



## STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

### Strategic Plan 2025-2029: Phase Two Consultation Results and Priority Areas

**Date:** October 28, 2024

**To:** Toronto Public Library Board

**From:** Strategic Planning Steering Committee

#### SUMMARY

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The purpose of this report is to request the Toronto Public Library Board's approval of the Strategic Planning Steering Committee's recommendations regarding the Strategic Plan 2025-2029: Phase Two Consultation Results and Priority Areas.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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The Strategic Planning Steering Committee recommends that the Toronto Public Library Board:

1. approve the priority areas and outcomes as outlined in the [report presented at the October 8, 2024 Steering Committee meeting](#) and direct staff to prepare a draft of the Strategic Plan with strategic objectives and key actions; and
2. receive for information the findings of phase two consultation results as outlined in the [report presented at the October 8, 2024 Steering Committee meeting](#).

## FINANCIAL IMPACT

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This report has no financial impact beyond what has already been approved in the current year's budget.

The Director, Finance & Treasurer has reviewed this financial impact statement and agrees with it.

## DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on December 4, 2023, the Board approved [Creating a New Strategic Plan: 2025-2029](#), including the terms of reference for the Strategic Planning Steering Committee and the Roadmap for development of the next Strategic Plan.

At its meeting on January 29, 2024, the Board received the areas of focus for the environmental scan as outlined in the [Strategic Plan 2025-2029: Environmental Scan Focus Areas and Consultation Plan report](#) and approved the Steering Committee recommendations for the consultation plan and implementation.

At its meeting on April 15, 2024, the [Strategic Planning Steering Committee received the Strategic Plan 2025-2029: Environmental Scan Summary and Internal Consultation Phase One Results report](#) for information.

At its meeting on May 3, 2024, the Strategic Planning Steering Committee considered the [Strategic Plan: External Consultation Phase One Results and Phase Two Consultation Plan report](#) and recommended that the Board receive the first phase of external consultation results for information and approve the focus areas for the second consultation phase resulting from the May 3, 2024 strategy session for implementation.

At its meeting on October 8, 2024, the Strategic Planning Steering Committee considered the [Strategic Plan: Phase Two Consultation Results and Priority Areas report](#) and recommended that the Board receive the second consultation phase results for information, approve the priority areas and outcomes and direct staff to prepare a draft of the Strategic Plan with strategic objectives and key actions at the October 28, 2024 Board meeting.

## COMMENTS

At its October 8, 2024 meeting, the Strategic Planning Steering Committee members reviewed the results of the second consultation phase and the priority areas and outcomes. The members provided their input and feedback, which are outlined below.

The recommended four priority areas for the Strategic Plan 2025-2029 are:

1. Democracy, civic engagement and social connections
2. Shared community spaces
3. Learning and growth
4. Awareness and access

The plan will also include a focus on staff within each priority, with TPL investing in their development to provide the tools, learning, and collaboration needed to meet the Library's priorities.

The questions asked at the session were:

- Do the priority areas clearly reflect the needs and opportunities we've heard in the consultation process?
- How will these priority areas and outcomes help the library to be successful over the next five years?

The Steering Committee commended library staff for their thorough consultations that informed priorities and outcomes that are overall very responsive to Toronto's current context.

The Steering Committee asked questions about the following:

- How the three scenarios from the wind-tunneling exercise were selected and other options considered. Library staff chose these scenarios based on the most significant and uncertain trends for the next five years identified through research and the environmental scan. Other scenarios included increasing cost of living and financial instability, a growing digital divide, and a widening skills gap and labour shortage, among others;
- Whether feedback from residents outside the downtown area reflected different perspectives. Feedback from these areas highlighted the need for standardized programs and improved access to services in neighbourhoods across the city;
- What non-users want from the library and if Torontonians' needs are changing. A [recent third-party survey](#) showed TPL has a wide reach among Toronto residents, indicating opportunities for deeper engagement with existing and potential customers. Opportunities for social connections, free third spaces, and skills to respond to rapidly evolving technologies like AI are becoming increasingly important.

