

**BIRMINGHAM**  
PUBLIC LIBRARY

# **2021 - 2025 Strategic Plan**



Adopted by Birmingham Public Library Board of Trustees October 8, 2024

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## Background/Process

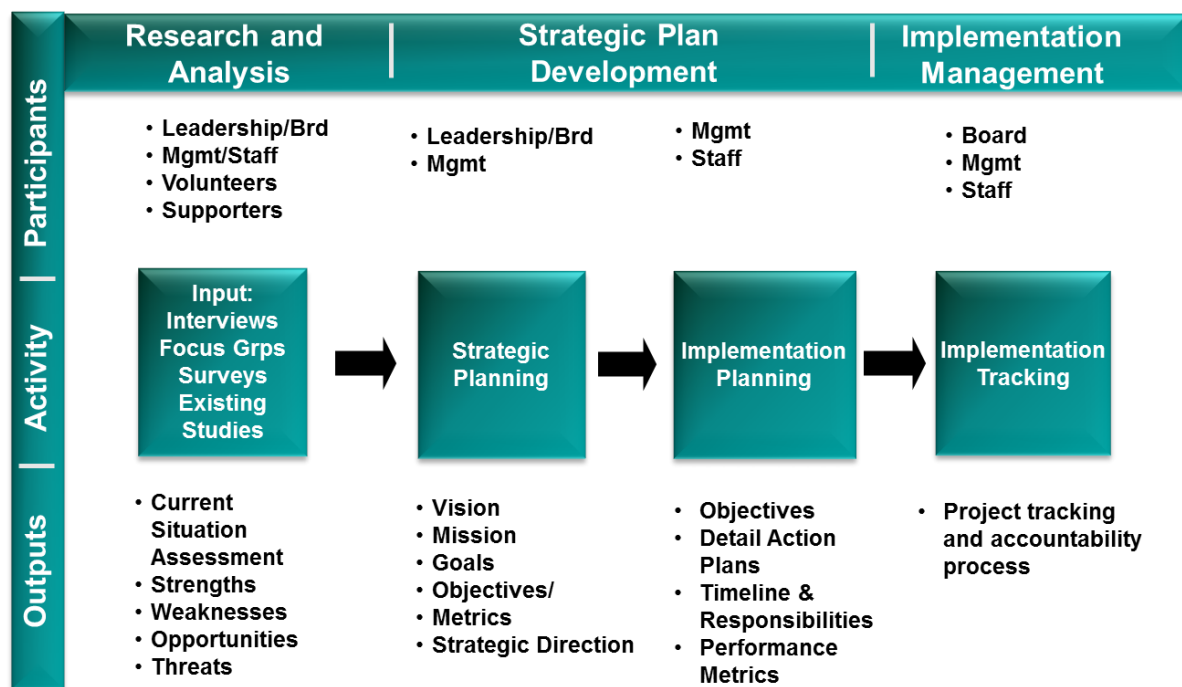
This report summarizes the results of the long-term strategic planning process conducted with Birmingham Public Library (BPL). The process was led by the BPL Board of Directors and key staff and facilitated by Jim Sisson of Vantage Associates, Inc. Vantage Associates is a consulting firm that specializes in helping organizations improve performance through Strategic Planning.

This process was developed to achieve the following objectives:

- Build a consensus for the Vision and direction of BPL
- Gather input from key constituent groups to better understand their perspective
- Align the organization’s capabilities and competencies with the opportunities
- Establish priorities for the next several years
- Identify the critical issues and develop specific action plans with measurable results

The overall process is summarized by the following chart:

# Planning Process



The planning process for the 2017-2021 Strategic Plan was conducted between May and August of 2016 and was designed to include the perspectives and input from a broad set of constituencies. In preparation for the planning retreat, Vantage used one-on-one interviews and an online strategy questionnaire to gather input from Board Members, key staff, and community supporters throughout the organization.

