

2018-2022 Strategic Plan

PUBLIC LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

Approved by the Public Library Association
(PLA) Board of Directors June 2018



OVERVIEW

In 2017, the PLA Board of Directors determined it was time to review PLA's strategic plan and update it based on progress that has been made and anticipated growth and opportunities over the next five years (2018–2022). Last updated in 2014, the strategic plan guided PLA and led to many successful initiatives under four goal areas: Advocacy & Awareness, Leadership & Transformation, Literate Nation, and Organizational Excellence.

At the September 2017 Board meeting, members reviewed the strategic plan and discussed critical issues facing public libraries today and the changing library landscape. Through these discussions, a need to update PLA's vision to reflect the evolution of collective thinking by the association's board, leaders and members and the state of the library field emerged along with three recommended changes to the strategic plan goals: 1) add Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion as a goal; 2) separate Leadership & Transformation into two individual goals; and 3) remove Literate Nation as a goal. These updates to the strategic plan were discussed at PLA's 2018 Conference through a series of member focus groups and as questions on the post-conference survey, which returned over 2,000 responses. Further refinements were then made to the plan. The desired outcome of this planning process is to clarify and guide how PLA should invest its valuable and limited resources to meet the future needs of its members and other public library stakeholders.

The revised strategic plan includes the following:

- A list of relevant factors, including a core purpose, core values, and a vision for PLA's future success;
- Goal areas that identify where PLA will direct its energy in the next three years, focused on outcomes beneficial to the association and its members;
- A set of Planning Assumptions for the public library profession the association represents, with revisions made in April 2018 (Appendix A).

Adoption of the revised strategic plan by PLA's Board of Directors is an affirmation of the intent and direction articulated by the vision, goals, and objectives. PLA views strategic planning as an ongoing process within the organization. Therefore, progress toward achieving the plan's objectives will be assessed annually, and the plan will continue to be updated based on achievement and the changing needs of members and stakeholders.

CORE IDEOLOGY & VISION

Core ideology describes PLA's consistent identity that transcends all changes related to our relevant environment. It consists of two elements: core purpose—our organization's reason for being—and core values—essential and enduring principles that guide our organization. Our vision depicts a concrete yet unrealized future. It consists of an overarching statement of ambition and a vibrant description of the future of public libraries and PLA.

CORE IDEOLOGY

Core Purpose

To strengthen public libraries and their contribution to communities.

Core Values

PLA is dedicated to:

- Visionary Leadership
- Member Focus
- Integrity and Transparency
- Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
- Excellence and Innovation

OUR VISION

Statement of Ambition

A dynamic public library is the heart of every community.

Description

We envision the future, where public libraries serve at the intersection of vibrant communities and a strong democracy. The future will be realized as the ever-expanding value of libraries is acknowledged, accepted, and ingrained in every heart and mind. A deeper intertwining of library and community means that libraries are eagerly and appropriately funded, so that their democratizing force can continue to open possibility, both individually and collectively.

In the future, the library not only reflects the diversity of its community, but also becomes the leader of practicing inclusion at all levels, starting with the people who work there. It partners with community organizations to expand the reach of its benefits and those with whom it collaborates. It's a hub of cultural and civic engagement, helping to facilitate understanding of how society is, and should be, shaped.

In the future, the library recognizes its own influence on communities, and is adept at advocating for the resources to do more. Libraries continue to fulfill their role as the place where everyone is welcome to take advantage of vital services and learning. More of the public, in turn, seeks out the library, because the library is continually tailoring its offerings to meet their needs. While the inside of the library remains quietly bustling, it knows how to raise its voice for good.

In the future, there is no more generative and generous environment for individual learning, enrichment, and economic opportunity than the public library. The community sees the library as a space to find the joy of personal growth through learning via expert assistance, relevant resources and research tools, content sharing and creation, and the opportunity for cultural enrichment. It is an integral component of a successful educational system, making abundant contributions to America's status as a literate nation.

Finally, the future Public Library Association (PLA) has built a solid foundation to support the library profession—the indispensable ally to an essential institution. Nearly all library staff, trustees, and other supporters from the United States, and many library staff and supporters from outside the United States, are members. The vast majority of them are actively engaged with the association, where anyone can contribute and everyone grows. Here, libraries hone their ability to respond to the needs of their communities. Here, libraries are transformed and librarians empowered through the pillars of leadership, kinship and innovation. Membership in PLA is indispensable to a successful library career, PLA is a hub where intuiting trends in an ever-changing environment is second nature, and matching members with superior educational and training services is second to none.