The Steering Committee provided the following general comments:

- While environment sustainability is an important issue, it was not ranked as a top priority in recent consultations. Staff acknowledged its importance and the need to determine how the library can support it;
- It is encouraging to see how the library has become an increasingly important third space in a City with rising cost of living and diminishing free public spaces.

The Steering Committee suggested the following:

- Loneliness and social isolation emerged as significant issues in the research and consultations. While they are represented in the "democracy, civic engagement and social connections" and "shared community spaces" priorities, this could be more prominent;
- Consider broader goals that extend beyond the City and recognize TPL's provincial and international role, such as TPL's leadership globally in democracy and intellectual freedom;
- Increase TPL's marketing approaches and particularly presence online and on social media to raise awareness of its services and staff;
- Highlight how the new priorities are different from the current plan, and how TPL's new Strategic Plan will respond to the current needs and challenges faced by Torontonians, creating strong connections to the community's current context;
- Consider articulating more clearly the strategic focus of the "learning and growth" priority and where TPL adds unique value. For example, beyond traditional learning opportunities, the library serves as a go-to-place for residents in need of assistance;
- Clearly articulate the expansion and enhancement of collections and other services in the "awareness and access" priority given that the consultation results showed that many customers want TPL to invest in and strengthen its collections;
- Clearly communicate the Library's offerings to Toronto residents in simple, plain language, highlighting its value and excellence in its communication and implementation plans.

### **Next steps**

The phase two consultation results marked the conclusion of the library's 2025-2029 Strategic Plan consultation process. Insights from the research, environmental scan, and the first and second consultation phases helped shape the library's 2025-2029 strategic priority areas and outcomes. Library staff will incorporate the Committee's feedback into the final Strategic Plan, which will be presented to the Strategic Planning Steering Committee in November and to the Library Board in December for approval.

## CONTACT

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## SIGNATURE

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Vickery Bowles  
City Librarian

## ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Strategic Plan 2025-2029: Phase Two Consultation Results and Priority Areas Presentation



# strategic plan 2025-2029

## phase two consultation results & strategic priority areas

**Library Board Meeting**

October 28, 2024

# progress update

## Phase 1 Inputs

1. Environmental Scan Findings
2. Staff Consultation Themes
3. Top Public Issues
4. Public Consultation Themes

## Phase 2 Consultation

- Focus Areas

## October meeting

- Review results of phase two consultations
- SWOT analysis and Scenario Planning results
- Strategic Priorities

## Next meeting

- Strategic Plan with strategic objectives and key actions





## phase 2 consultation results

## purpose

- To validate and prioritize the focus areas and identify potential action items to execute on the plan
- Target audiences for the second phase included all staff, underrepresented audiences from the first phase of public consultations, community partners, industry experts, and stakeholders
- Phase two took place from June to August

## phase two focus areas

- Awareness and availability of library services
- Cost of living, economic resilience, and skills development
- Democracy, civic engagement, and information literacy
- Environmental sustainability
- Reading, learning, and growth
- Social connections and mental well-being
- Technology and digital inclusion
- Welcoming and inclusive public spaces to meet, study, and do work

# staff engagement overview

**401 staff members** engaged from June to July

- ThoughtExchange survey | **284 responses**
- Four facilitated local staff engagement sessions | **117 staff**

# focus areas ranking

Where should the library focus in the next five years? Please rank (1 to 8) the following focus areas based on their importance for TPL to have the greatest impact for Toronto residents. (1 being the most important, 8 being the least important). You can organize your choices by dragging and dropping from the list.

Ranking	Answer
#1	Awareness and availability of library services
#2	Reading, learning and growth
#3	Welcoming and inclusive public spaces to meet, study and do work
#4	Cost of living, economic resilience and skills development
#5	Social connections and mental well-being
#6	Democracy, civic engagement and information literacy
#7	Technology and digital inclusion
#8	Environmental sustainability

## idea exchange themes

What can the library do to support the top focus areas you identified? This could be a new idea, something we can do more of, or the tools and resources that will be needed to deliver on the focus areas.

