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# STRATEGIC PLAN

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2024-2028

WASHINGTON TOWNSHIP'S PUBLIC LIBRARY

## **Table of Contents**

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Mission Statement</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Summary of Goals and Objectives</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Pursuing Our Strategic Goals</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Goals and Strategies</b> .....	<b>6</b>
Increase Library use by residents .....	6
Ensure that the Library collection reflects community needs .....	9
Invest in outstanding customer service and facilities .....	11

## **Executive Summary**

In the summer of 2023, the Margaret E. Heggan Free Public Library retained Creative Capacity, LLC to facilitate a strategic planning process.

The Library and Creative Capacity conducted community research to inform the planning process, including:

- Four listening sessions to gather feedback from Library patrons, including sessions for teens, older adults, caregivers for young children, and adults who frequently use Library services.
- A community survey, completed by 884 residents of Washington Township.
- An additional intercept survey administered at community events in order to reach Township residents who don't frequently visit the Library, which was completed by 195 Washington Township residents.
- A planning session with the Board of Trustees.
- A planning session with all Librarians.

The results of the planning research were shared with Library leadership in the fall of 2023. With support from Trustees, the Library's department heads worked with Creative Capacity to design the plan.

The plan expands on Margaret E. Heggan Free Public Library's success in providing a wide variety of high-quality services to the community. In the coming years, the Library will continue to serve as a key hub for Washington Township, bringing residents together for learning, enjoyment, resources, and connection.

This is an *adaptive strategic plan*, designed to help the Library adapt to changing conditions over the next five years. The plan's mission and objectives will guide the organization's decision making. Broad strategies are included to illustrate the kind of work that is likely to take place; each strategy is followed by examples of potential projects that could fulfill the objectives. These projects may or may not prove to be the best way to carry out the plan over time; annual assessments and project planning will determine the best options for pursuing the Library's strategic objectives.

## **Mission Statement**

The Margaret E. Heggan Free Public Library of the Township of Washington will be the community's primary resource for knowledge, information, and enjoyment, with emphasis on convenient accessibility and customer-oriented service. The Library will strive to:

- Provide materials which are of most interest to users of all ages; especially preschool and adult age groups who have no other library at their disposal;
- Instill a love of reading and learning, and a familiarity with the Library, in all residents but especially in preschool children from infancy through the kindergarten age;
- Provide prompt and accurate information to individuals, groups, businesses, and government in our community;
- Assist elementary and secondary students with information, materials, and services which support their formal education assignments and interests;
- Be a place where our community can gather, learn, and connect with each other.

## **Summary of Goals and Objectives**

### **Increase Library use by Washington Township residents.**

- Increase the number of Washington Township residents who are using Library services.
- Increase participation in Library programs for adults.
- Raise the Library's profile in the community, so that more residents recognize how they can benefit from the Library.
- Continue to engage children, teens, and families in ways that support literacy development and a positive sense of community at the Library.

### **Ensure that the Library's collection reflects changing community interests and needs.**

- Make strategic investments in physical and digital materials to maximize the use of the collection.
- Ensure diverse holdings that reflect the interests of the community.
- Maximize the use of the Library's shelving space by prioritizing the most frequently-used materials.

### **Continue to invest in the Library's outstanding customer service and facilities.**

- Ensure that all staff are continually developing their skills.
- Enhance cross-training opportunities for librarians.
- Develop procedure guides to support quality service in each interaction.
- Renovate the public restrooms.
- Maximize shelf and storage space to support collection management and easy patron access to materials.

## **Pursuing Our Strategic Goals**

This is an adaptive plan, designed to articulate the Library’s goals while providing flexibility in the strategies used to achieve them. This plan includes broad strategies to illustrate the kind of work that is likely to take place; some strategies are followed by examples of potential projects that might be pursued to fulfill the Library’s objectives. In order to maximize responsiveness to changing community needs and circumstances, this plan does not commit the Library to specific projects or action steps. Annual planning will determine the best options for pursuing strategic objectives each year.

## **Goal #1: Increase Library use by Washington Township residents.**

- Increase the number of Washington Township residents who are using Library services.
  - Increase participation in Library programs for adults.
  - Raise the Library's profile in the community, so that more residents recognize how they can benefit from the Library.
  - Continue to engage children, teens, and families in ways that support literacy development and a positive sense of community at the Library.
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### **Strategy #1: Strengthen community outreach.**

- Participate in community events.
- Offer programs at other community locations to introduce more people to the Library.
- Increase staff in order to support more community events and participation.

### **Strategy #2: Enhance community partnerships.**

- Expand school partnerships in order to encourage children and families to sign up for library cards and routinely use Library resources.
- Connect with other groups that provide community resources to increase opportunities for cross-promotion and referrals.
- When logistically feasible, partner with other groups so they can offer programs or services at the Library.

### **Strategy #3: Invite new residents to get their Library card as soon as they arrive in town.**

- Encourage realtors to promote the Library as one of the benefits of living in Washington Township.
- Regularly mail postcards inviting new residents to come in and get their Library cards, highlighting services that people often do not know about (museum passes, digital books and audiobooks, etc.).
- Identify and work with newcomers groups at other Washington Township organizations.

