



TOWN OF ACTON LIBRARIES STRATEGIC PLAN FOR FISCAL YEARS 2025–2029

Submitted by:



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Town of Acton Libraries

Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2025–2029

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
BACKGROUND	3
COVID-19 PANDEMIC.....	3
NEW STRATEGIC PLANNING PERSPECTIVES	3
OUR PLANNING PROCESS	4
WHAT WE LEARNED	5
OUR PLAN	6
COMMUNITY VISION STATEMENT	6
MISSION STATEMENT.....	6
STRATEGIC GOALS	6
ANNUAL ACTION PLANS	8
MEASURING AND COMMUNICATING OUR PROGRESS.....	8
PLAN APPROVAL	8
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	8
APPENDICES	9

INTRODUCTION

Background

The Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC) recommends that libraries maintain a strategic plan that identifies the organization’s mission statement and strategic goals for the plan’s term. Typically, a strategic plan with a 3-5-year term enables MA libraries to identify new and evolving community needs and to prioritize the allocation of organizational resources to meet the stated goals. Maintaining a current strategic plan is considered a library management best practice. Libraries with strategic plans are eligible for MBLC Library Services and Technology Act direct grants and construction grants.



Every five years, the Acton Libraries create a strategic plan that meets the MBLC’s guidelines. The plan is designed to inform the Acton community of the Library’s future goals and aspirations.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The Library’s last plan, the *AML Long Range Plan FY 2020 – FY 2024*, was developed before the COVID-19 pandemic started but was in effect during the pandemic. During the pandemic, the town and the world experienced many challenges. It was difficult for most organizations to continue operating.

The Library responded by facing these challenges head-on. While the Library building was closed to the public for months, staff quickly pivoted to develop and implement innovative new processes and programs that enabled the organization to continue providing essential services. This intense focus on delivering core Library services made it challenging for us to pursue the *Long Range Plan’s* original goals and objectives; the very specific, targeted, year-by-year goals were no longer valid.

New Strategic Planning Perspectives

Given the challenges experienced with our last plan, we determined that the *Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2025-29* will focus on broader, more strategic goals and objectives. This modified approach resulted in us developing a more flexible and effective plan.

It is also important to note that this is the first plan generated after combining services of Acton Memorial Library (AML) and West Acton Citizens’ Library (CL). This *Plan* is the result of a comprehensive review of the community’s needs, a thorough environmental assessment of demographic and Library usage trends, and a thoughtful prioritization of the libraries’ primary areas of focus for the next five years.

OUR PLANNING PROCESS

Our strategic planning process began in August 2023 with the creation of a three-person project leadership team consisting of Acton Libraries Director Maria Palacio, AML Trustee Miriam Lezak, and Acton Libraries Assistant Director Kerri Darcy.

After considering how to tackle the initiative, Barbara Alevras of Sage Consulting Services was hired using AML State Aid funds to guide the Library through the strategic planning process.

A Strategic Planning Advisory Committee (SPAC) was formed with 15 community members representing diverse organizations and populations in town. During its 10-month tenure, the committee met every one to two months to brainstorm community engagement ideas, draft community vision statements, and review all the key strategic plan components.

From November 2023 to March 2024, we conducted numerous community feedback activities, including:

- 1 Community Visioning Exercise with the SPAC (15 participants)
- 5 Focus Groups (27 participants): 4 with Community Members and 1 with Teen Advisory Group Members
- 4 Strategic Planning Surveys (717 responses)
 - Boards' Survey with the AML Board of Trustees, AML Foundation, CL Board of Trustees, and Friends of Acton Libraries Board (22)
 - Community Survey (537)
 - SPAC Survey (11)
 - Teen Survey (147)
- 4 Strengths-Opportunities-Aspirations-Results (SOAR) Assessments (56 participants)
 - 2 with the Library Governance and Volunteer Boards (AML Board of Trustees, AML Foundation, CL Board of Trustees, and Friends of Acton Libraries board members)
 - 2 with Staff

In addition to collecting subjective community feedback, we compiled objective data related to key Acton demographics and Library use statistics. These statistics are presented in *Appendix B—AL Community and Library Profiles 2024*.