Vantage also designed and conducted a patron survey to gain additional insights into the needs and expectations of the current users of the BPL. A total of 730 patrons completed the survey. Approximately 450 patrons completed a paper survey distributed at each of the BPL facilities. Surveys were allocated according to the activity level at each facility. An additional 280 surveys were completed online in response to a request to the public for their input.

The Birmingham Public Library Strategic Plan adopted for 2017-2021 remains vital and provides a solid framework for library operations. The plan represents the best thinking of the leadership within the current situation defined by the political environment, the changing community, and social and economic conditions. The past 18 months presented many unexpected challenges including the COVID-19 Pandemic, library closures, budget cuts, furloughed staff, and retirements. To fully realize the goals, set forth in the 2017-2021 Strategic Plan, the Birmingham Public Library Board of Trustees adopted the current Strategic Plan for an additional 3 years. The following is the approved Birmingham Public Library Strategic Plan for 2021-2024.

Action Plans were developed to support each of the Critical Issues defined in the Strategic Plan. These Action Plans include responsibilities, priorities, and measures of success. These Action Plans form the basis of accountability by communicating expectations and tracking progress over time. BPL's Executive Team conducted a preliminary evaluation of progress and made comments and adjustments as warranted. One of the key questions addressed in the workshop was – "Based on BPL's Mission, Vision, and Core Values, where do we want to be?" Several priorities were identified.

- BPL will strive to prioritize and practice a patron-focused approach by nurturing a culture of service that seeks to exceed expectations by continually delivering positive experiences inside and beyond the library walls.
- BPL will work to reduce barriers to access. This includes providing convenient access to library services, resources, and programs – both in-person and virtually.
- BPL will expand learning opportunities by enhancing patron and staff capacity to use technology and other resources with greater confidence and skill.

During the next 12 months BPL will conduct a structured assessment of the plan's progress and will provide routine updates to Board of Trustees and stakeholders. This will allow the library's leadership the opportunity to revise and validate the priorities within the current environment.

## LONG TERM VIEW

### Vision

A **Vision** is a statement of what the organization would like to be in the future. A vision is not a statement of who we are or what we do, but of what we would like to become.

BPL's long-term Vision is:

- **The Birmingham Public Library will play a vital role in the city by recognizing the potential of our community and transforming lives through community, education and technology**

### Mission

A **Mission** is a statement defining the overall purpose and scope of responsibility of an organization. It explains the reason for being.

BPL's Mission is:

- **The mission of the Birmingham Public Library is to provide the highest quality experience to our community for life- long learning, cultural enrichment and enjoyment.**

## Core Values

**Core Values** are commonly-held beliefs to which an organization commits itself. Ultimately and ideally, an organization's values should guide the behavior of every individual within the organization. Core Values help define the culture of the organization.

BPL's Core Values are:

- **Service**
- **Employees**
- **Leadership**
- **Learning**
- **Innovation**
- **Respect**
- **Diversity**
- **Integrity**
- **Partnerships**

## Goals

*Long-Term **Goals** are the highest priorities that guide and characterize the organization. Goals define how an organization will focus its limited financial and human resources. Goals should focus on the result the organization is trying to achieve while action plans focus on how the goal will be achieved.*

BPL's Goals are:

- A. Patrons** – Identify and understand the needs of all current and potential patrons in order to provide a rich and satisfying experience
- B. Employees** – Foster a positive culture that recognizes the value of employees resulting in quality employees and high retention
- C. Elected Officials** – Provide elected officials with the information they need to understand the value of the Library for their constituency
- D. Board** – Develop a board that supports the Library with good governance, committed leadership and strong advocacy
- E. Community** – Cultivate and maintain strong community partnerships
- F. Underserved Populations** – Identify and engage these populations and provide services as appropriate
- G. Continuity of Service** - Strengthen ability to response to unanticipated threats

## CURRENT SITUATION

**Current Situation** is a fair and honest assessment of the current state of the organization and the environment in which it operates. Strengths and Weaknesses are internal and therefore the organization has some control over them. Opportunities and Threats are external and are usually generated by a trend or change in the environment in which it operates. Because they are external, they can be managed, leveraged, or mitigated but not controlled.