Focus area	Subtheme (number of thoughts)
Awareness and availability of library services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Marketing and promotion (34)</li><li>• Staffing levels (13)</li></ul>
Reading, learning and growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reading and literacy programs (15)</li></ul>
Social connections and mental well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Social services (11)</li></ul>
Welcoming and inclusive public spaces to meet, study, and do work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Multi-use spaces (16)</li><li>• Safe and welcoming spaces (11)</li></ul>

# public engagement overview

**815 public members** engaged from June to August

- ThoughtExchange survey | 649 responses
- Four facilitated focus groups | 26 participants
- Indigenous feedback sessions | 12 participants
- Digital Inclusion Forum | 52 participants
- Social Connectedness Forum | 54 participants
- TPLF Board session | 8 participants
- Local 4948 Union session | 14 participants
- + third-party residents survey results

# participation phase 1 comparison

More participation from:

- 'less frequent users' (+4%)
- East York (+7%) and Scarborough residents (+3%)
- Youth (+2%) and Seniors (+14%)
- Males (+3%)



# focus areas ranking

Where should the library focus in the next five years? Please rank (1 to 8) the following focus areas based on their importance to you and/or your community. (1 being the most important, 8 being the least important). You can organize your choices by dragging and dropping from the list.

Ranking	Answer
#1	Reading, learning and growth
#2	Awareness and availability of library services
#3	Welcoming and inclusive public spaces to meet, study and do work
#4	Democracy, civic engagement and information literacy
#5	Technology and digital inclusion
#6	Social connections and mental well-being
#7	Cost of living, economic resilience and skills development
#8	Environmental sustainability

# idea exchange themes

What can the library do to support the top focus areas you identified? This could be a new idea, something we can do more of, or improve on.

Focus area	Subtheme (number of thoughts)
Reading, learning and growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Expand and enhance collections (72)</li><li>• Programming (62)</li><li>• Reading and information literacy programs (26)</li></ul>
Awareness and availability of library services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Marketing and promotion (52)</li><li>• Longer evenings and weekend hours (38)</li></ul>



## focus group participants

- Black-serving agencies
- City of Toronto's Lived Experience Advisory Group
- Senior newcomers
- Vulnerable populations



## focus group summary of findings

- Awareness and availability of library services is a top priority for all groups
- Reading, learning and growth should always be core principles of the library. Continuous learning is crucial to support job search and personal development.
- Standardization of library programs across all branches is important
- Libraries are considered as a third space, and they should provide a safe and welcoming environment for all. The appearance and cleanliness of the library are very important.
- Libraries should have access to the latest technology and expertise in areas such as AI

# Indigenous feedback sessions

## preliminary key themes

- **Library awareness and usage:** Both users and non-users are unaware of the full offerings of the library and recommend increased promotion and partnerships
- **Inclusion of Indigenous communities:** All participants would like to see more inclusion of Indigenous art, events, and community engagement
- **Barriers to the library:** Participants shared that past negative experiences with the library could make patrons feel unwelcome and prevent participation
- **Supporting skills and culture:** All participants found the library has an important role to play in helping preserve Indigenous culture and support skills development

# strategic plan development process





**strategic priority areas**

Strategic priorities are:

- Evidence based and reflect data and input gathered through research and consultation
- Are strategic and forward looking, not operational
- Identify outcome-focused areas where we want to close the gap between where we are currently and where we want to be in five years
- Reflect where we will focus our efforts, resources and investment over the next five years

Our commitments to Equity, Reconciliation and Intellectual Freedom will be integrated throughout