Appendix A—AL Strategic Planning Project Flowchart 2023-24 contains a detailed process flowchart.

See the *Appendices* page for a list of available community feedback reports.

WHAT WE LEARNED

The community expressed tremendous support for the Library and is extremely satisfied with the quality of the Library's offerings. Community members are generally very happy with what we do – they just want more of everything.

The community wants the Library to offer more programs, grow its collections, and expand and enhance its physical space in the future.

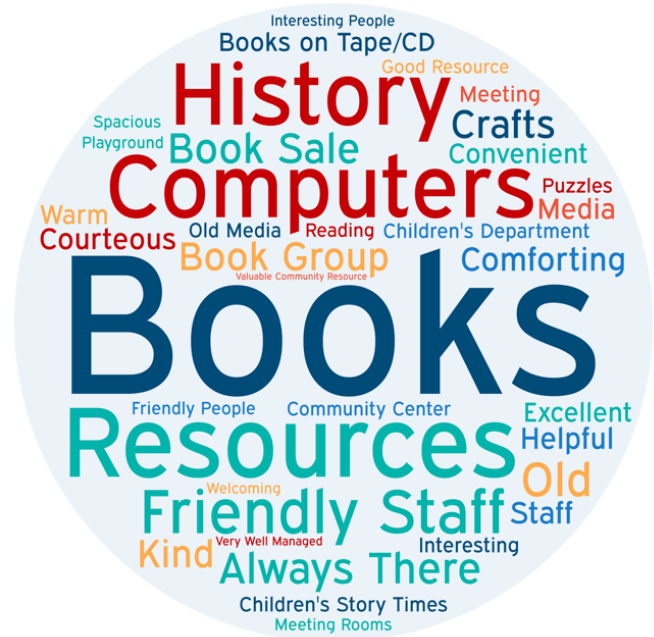
The Library's greatest strength was consistently identified as the staff, who garnered extremely positive feedback (friendly, welcoming, knowledgeable, child-friendly, and helpful).

Community members expressed concern about several local, national, and international issues that may impact the Library or that the Library could help address over the next five years, including:

- Increased Social Isolation/Lack of Community Connections
- Insufficient Awareness of Library Offerings
- Lack of Civil Discourse (censorship, hyper-partisanship, intolerance, etc.)
- Potential Financial/Funding Challenges
- Underserved and Vulnerable Community Populations

Input received from our community feedback activities and the analysis of local statistics identified the following seven strategic areas of focus and possible ideas associated with each:

- **COLLECTIONS** (physical and digital): There is interest in adding more physical and digital books, growing the Library of Things, and diversifying the collections to reflect the community's demographics, interests, and needs.
- **FACILITY** (interior and exterior physical spaces, furniture, layout, etc.): Add study/meeting rooms for small groups, more comfortable reading spaces and social gathering areas, enhanced outdoor areas for patron use, and improved parking. Improve CL's physical accessibility (e.g., make it ADA-compliant).
- **MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS** (financial oversight, governance, policies/procedures, staffing, and volunteers): Continue smoothing out the operations of both branches and making them more welcoming for all. Minimize barriers to service and continue offering high-quality customer service.



Focus Group Participants: What Are The First 3 Words You Think of When You Think of the Library?

- **MARKETING** (branding, communications, and outreach): Increase community outreach activities, especially to underserved populations. Pursue additional collaborations/partnerships with local organizations and increase communication of the Library’s value and offerings. Expand the Library’s presence in the community.
- **PROGRAMS** (activities and events): Offer more programming of all varieties for all ages on diverse topics, including author/reading-related, health and wellness, cooking and food, and additional tween-focused programs. Schedule more children’s programs at times that accommodate working parents.
- **SERVICES** (activities and events): Develop additional convenience-based services (e.g., delivery of materials, offsite drop-offs/pickups — “Go where the people are”). Consider translation services and social safety net resources/referrals.
- **TECHNOLOGY**: Offer more technical skills tutorials/classes, application and device tech support, and additional online resources. Use current technologies and provide information and resources on new and emerging technologies.