### Strengths

- The Collection
- Technology
- Dedicated Staff
- Branch network
- Diverse programs
- Central role within Jefferson County
- Virtual presence
- Bookmobile

### Weaknesses

- Staff development on all levels
- Maintenance of facilities
- Marketing and Public Relations
- Relationships with Public Officials
- Staff attrition



## Opportunities

- **New revenue streams**
- **New community/business partners**
- **Downtown revitalization**
- **Improved communication**
- **More public awareness of services**

## Threats

- **Limited funding**
- **Aging and declining population in Birmingham**
- **Lack of connection with younger populations**
- **Declining perception of Libraries' value**
- **Perception of crime within Birmingham**
- **COVID-19 (pandemic)**
- **Budget cuts**

# IMPLEMENTATION

## Critical Issues

***Critical Issues*** are the barriers that must be addressed in order to achieve the Vision. The Critical Issues are prioritized and represent how the organization will allocate its limited resources.

BPL will focus on the follow Critical Issues and Outcomes:

### 1) Funding

- Increase control and flexibility by diversifying funding sources
  - Increase grants for operational funds
  - Increase Earned Revenue
  - Develop Fund Raising through Donations

### 2) Financial Expertise

- Make better financial and operational decisions and increase accountability and credibility
  - Create and fill a CFO position
  - Improve the relationship with City Hall
  - Increase the analysis of operations

### 3) Support from the City (Goals C & D)

- Help the political leaders better understand the potential contribution the library can make to the community
  - Emphasize the Economic Development Role of the Library

### 4) Public Awareness (Goals A& C)

- Increase the depth and breadth of community engagement through increased awareness of programs and services
  - Establish internal group to address marketing and public awareness and evaluate ways to engage the community

### 5) Employee Morale (Goal B)

- Improve employee morale and satisfaction
  - Create Employee Recognition Program:
  - Define and Communicate Job Expectations:
  - Improve Communication – Feedback:
  - Expand Staff Development

## **6) Leadership (Goal B)**

- Improve the quality of leadership throughout the library
  - Expand Leadership Assessment & Development
  - Establish Site based management
  - Create Mentorship Program
  - Increase Diversity of Experience

## **7) Branch/Library Network**

- Maximize the value of the community branches by adapting to the needs of each community
  - Find out what the community wants
  - Create Branch Specialization
  - Expand Services
  - Optimize/Leverage Library Network

## **8) Technology (Goals A & B)**

- Increased, more meaningful access to technology that meets both patron and employee needs.
  - Establish a committee to evaluate current technology needs and trends
  - Develop strategies to make technology more accessible to patrons
  - Provide regular technical professional development opportunities
  - Improve electronic communication infrastructure for employees

## **9) Research/Archives (Goal E)**

- Engage the broader Birmingham community in understanding, using, and contributing to the library's rich historical archive and research capabilities
  - Investigate earned revenue opportunities
  - Engage the community to contribute their materials
  - Leverage partnerships with local historical and genealogical societies and research institutions (Samford University Special Collections, ADAH, etc.)
  - Optimize new and emerging technology for preserving archival materials and microforms

## **10) Programs (Goals A & F)**

- Expand the role of programs to meet the evolving needs of diverse groups of patrons
  - Restructure the programming committee and prioritize programs
  - Analyze program results
  - Expand Funding
  - Develop Partners

**11) Pandemic – COVID-19 (Goal G)**

- Improve ability to respond to the unanticipated threats (pandemic) and provide patron-focused service
  - Develop policies and procedures for operating during pandemic
  - Develop virtual technology for staff meetings and training
  - Develop virtual technology for library programming
  - Develop Curbside Pick-up Services
  - Identify needed Personal Protection Equipment (PPE)