics to better determine the effectiveness of the Library's programs and services.

Finalize a minimum technology standards training program to provide maximum effectiveness of all staff.

Develop new Special Events opportunities; responding to current gathering trends and regulations in order to resume revenue stream.

Develop and implement a new emergency response plan



### Stewarding our collections

Founding Research Collection project - Complete phase 1

Complete collections work for branches w capital projects

Reopen Rare Books: Collection move, space set up, open service

Continue to evaluate and prepare collections in the McKim building for upcoming renovation work

Implement digital preservation plan.

### Equity, diversity, and inclusion

Invest in initiatives that develop and improve employee culture, improve diversity in hiring, and aim to achieve equity in professional development.

Increase and sustain outreach and community engagement work focused on communities in the greatest need, particularly Black communities and communities of color, schools, the incarcerated, the vulnerable, and youth of the city of Boston.

Implement the action plan developed by the DEI cohort guided by YWBoston

Determine next steps based on that action plan to advance this goal

### COVID Recovery

Complete the second phase of a programs and service focus around recovery and assess the need to additional work

## **Phase IV: Jan 24 – Dec 25**

### Prioritizing our programs and services

Revamp and implement a system-wide Outreach plan

Finalize planning on an Education Team to provide direct teaching opportunities for teachers and students

### Continuing to improve our operations

Improve the budgeting process for Trustee revenue

### Stewarding our collections

Founding Research Collection project - Phase 2

Complete collections work for branches w capital projects

### Equity, diversity, and inclusion

To be determined based on outcomes of long-term YWBoston engagement

### COVID Recovery

To be determined, based on current need

## **LONG TERM**

Begin Development of a BPL climate resilience program

Continue to implement technology plan

Complete Facilities Department restructuring

## CLOSING

Each year, millions of people use and depend on the BPL, both in person and online. They expect us to be steady, open, innovative, and vibrant. They want to be welcomed, inspired, and energized. They need to feel safe, included, and powerful. And they both challenge us and trust us to help guide them in achieving these goals.

These are high expectations. But we are confident that the seven priorities outlined in this document and the projects and initiatives that are informed by them are those will have the greatest impact on meeting – and exceeding -- our patrons’ needs and expectations.

Doing so will require the collective energy of every member of this organization, its affiliates, and its partners. The remarkable staff of the broader BPL is uniquely capable and committed to our mission. Together, we will harness our mission of “Free to All” to meet the challenges of today and to be ready for the challenges of tomorrow.