

How Toronto's Library will
help our city and its residents
adapt, connect and thrive.



Toronto Public Library
strategic plan 2025-2029

[tpl.ca](https://www.tpl.ca)



welcome to our new strategic plan

Toronto is a vibrant city that’s always growing and changing, and the Library continues to evolve alongside it to respond to the needs of residents. We provide free and equitable access to services in a welcoming and supportive environment, helping Torontonians thrive.

Our new Strategic Plan is the result of incredible collaboration. Thousands of residents, along with community organizations and partners, came together to help us create a shared vision for the future. This plan reflects input and feedback from the broadest engagement we’ve ever had, and sets a bold direction for the Library’s next chapter.

Through the consultation process, residents made it clear they value the excellent services the Library provides—and they also want more. They want these services to reach more neighbourhoods, and for more people to know about and benefit from the broad range of programs and resources we offer. We also heard that our city needs the Library to continue and to expand our role in bringing people together, supporting civic engagement and democratic values, creating welcoming spaces, improving literacy and skills, and extending access citywide.

This Plan is about creating opportunities and building a more inclusive Toronto where everyone can adapt, connect and thrive. As we embark on this next chapter, we’re excited to work alongside our colleagues, partners and communities to empower Torontonians in every neighbourhood. Together, we can create a stronger, more connected future for this incredible city.



Vickery Bowles
City Librarian

Vickery



Alim Remtulla
TPL Board Chair

TPL board members

- Sakariya Ahmed

Councillor Paul Ainslie

Tamara Balan

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- Amina Mohamed

(Committee Chair)

Alim Remtulla

how to navigate this document

our plan at a glance	_____	page 18
what we’ll focus on	_____	20
the difference that we’ll make	_____	36
how we’ll achieve and measure success	_____	38
how we got here	_____	42



In 2023, **Ethennonnhawahstihnen'** branch opened. It's the first Indigenous named library branch in Toronto. The name – pronounced Etta-nonna wasti-nuh – was gifted by the Huron Wendat, and means “where they had a good and beautiful life.” The library will feature a striking mural, depicted in the rendering at right, titled “Past and Future Amongst Creation,” created by Tsista Kennedy, an Anishinaabe Onyota’a:aka digital artist from Beausoleil First Nation and Oneida Nation of the Thames. This naming and mural support TPL’s commitment to Indigenous Place-making and represent an important step towards Truth and Reconciliation.

Year	Percentage of people who are obese
1980	15
1985	17
1990	19
1995	21
2000	23
2005	25
2010	29

who we are, what we do, why we matter

Together, our vision, mission and values are a central foundation of our Strategic Plan. Our vision statement serves as a guide for what we’re aiming to achieve, while our mission statement describes what we do. Our values highlight our core principles and identify what’s important to us. You can read more about them at [tpl.ca/about-the-library](https://www.tpl.ca/about-the-library). Finally, our commitment statements help to further explain and reinforce our values, and work together with our policies to guide and ensure accountability for the delivery of our services.

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.

strategic plan

our mission

Toronto Public Library provides free and equitable access to services which meet the changing needs of Torontonians. The Library preserves and promotes universal access to a broad range of human knowledge, experience, information and ideas in a welcoming and supportive environment.

our values

equity • diversity
intellectual freedom
innovation • inclusion
integrity • accountability
service orientation

our commitments

equity

Our commitment to equity informs how we design and deliver our services. We are committed to creating and maintaining work and public service environments where everyone is welcomed, included and supported, and that are grounded in tolerance and mutual respect. Read our full commitment statement at [tpl.ca/equity-statement](https://www.tpl.ca/equity-statement).

intellectual freedom

As a public library, we are committed to freedom of expression as a core value of our services. We will safeguard each individual’s privacy to decide what they want to read, view, listen to, or services they want to access, and we will provide opportunities for ideas and opinions to be freely exchanged, including those that are unconventional and unpopular. Read our full commitment statement at [tpl.ca/intellectual-freedom](https://www.tpl.ca/intellectual-freedom).

accessibility

We foster an inclusive work and public service environment that supports persons with disabilities. We are dedicated to the identification, removal and prevention of systemic accessibility barriers within our services, programs, employment practices, and digital and physical spaces.

TPL’s commitment to UN sustainable development goals

The UN (United Nations) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and improve the lives and prospects of everyone, everywhere. They have been adopted by all United Nations member nations, including Canada, to provide a shared blueprint for the future that balances the issues of environmental stewardship, social equity and economic prosperity. The 17 SDGs are interconnected, and recognize that climate change has a multiplier effect on social and economic inequalities.

