

Warwick Public Library

Strategic Plan 2021-2024

Mission

Our mission is to improve the quality of life in Warwick through learning, personal discovery, and the free flow of information and ideas.

Values

At Warwick Public Library, we believe that all members of our community deserve free and open access to information and educational resources. We strive to provide high-quality service to all members of the community, with a focus on equity and inclusion. We believe that literacy is essential for the well-being of every community and that informed residents contribute to a thriving community.

Background

In early 2020, we began the process of creating a traditional five-year strategic plan. A consulting firm conducted focus groups with staff and the library board, and we had plans to conduct focus groups in the community. However, by mid-March 2020, the planning process was put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Once it was determined that we would not be able to continue the planning process, the consulting firm put together a one-year plan. This plan focused on the information gathered before the pandemic, and on the efforts the library was making to move toward safely reopening and providing essential services for the community.

In the summer of 2020, then-Library Director Christopher LaRoux decided to retire. He assisted the library board in conducting a search for a new director. In October 2020, Jana Stevenson was named Library Director by the Library Board of Trustees.

Ms. Stevenson and the Library Board decided to create a three-year strategic plan with a focus on reorganizing library staff and workflows, and assisting the community in recovery from the pandemic. The decision not to conduct a community assessment was not made lightly. In consideration of the safety of all that would be involved, library administration concluded that

taking the next three years to focus on the internal structure of the library would be a good use of our time. Library staff will continue provide programming and to assist the community in recovery, while building strong community relationships that will set us up for a proper community assessment with community stakeholders, governing officials, and residents.

The Plan

This plan consists of four broad goals. Each goal has a list of priorities that will guide staff and library administration through the next three years. The plan focuses on staff development. The library will simultaneously work toward enrichment and educational success, and community engagement. Administration will also focus heavily on addressing issues in the four library buildings.

Staff Development

Many things have changed in the past year. Since the lockdown, the library has struggled to return to regular operating hours at all of the locations. The explanation for this is not entirely pandemic-related. In July 2020, the City Administration eliminated four positions from the library budget. Due to the bumping process established by the employee union, four employees were laid off and two were demoted from their original positions. In addition to the adjustment to having less staff, this had a very negative impact on morale.

In May 2021, the new City Administration and City Council passed a budget that will reinstate three of the four eliminated positions. Even with this recall, the library continues to operate with 12 vacancies.

As the pandemic moves into a phase of vaccination and reopening, the library continues to struggle to bring visitations and physical circulation back to pre-pandemic levels. However, digital usage continues to climb to record breaking levels. Libraries are seeing a change in usage patterns as a consequence of the pandemic. The time is right for a change in the way work is organized in our library so that we can go out into the community and engage with residents where they are.

In addition to facing a pandemic, the nation has begun to address inequalities that negatively affect a significant portion of the population. Libraries across the nation are taking a frontline position as the neutral place where communities can have honest and difficult conversations about race, sexual orientation, mental health, and addiction issues, to name a few. The Office of Library and Information Services (OLIS) provides valuable training such as *How to Talk About Race*, and *Project Ready*.

Library programs will have a stronger focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion. In preparation for that, staff development will focus on implicit bias training, facilitation techniques to empower staff to act as allies for marginalized communities, and the history of systemic racism in the community and the nation as a whole. The library is a safe space for everyone in the community, and it is the staff's responsibility to encourage a sense of belonging for all.

Goal: Update the organization of staff to fit the needs of a modern public library. Librarians and support staff will work together, dividing tasks according to proficiency and education level. These changes will improve the communication and collaboration between departments and administration.

Rationale: Job descriptions are antiquated and often do not address the work librarians and support staff do on a daily basis. Librarians have limited time for professional level work due to a lack of adequate support staff in each department. Support staff often feel limited by their job descriptions. Many express the desire to learn about the profession, but are not able to work closely with librarians. Over the next three years, library staff will work towards assessing job descriptions, tasks, and responsibilities; aiming for efficiency and modernizing the way we provide services to the public.

Potential Strategies:

- Focus on better communication:
 - Utilize Google Workspace to create more open communication and share-points for all staff.
 - Conduct quarterly meetings with Administration and staff to allow for better communication.
 - Encourage collaboration between departments.

- Staffing organization assessment:
 - Assess public service needs at each service point. Staff service points based on typical patron needs.
 - Explore other public libraries' job categories and task distribution.
 - Modernize the roles of librarians and support staff at WPL to fit the daily needs of the library.
 - Create a list of core competencies for each position.
 - Create a formal goal setting and assessment system.
 - Work with Rhode Island Library Association and the Office of Library and Information Services to provide more training for support staff.
 - Schedule time for professional development for all staff levels.
 - Provide time and funding for all staff to have the opportunity to attend conferences and trainings.

Enrichment and Educational Success

WPL has a statewide reputation for providing excellent programs for the community. From computer classes to family movie nights, the library has always worked to provide enriching programming with the goal of supporting participants to live their best lives.

Now that in-person programming can resume, staff will continue to develop quality programs that will focus on economic, emotional, and social recovery from the pandemic. Programs will focus on bringing the community together and rebuilding social networks to combat the feelings of isolation created during the pandemic.