OUR PLAN

Community Vision Statement

The Library’s fifteen-person Strategic Planning Advisory Committee brainstormed a series of vision statements reflecting the ideal Acton. The committee prioritized their drafts to identify which statements members believe the Library can best support and positively impact. Based on their input, the following community vision statement was created:

Acton maintains public facilities, recreational spaces, and community gathering places that serve as cultural and social activity centers.

Appendix D—AL Community Vision Statement Results Report 2024 presents the full community visioning exercise results.

Mission Statement

At the Acton Libraries, stories connect us. Our collections, programs, services, and technology promote and celebrate community and civic engagement through open and equitable access to cultural, informational, recreational, and shared resources.

Strategic Goals

After analyzing the community’s feedback, community and Library statistics, and the Library’s priorities and resources, we established five multi-year strategic goals and several sample supporting objectives for each goal.

We believe that focusing on these broad strategic goals and supporting objectives enables us to meet the community’s evolving needs throughout the Plan’s term and beyond. These goals provide the flexibility necessary for us to adapt to new and emerging challenges and opportunities by adjusting specific activities designed to meet these goals.



Goals for Strategic Plan

These goals point the way for what we want to achieve in the next 5 years. Strategic goals, unlike business goals, represent ideals that the library is working towards.

Concrete annual objectives for each goal will be created every year by library staff. The objectives shown here are examples of what each goal represents.

Goals

1.

Foster community and provide cultural enrichment

2.

Support literacy and access to resources and services

3.

Serve as a third place

4.

Connect with people where they are

5.

Bridge the digital divide

Goals with Sample Objectives

Foster community and provide cultural enrichment

- Expand community meeting spaces
- Create opportunities for residents to connect with one another
- Expand services to all members of the community
- Provide a diverse range of programs for everybody

Support literacy and access to resources and services

- Provide services for people with diverse abilities (sensory friendly, accessible)
- Provide services for English Language Learners
- Continue and expand the teen advisory group (TAG)

Serve as a third place

- Affirm the library as a center for learning
- Ensure that the library is welcoming and comfortable
- Create a sense of belonging

Connect with people where they are

- Create opportunities at Council on Aging, Danny's Place, Food Pantry, AB Resource Center, and other locations
- Create offsite hold pickup and return (train station or other locations)
- Provide outreach to schools and town departments

Bridge the digital divide

- Provide equitable access to existing and emerging technologies
- Ensure access to in-house computers
- Provide one-on-one technology tutoring

Annual Action Plans

The Town of Acton Libraries will develop an annual *Action Plan* that details specific activities and strategies to help us achieve our strategic goals. The *Action Plan* captures new initiatives and tasks designed to support specific objectives and address our changing needs. The *Action Plan* will be updated annually and kept on file at the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC).

Measuring and Communicating Our Progress

Creating a strategic plan and annual action plans is important. Measuring and communicating progress toward achieving the strategic plan’s goals and objectives is also vital. To that end, the Library Director will regularly review the progress toward meeting our *Strategic Plan’s* goals and objectives, including identifying completed *Action Plan* tasks.

The Director will share the *Strategic Plan* review results at least quarterly with staff during regularly scheduled staff meetings. The Director will report to the Library’s Board of Trustees at least quarterly on progress toward achieving our *Strategic Plan’s* goals and annual *Action Plan’s* activities. In addition, *Strategic Plan* performance highlights from the calendar year will be included in the Town of Acton’s *Annual Town Report*.