Libraries around the world offer services that contribute to achieving the SDGs in different ways – promoting literacy and learning, providing safe and welcoming spaces, advancing digital inclusion, and providing access to knowledge and information that fosters peace and democracy. The four Strategic Plan priorities for 2025-2029 will make contributions specifically to the SDGs identified shown here to the right. TPL will also develop a Sustainable Development Goals Commitment Statement which further outlines the ways that our broad range of services contribute to the SDGs now and into the future.



why the library

Toronto Public Library has the vital active ingredients to help Torontonians thrive in our city. This goes beyond our people and programs, our services and our resources. We uniquely serve our city and its residents by creating value through experiences that are:

accessible

We are free and local, reaching and serving you where you live, and tailoring our services to your needs.



inclusive

We are supportive and welcoming to all.



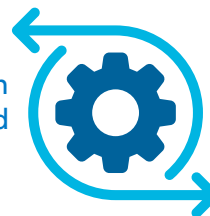
expert

Our knowledgeable staff are trusted, credible and neutral, and can help you pursue any interest.



flexible

Our services are personalized so you can use us where, when and how you like.



No other public institution has the mandate and reach, physical and technical infrastructure, talent and community presence to empower Torontonians the way we do.

bringing to life our commitment to intellectual freedom

Libraries around the world are facing increasing intellectual freedom challenges on a wide range of issues, not just with physical materials like books and movies, but also with programs, e-content, Internet access, room bookings and exhibits. These challenges are coming from all sides of the political and social spectrum, and can limit access to information, suppress civic engagement, and silence voices — especially those of more marginalized communities.

To highlight the issue of censorship and reaffirm the important role public libraries play in protecting intellectual freedom, in 2023, TPL joined the Book Sanctuary movement, started by Chicago Public Library, and launched our Book Sanctuary Collection.

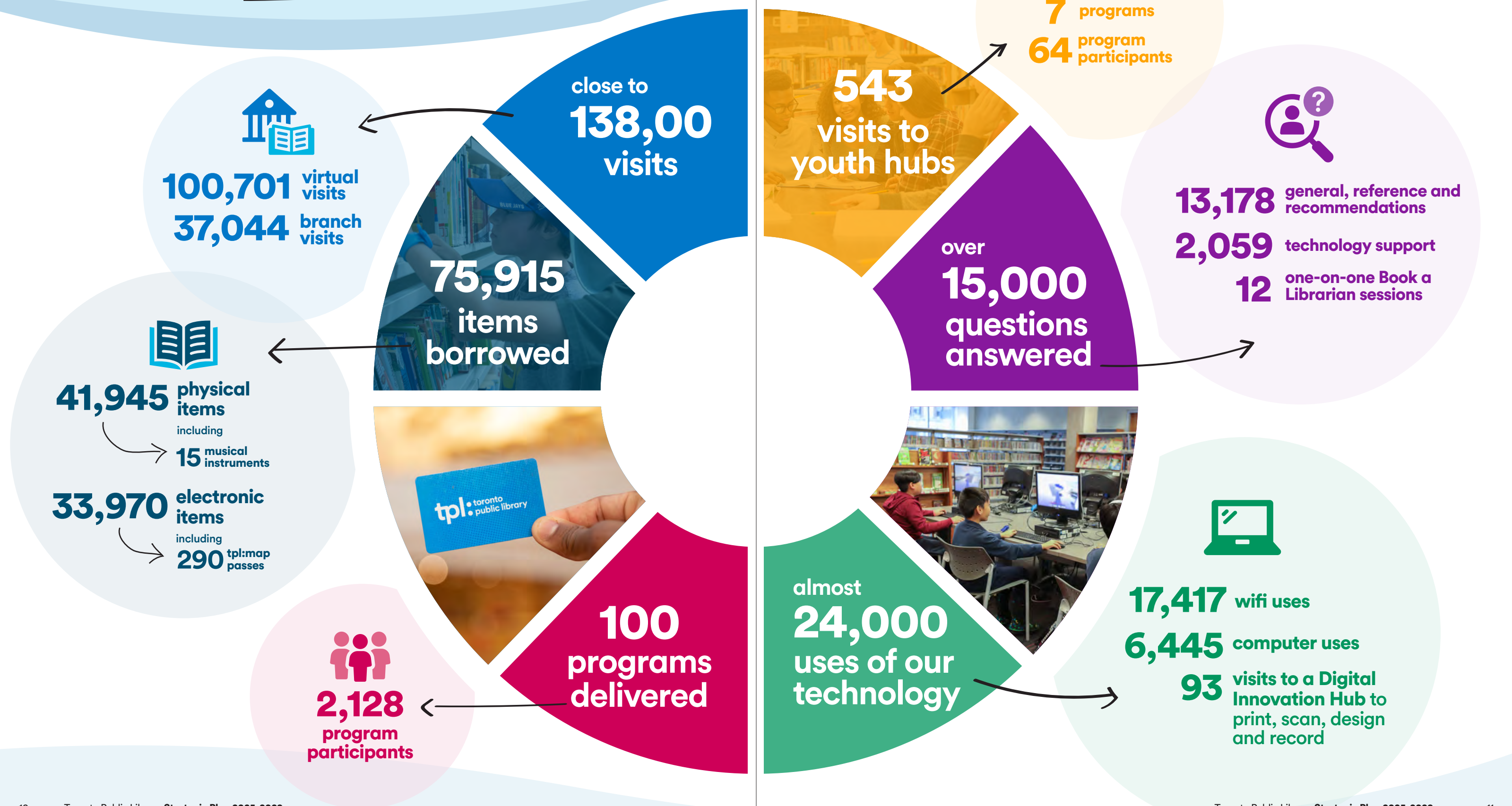
The Collection represents books that have been challenged, censored or removed from a public library or school in North America. The 50 adult, teen and children's books are available online or in our branches, or by visiting the Book Sanctuary Reference Collections at the Toronto Reference Library and North York Central Library (pictured here).