PLANNING HORIZON (2018-2022) GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The following goals will anchor and guide PLA for the next five years as we continue to advance toward our shared vision. The goals listed are considered of equal importance and are not necessarily in priority order. Objectives provide direction on how PLA will accomplish its articulated goals. Success toward achieving the goals will be reviewed annually by PLA leadership.



TRANSFORMATION

Goal Statement: To strengthen public libraries and their contribution to communities.

Objective (1): Define and support the transition of public libraries to become more responsive to – and reflective of – community needs.

Objective (2): Increase opportunities to explore and share effective emerging best practices that are addressing community priorities.

Objective (3): Increase awareness of and access to the types of literacy necessary for skills development and success in the 21st century.

Objective (4): Increase the number of libraries using meaningful and actionable measurements to understand and expand their community impact.



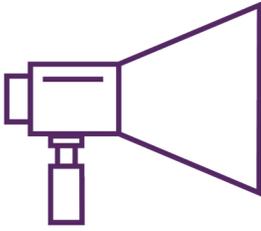
LEADERSHIP

Goal Statement: PLA builds and supports leadership for public libraries that is reflective of the needs of each community and the profession.

Objective (1): Increase leadership and personal development training opportunities for all levels of public library staff reflective of the PLA leadership model.

Objective (2): Support public library staff in the shift from a library-centered to a community-centered approach, through PLA trainings and resources.

Objective (3): Encourage learning opportunities for all library staff through collaboration with library schools and support access to other types of learning available to library staff including CE, online courses, certificate programs and conferences.



ADVOCACY & AWARENESS

Goal Statement: PLA leads in public library advocacy and influencing perceptions of public libraries.

Objective (1): Increase awareness and strengthen perceptions of public libraries among key audiences and stakeholders.

Objective (2): Increase awareness and the effectiveness of PLA/ALA's advocacy resources and create new tools to support current and future advocacy efforts.

Objective (3): Increase library staff participation in public library advocacy at all levels (i.e., federal, state, local).

Objective (4): Improve PLA's capacity to serve as a resource to public libraries outside of the U.S. that are conducting library advocacy.



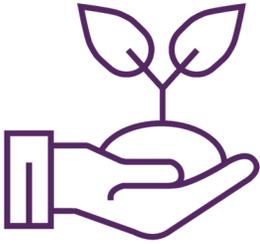
EQUITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Goal Statement: PLA advocates for equity, diversity, inclusion and social justice in order to enable every member, library, and community group to fully and equally participate in a society mutually shaped to meet their needs.¹

Objective (1): Reflect EDISJ principles in association leadership, staffing, values, mission/vision, strategies and operations.

Objective (2): Equip members with tools, mentoring/coaching, learning opportunities, and other resources to advocate and apply EDISJ principles in their libraries and communities.

Objective (3): Identify measurable impacts, including professional competencies, that demonstrate progress in key EDISJ areas.



ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Goal Statement: PLA is entrepreneurial, resilient, and successful in the sustaining and growing of resources to advance its mission and work.

Objective (1): Maintain a financially stable and sustainable operating model.

Objective (2): Commit to and support ongoing, regular data-driven assessment of PLA impact on the library field.

Objective (3): Increase the number of income-generating products and programs.

Objective (4): Oversee successful stewardship of the multi-year Legacy and future grants.

Objective (5): Seek and adapt to new trends and models in association organization and membership.

Objective (6): Maintain strong relationships with existing partners, both nationally and internationally, and explore new partnership opportunities outside of the library field.

Objective (7): Invest in more professional development training for PLA staff to strengthen their capacity to meet member and library field needs.

APPENDIX A

PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS (UPDATED Q2 2018)

To make progress toward PLA's goals, it's important to anticipate factors that could affect our ability to succeed and to assess the implications of those factors. This process will allow PLA to annually review and recalibrate our strategy based on these assumptions and to adjust, if needed, the strategic plan.

Economic & Business Environment

- Public library budgets will continue to be constrained with more competition for funds; this will vary by community and will likely be more pronounced in communities where library services are viewed as discretionary.
- Funding sources for public libraries at the local, state, and/or federal level will be affected by the economy and may change, shrink, or go away.
- Diversification of funding sources will become more necessary.
- Libraries will need to continue to demonstrate a positive return on investment (ROI) to the public and those who make library funding decisions.
- There will be more options for private funding available—and more competition for those dollars.
- There will be an increase in partnerships and in pooled and shared resources.