### **Strategy #4: Promote the fact that we are Washington Township's library.**

- Use tag lines (*serving Washington Township since 1966*) along with our logo.
- Promote the benefits we deliver to Washington Township.

- Ensure that Washington Township residents are prioritized for programs and materials that are in high demand.

**Strategy #5: Develop a new approach to our adult programming schedule.**

- Develop guidelines that support designing and executing programs that will generate strong attendance among adults.
- Continue to work with Library patrons and partners to understand what interests them the most, and focus most programs on those interests.
- Periodically present programs that are likely to have wide appeal (for example, well-known speakers or an event on a topic with strong community interest), and support them with extra promotion to drive strong participation.
- Assign librarians to collaborate with Washington Township commissions and advisory groups to host and support programs at the Library.
- Discontinue programs that do not meet minimum standards for participation after a reasonable pilot period.
- Seek examples/referrals from other libraries about successful programs and presenters.

**Strategy #6: Invest in making programs for children and teens accessible.**

- Periodically present weekend events for children, to bring families where parents work during the week to the Library.
- Experiment with programs aimed at keeping older children involved in the Library.
- Collaborate with the Teen Advisory Group to develop and promote Library programs and services to teens who might not otherwise visit (for example, a college information night or other program that meets a specific need for teens).

**Strategy #7: Enhance marketing and promotion.**

- Increase subscribers to *Heggan Happenings*, especially among current Library patrons.
- Increase print marketing that can be easily distributed in multiple community locations (bookmarks, etc.).
- Promote high-value Library resources that many residents are unaware of (museum passes, free children's programs, free eBooks and audiobooks).
- Enhance the Library's social media presence both on its own channels and by having its content shared by other channels that locals follow to get information about local events and resources.
- Work with the Teen Advisory Group to develop a dedicated social media presence that attracts local teens.



**Strategy #8: Capitalize on anniversaries and commemorations to raise the Library's visibility.**

- Host events that celebrate the Library's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary and its 15<sup>th</sup> year in its current building.
- Develop a timeline of the Library's history and community impact.
- When possible, participate in local, statewide, and national events that tie the Library in with other prominent happenings.

## **Goal #2: Ensure that the Library's collection reflects changing community interests and needs.**

- Make strategic investments in physical and digital materials to maximize the use of the collection.
  - Ensure diverse holdings that reflect the interests of the community.
  - Maximize the use of the Library's shelving space by prioritizing the most frequently-used materials.
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### **Strategy #1: Update collection management procedures to reflect today's needs.**

- Adopt a "just in time" strategy for collections that allows us to use our wide network to meet patron needs, vs. a "just in case" approach that requires us to house too many materials that are not frequently used.
- Determine which resources need to be physically available in the Library vs. available in a digital format.
- Develop and implement an ongoing weeding schedule to ensure that we have adequate space for physical resources that are in-demand and in good condition.

### **Strategy #2: Tie usage statistics to collection management.**

- Develop and implement processes for collecting statistics on the use of resources while patrons are in the Library.
- Develop a process that allows for usage statistics to regularly influence acquisitions, weeding, and shelving decisions.

### **Strategy #3: Continually explore options for meeting the demand for digital materials.**

- Regularly assess the value of new/updated streaming services and online platforms to determine how well they align with the materials most wanted by our community.
- Begin to transition books on CD out of the collection and invest in streaming audio books.
- Help patrons understand the complexity and cost of acquiring digital materials, so they can understand why these materials sometimes have longer wait lists.

### **Strategy #4: Ensure that the collection reflects diverse experiences and diverse people.**

- Continue work to catalogue items with subject headings that allow materials related to diverse authors and experiences to be easily found.

- Continue to feature diverse materials in our monthly initiatives.
- Ensure that the Library is collecting materials that reflect diverse experiences.

**Strategy #5: Carefully allocate shelf space to maximize the accessibility of the collection.**

### **Goal #3: Continue to invest in the Library's outstanding customer service and facilities.**

- Ensure that all staff are continually developing their skills.
  - Enhance cross-training opportunities for librarians.
  - Develop procedure guides to support quality service in each interaction.
  - Renovate the public restrooms.
  - Maximize shelf and storage space to support collection management and easy patron access to materials.
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#### **Strategy #1: Provide strong onboarding and ongoing training.**

- Identify key skills and competencies that staff need in each department, and ensure these are covered in onboarding and supported with self-help aids (for example, procedure manuals for handling certain tasks or using software).
- Stress the importance of outstanding customer service in all training and staff performance reviews.
- Create opportunities for librarians to shadow or cross-train in other departments.

#### **Strategy #2: Standardize external communication practices.**

- Clarify expectations for communicating with the public on the phone, following up on patron suggestions, etc.

#### **Strategy #3: Renovate public restrooms.**

#### **Strategy #4: Conduct a space/storage review.**

- Have the Library's facility reviewed to determine where storage could be added and how storage should be assigned.

#### **Strategy #5: Update shelving plans.**

- In alignment with the revision of collection development and management procedures, update shelving plans to maximize shelf space.

#### **Strategy #6: Consider options for securing additional private funding for special programs or initiatives.**

- Pursue grants when feasible.
- Investigate the pros and cons of launching a foundation for the library.