		Strategic Priority Areas				Sustainable Development Goals Commitment Statement
Overall Ranking	Focus Areas (inputs)	Democracy, civic engagement and social connections	Shared community space	Learning and growth	Awareness and access	
1	Awareness and availability of library services <small>(staff, public, internal analysis)</small>				✓	
2	Reading, learning and growth <small>(staff, public, internal analysis)</small>			✓		
3	Welcoming and inclusive public spaces to meet, study, and do work <small>(staff, public, internal analysis)</small>		✓			
4	Democracy, civic engagement and information literacy <small>(public, internal analysis)</small>	✓				
5	Social connections and mental well-being <small>(staff, internal analysis)</small>	✓	✓			
6	Technology and digital inclusion <small>(staff, public, internal analysis)</small>			✓		
7	Cost of living, economic resilience and skills development <small>(staff, internal analysis)</small>			✓		
8	Environmental sustainability <small>(internal analysis)</small>		✓			✓
		Focus on staff				

# strategic priorities

## key elements

1. Outcomes (what success looks like)
  - Overall outcome (TPL will....)
  - Customer outcomes (So that Torontonians can.....)
  - Staff outcome
2. Strategic Objectives (what we want to achieve)
3. Actions (how we will achieve this)
4. Key Performance Indicators (how we will measure the change)
5. Alignment to City of Toronto strategies

# current needs & challenges

- Increasingly polarized world that is driven by rapidly changing technology and misinformation
- Loneliness and social isolation are creating significant challenges to health and community well-being
- Widespread threats to democratic values and freedoms
- Toronto continues to face a shortage of public spaces
- Students experienced significant setbacks in their reading and math skills during the pandemic
- Cost of living in Toronto continues to create financial and social pressures

## our vision

Toronto Public Library will be recognized as the world's leading library by informing and inspiring Toronto and its communities, making us all more resilient, more knowledgeable, more connected and more successful.

## our 2025-29 strategic plan overall outcomes

### Democracy, civic engagement and social connection

**TPL will be the centre for social connection, community dialogue and strengthening democratic values.**

### Shared community spaces

**TPL's physical and online spaces will be destinations of choice for work, study, collaboration, culture and learning.**

### Learning and growth

**TPL will be the leading hub in Toronto for high-quality, self-directed, and free lifelong learning.**

### Awareness and access

**TPL collections, programs, spaces and services are easy to access and are well used.**

## Democracy, civic engagement and social connections

We will embed opportunities for social connection, civic dialogue and information literacy in everything we do, so that residents have the skills required to sustain a healthy democracy.

### Outcomes

**TPL will be the centre for social connection, community dialogue and strengthening democratic values.**

#### So that...

- Torontonians are more connected to each other and their communities, and have a strong sense of belonging.
- Torontonians are well-informed, able to engage in respectful dialogue and empowered to participate in community decision-making, contributing to a free and just democratic society.
- Torontonians have the ability to navigate various information sources and apply critical thinking skills to assess the accuracy, reliability, and credibility of the information.
- Our staff have the skills they need to facilitate opportunities for social connection, to support information literacy in the digital age and to champion democratic values.

### Proof points

- In the second consultation phase for staff and the public, the “Civic engagement” focus area ranked sixth and fourth, and the “Social connections” focus area ranked fifth and sixth, respectively (consultation)
- The use of AI in schools raises ethical concerns among educators, but also presents an opportunity to encourage critical thinking (environmental scan)
- Social isolation considered one of the biggest unaddressed impacts of the pandemic (social connectedness forum)

## Shared community spaces

We will accelerate the enhancements of our physical and online spaces to establish more welcoming, safe, inclusive, and sustainable multi-use environments that build resilience and belonging in every neighbourhood.