Legislation & Regulation

- Understanding the legal environment, including employment and immigration laws, will require more time, energy and expertise.
- Copyright and digital licensing will continue to evolve and be volatile.
- Confidentiality/privacy will become more complex and will affect use, records, maintenance and requirements for registration, data collection and marketing.

Legislation & Regulation

- Stratification and polarization of society will continue.
- National, state, and local political agendas will change, and the public's support for political agendas will continue to fluctuate.
- Attitudes toward the U.S. education system will affect support for libraries, as many see them as aligned.

- The library will have a greater role in civic engagement.
- The library will continue its role as a convener and facilitator.
- Library staff will continue to seek guidance on the appropriate response to salient issues based on their individual communities.
- Public library programs and services will continue to reflect the diversity of the communities they serve and fill their unique role as a safe place where everyone is welcome.
- Public libraries will continue to grow as a community gathering place and as a personal connection space.
- Supporting lifelong learning will continue to be a library priority.
- Reading will continue to be a critical skill to succeed in life.
- Continued growth in volunteerism will benefit public libraries.
- Expectations will increase for public libraries to make sustainable environmental practices part of standard library operations.
- It will be important to ensure that our commitment to social justice seeks to dismantle systemic discrimination and structural inequalities, uplift the right and opportunity for all to thrive, and advance the promise of a more just and equitable world.ⁱⁱ

Demographics & Trends

- Changes in demographics will influence the ways people interact and behave in public spaces, including public libraries.
- New immigrants from countries without a public library tradition will need assistance in understanding the role and services of the U.S. public library.
- Baby Boomers (76.4 million) will continue to impact the services provided by public libraries.
- The socioeconomic gap will continue to grow, and the income level defining poverty will continue to rise.
- Trends in the way people learn, share knowledge, and interact with information and one another will evolve along with the tools and services libraries will need to provide.
- The workplace will continue to change and cater to the next generation workforce; professional collaboration will be more often hosted in a digital environment.

Technology

- Technology will allow libraries the opportunity to attract and serve new client groups; they will expect multiple access modes to the library.
- More people without technological skills or financial means will use the library's technology resources; libraries will continue to be a technology

safety net for a large percentage of the population.

- The library as a place for content creation will continue to grow; there will be greater interest and demand for user-generated content.
- Monitoring trends and exploring the role of libraries in the context of technology by library support organizations' will need to be supported and grown
- Ongoing technology investments in upgrades and new tools will increase delivery of technology services at the library.

Structure & Tradition

- Public library operating and governance structures that fail to evolve may negatively impact long-term sustainability, including investment in research and development.
- Libraries will continue to be constrained by vendors in delivering solutions if they do not have their own roadmap.
- There will be ongoing tension around the need to collect user data and librarians' value of privacy.
- Tensions about allocating public resources to market/promote library services will persist.
- The traditional staffing structure of public libraries will need to be adjusted.
- Diversity among library staff will increase to reflect changing communities.
- Because traditional staffing of public libraries will continue to evolve, the need for increasingly diverse skills and expertise will grow. Public libraries will be challenged to provide on the job experience and training and/or hire from other sectors (customer service and marketing, fundraising, IT, social work).
- Library staff will stay in the workforce longer, potentially reducing opportunity for new library staff; an experience gap could result when they retire.
- While improving, the diversity of library school graduates will not catch up to reflect communities' demographics in the near future.

ⁱ Adams, M. (Ed.), Bell, L. (Ed.). (2016). *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*. New York: Routledge.

ⁱⁱ Arcus Center for Social Justice Leadership, Kalamazoo College, Kalamazoo, Michigan. <https://reason.kzoo.edu/csjl/>



The Public Library Association (PLA) is the largest association dedicated to supporting the unique and evolving needs of public library professionals. Founded in 1944, PLA serves nearly 10,000 members in public libraries large and small in communities across the United States and Canada, with a growing presence around the world. PLA offers continuing education opportunities, unique public library initiatives, and a conference that welcomes public library staff into meaningful partnership. In collaboration with its parent organization, the American Library Association, PLA strives to help its members shape the essential institution of public libraries by serving as an indispensable ally for public library leaders.

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