The Children's Department will work with the Warwick School Department to build social and emotional programming into our repertoire. There will be a strong focus on early literacy and improving literacy skills for children who have fallen behind in the pandemic.

We will meet the community where they are, by planning more programs and events outside of the library. We will play a more active role in the community by participating in local events, organizing outreach programs, and visiting schools and nursing homes.

As staff development continues, we will begin to explore ways to provide space for difficult conversations about race and marginalized groups. We will provide programs on diverse cultures and ensure that our collection is inclusive and supportive of the community. Youth programs will introduce diverse religions, nationalities, and beliefs in order to build cultural competence. Teen programs will provide bystander intervention training, online harassment defense, and ally training. In summary, the library will be more vocal in our support of marginalized communities and we will be an ally for those who experience implicit and explicit discrimination.

Goal: The library will strive to show that we are a trusted source for information and continuing education. The library will shine as a safe place for the community to gather and support each other.

Rationale: We believe that literacy of a wide variety of topics is essential for the well-being of every member of the community and that a well-informed community is a vibrant community.

Potential Strategies:

- Maintain early childhood literacy as a priority.
- Work with the School Department to create social and emotional development programs for children.

- Continue to develop quality programs that will focus on economic, emotional, and social recovery from the pandemic. Provide a place for the community to come together and heal together.
- Explore options for providing adult literacy classes, including ESL, media literacy, and citizenship classes.
- Work with local and statewide workforce development programs to bring their expertise to the library.
- Provide computer classes and increase access to *Tech Help* one-on-one sessions to the branches.
- Host educational seminars and learning series' on topics such as civics, voter rights, equity and inclusion, climate change, and other important social topics.
- Make the library a place where difficult conversations about race and equity can be held.
- Create a year-long calendar of social awareness campaigns such as mental health awareness and Pride Month. Support these campaigns with library programs and information stations.
- Provide programs that will promote socializing and community enrichment.
- Develop programming and training around the Warwick Radio Online.
- Review library policies to be sure they reflect our efforts to promote equity and inclusion, climate action, and social justice.

Community Engagement

The objective with this goal is to establish relationships with businesses, agencies, and government representatives in the community. We will work toward changing the image of a library from a warehouse of books to the first place someone thinks of as a source of trusted information and connection to the community. The library will support these agencies and the community in the process of recovering from the economic impact of the pandemic. We will create a database of agencies with contact info and a basic description of their mission. This database can be used to grow connections and as a resource when librarians are reaching out to the community.

Advocacy for the library is an important part of being a librarian. Training on marketing, self-promotion, and advocacy will be a focus for library staff. Staff will be more active in library associations, government policy creation, and promoting the library to the general population. We will work to remind public officials of our reputation as essential service in Rhode Island.

Goal: Through an increase in outreach programs and participation in community events, the library will build a network of partnerships with local agencies, businesses, and citizens. We will create library advocates by supporting the needs of the community.

Rationale: By building strong relationships with the community, the library will place itself in the center of the recovery from the economic impact of the pandemic. Partnerships with local agencies and city departments will bring the library to the forefront of the community and exemplify the library as being more than just books.

Potential Strategies:

- Create a database of community agencies with contact details and staff who have a relationship with that agency.
- Establish and grow relationships with local schools, after-school care, and day care centers.
- Create a public use list of agencies and services provided in Warwick.
- Investigate the vision prominent leaders have for the community and identify ways the library can fit into that vision.
- Build citizen involvement groups who can provide insight about the community.
- Attend local community events and promote library services.
- Revamp the Friends of the Library.
- Study the City of Warwick's Comprehensive plan to find ways the Library can help accomplish some of the goals.
- Conduct a marketing and public relations assessment and develop possible strategies to raise the awareness of the library in the city and the state.
- Review policies to be sure they reflect the library's values.

Infrastructure and Capital Improvements

The library has four buildings to maintain. Two of the branches are not accessible for patrons who have difficulty walking and therefore are not compliant with current ADA regulations. The branches are also in need of structural repairs.

The Central Library has several capital improvements that will need to be addressed over the next 10 years. We will work closely with the city to fund these improvements. Many restaurants moved services outside as a way to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The library has a large garden that can be used for outside meeting space, workspaces, and programs.

Goal: Provide modern, accessible, and attractive spaces for library users.

Rationale: Maintaining buildings and the grounds is essential to providing adequate services to the community.

Priorities:

- Explore alternative energy resources.
- Conduct an accessibility analysis of the Norwood and Apponaug locations with the goal of being prepared when capital funding becomes available.
- Explore opportunities to create outside workspaces, meeting space, and programs in the garden at the Sandy Lane location.
- Continue to develop the pop-up library program, and possibly expand the concept to a mobile library.
- HVAC – Continue working with the City.
- Elevator – Continue working with the City.
- Carpeting – Continue working with the City.
- Emergency egress in the Circulation Workroom.
- Hearing Loop – Install and training.
- Work with the City to assess the feasibility of installing speed humps in the parking lot and ball field parking lot.

Summary

The Library Board, on June 30, 2021, unanimously approved this plan. Ms. Stevenson, Library Director, submitted the plan to the Office of Library and Information Services in compliance with the minimum standards and regulations for Rhode Island Public Libraries. Library Administration will report progress in the plan at Library Board meetings.