### Outcomes

**TPL's physical and online spaces will be destinations of choice for work, study, collaboration, culture and learning.**

#### So that...

- Torontonians have access to modern, multi-use library spaces that cater to diverse needs in every neighbourhood in the city.
- Torontonians feel welcome, included and safe in library spaces that provide the social infrastructure to gather, collaborate, and build connections.
- Torontonians have sustainable library spaces that are built and maintained to reduce greenhouse gases and are resilient to the risks posed by our changing climate.
- Our staff have the supports, partnerships and expertise they need to make our spaces more welcoming and inclusive. They have the spaces and support they need to collaborate, learn and thrive.

### Proof points

- In the second consultation phase for staff and the public, this focus area ranked third for both staff and the public (consultation)
- Shortage of public spaces in Toronto (public consultation)
- Growing need for co-working and shared spaces (public consultation)
- Libraries are considered as a third space and should provide a safe and welcoming environmental for all (public focus group)

## Learning and growth

We will expand learning opportunities for all ages to develop multiple literacies and personal and professional skills, so that residents can thrive, build economic resilience, and adapt to new technologies, such as AI.

### Outcomes

**TPL will be the leading hub in Toronto for high-quality, self-directed, and free lifelong learning.**

#### So that...

- Torontonians have easy access to in-person and online learning opportunities to develop skills that support their personal and professional goals.
- Torontonians have the digital literacy skills they need to adapt to changes in technology and thrive in the modern world.
- Children and youth have the literacy skills required to succeed and thrive.
- Our staff have the knowledge, tools, training and supports they need to support the development of multiple literacies and skills that our customers need.

### Proof points

- In the second consultation phase for staff and the public, this focus area ranked second and first, respectively (consultation)
- High and increasing cost of living in Toronto (environmental scan)
- Students suffered deep learning setbacks in reading and math during the pandemic (environmental scan)
- Services related to reading, literacy and learning are the top three priorities for library users (third-party survey)

## Awareness and access

We will increase awareness and availability of library services, so that residents in every neighbourhood have equitable access to services that meet their changing needs.

### Outcomes

**TPL collections, programs, spaces and services are easy to access and well used.**

#### So that...

- All Torontonians become members of TPL, are aware of what we offer and use a broad range of library services.
- Torontonians can access library collections, programs, spaces and services equitably in neighbourhoods across the city where, when, and how they want to.
- Torontonians have access to diverse and innovative collections and services that reflect our customers' evolving interests and needs.
- Our staff have the knowledge, tools and skills to deliver high quality, personalized service in a complex and changing environment. They are aware of what is happening at the library, and act as champions for the library in their communities.

### Proof points

- In the second consultation phase for staff and the public, this focus area ranked first and second, respectively (consultation)
- Many respondents were unaware of services TPL provides, including school assignment help, access to specialized technology, and entrepreneurial support (third-party survey)
- Standardization of library programs across all branches is important for newcomers and vulnerable persons (public focus group)



# priority areas

Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3	Priority 4
<b>Democracy, civic engagement and social connections</b>  We will embed opportunities for social connection, civic dialogue and information literacy in everything we do, so that residents have the skills required to sustain a healthy democracy.	<b>Shared community spaces</b>  We will accelerate the enhancements of our physical and online spaces to establish more welcoming, safe, inclusive, and sustainable multi-use environments that build resilience and belonging in every neighbourhood.	<b>Learning and growth</b>  We will expand learning opportunities for all ages to develop multiple literacies and personal and professional skills, so that residents can thrive, build economic resilience, and adapt to new technologies, such as AI.	<b>Awareness and access</b>  We will increase awareness and availability of library services, so that residents in every neighbourhood have equitable access to services that meet their changing needs.

## Focus on staff

Staff are key to achieving our organizational priorities. We will invest in staff to deliver the services our community needs by providing them with the necessary tools, learning and collaboration opportunities.

## next steps

chair elected,  
environmental scan focus  
areas & consultation plan  
january

phase one external  
consultation results & phase  
two consultation plan  
may



strategic plan with  
strategic objectives and  
key actions  
december

environmental scan &  
phase one internal  
consultation results  
april

phase two consultation  
results and  
priority areas  
october



**thank you**  
questions?

**tpl:**