PLAN APPROVAL

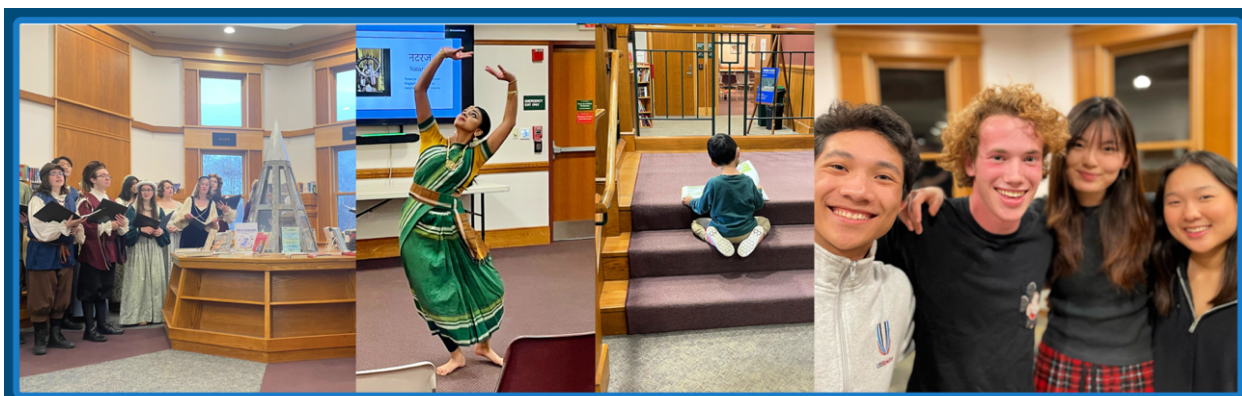
On June 27, 2024, the Library’s nine-member Board of Trustees unanimously approved this *Strategic Plan*.

AML Board of Trustees

Ann Chang, President
Christina Stoval, Vice President
Eric Schlesinger, Secretary
Thomas Dunn
Tom Lemire
Miriam Lezak
Pamela Lynn
Sampada Salunkhe
Suzanne Shanahan

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the members of the Strategic Planning Advisory Committee (SPAC), the Acton Libraries’ staff, the AML Board of Trustees, the West Acton Citizens’ Library Trustees, the Town Manager’s Office, the Friends of the Acton Libraries, the AML Foundation, the Teen Advisory Group, Barbara Alevras of Sage Consulting Services, and the entire Acton community for their continued support of the Acton Libraries.



APPENDICES

Following is a list of Strategic Plan document appendices. They are available for download and review at the following link: www.actonmemoriamlibrary.org/about-us/strategic-plan.

Appendix A—AL Strategic Planning Project Flowchart 2023-24: The flowchart presents the strategic planning project methodology, including the timeline, major project milestones, community needs assessment activities, and process participants.

Appendix B—AL Community and Library Profiles: This document presents key Acton community statistics related to our library services.

Appendix C—AL Acton Libraries Timeline: This document presents a brief overview of the Acton Memorial Library and West Acton Citizens' Library history.

Appendix D—AL Community Vision Statement Results Report 2024: This report presents a prioritized list of the community vision statements generated by the SPAC.

Appendix E—AL Boards Survey Results Report 2023: The Acton Memorial Library Board of Trustees, West Acton Citizens' Library Board of Trustees, Acton Memorial Library Foundation Board of Directors, and Friends of Acton Libraries Board survey was conducted in December 2023.

Appendix F—AL Community Survey Results 2024: The community survey was conducted from December 2023 to mid-January 2024.

Appendix G—AL Community Members Focus Group Summary Report 2024: Four focus groups for community members were conducted from January to February 2024.

Appendix H—AL Teen Focus Group Summary Report 2024: A focus group for members of the Teen Advisory Group was conducted in January 2024.

Appendix I—AL SOAR Exercise Summary Results Report 2023: This report documents the results of an environmental assessment of the Library's strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results.

Appendix J—AL SPAC Survey Results Report 2024: The Strategic Planning Advisory Committee (SPAC) survey was conducted in January 2024.

Appendix K—AL Teen Survey Results 2024: The teen survey was conducted from mid-January to early February 2024.





Town of Acton Libraries