This is one of the many ways we're bringing to life our commitment to protecting and defending Torontonians' rights to freely access a broad range of diverse materials online and at our 100 branches across the city. Learn more at tpl.ca/intellectual-freedom.



a day in the life

On an average day at TPL, there are...



opinion: the globe & mail

“As climate chaos grows, libraries serve as warming and cooling centres. They offer free WiFi for those who can’t afford it, a bit of story-time respite for overwhelmed parents and caregivers, language courses for new Canadians, free technology training courses, job training for hundreds of thousands, cooking classes, and a place for students to study, and gig workers to work, as well as social interaction for the growing legions of the lonely...

... There is no doubt libraries are good for our health, individually and collectively.

Paying more attention to the health and social benefits of libraries is overdue

by André Picard, The Globe and Mail
October 31, 2023



what we’ll focus on

the difference that we’ll make

how we’ll achieve and measure success



the plan

our plan at a glance

Toronto is grappling with pressing challenges, including social isolation, polarization driven by misinformation and disinformation, rapid technological shifts like AI, threats to democratic values, a shortage of public spaces, pandemic-related learning losses, and rising costs of living. These issues significantly impact residents' well-being, opportunities and community cohesion.

Our new Strategic Plan is a bold response to these issues. It focuses on bringing people together, supporting civic engagement, creating welcoming spaces, improving literacy and skills and expanding services to more neighbourhoods. Residents have told us that they want more access to the Library's services and greater awareness of the Library's offerings to maximize its impact citywide.

This Plan is about more than addressing challenges — it's about creating opportunities. By helping people adapt, connect and thrive, the Library is building a better, more inclusive Toronto for everyone.

what we'll focus on

our strategic priorities

“Library staff are trained to welcome everyone. They don't care about where you come from, whether you're young or old, or where you were born and so on. It's open to everyone.”
– TPL customer

focus on staff

Our staff are the foundation of everything we do, and we are committed to providing them with the tools, training and support they need to thrive, as well as opportunities for growth, collaboration and professional development.

Each of our strategic priorities includes a dedicated focus on staff — an intentional effort to ensure our team has the skills, resources and support they need to contribute to achieving our strategic priorities. By investing in our staff, we are supporting their well-being, enabling them to deliver responsive services and create a welcoming, inclusive environment for all. This commitment to staff is essential to realizing the Library's organizational priorities and delivering lasting, meaningful impact in our communities.

In each of our priorities, you'll find clear examples of how we're putting this commitment into action.

- 1 social connection, civic engagement and democracy
- 2 shared community spaces
- 3 learning and growth
- 4 awareness and availability





working together with the TPL Foundation

The Toronto Public Library Foundation is a key contributor to our Strategic Plan, playing an important role in advancing and accelerating its outcomes. Fundraising and donor support allow TPL to innovate, develop new programs and scale impact to meet community needs faster.

Together with the TPL Foundation, we will continue to provide services that address the evolving needs of Torontonians and support our Strategic Plan priorities.

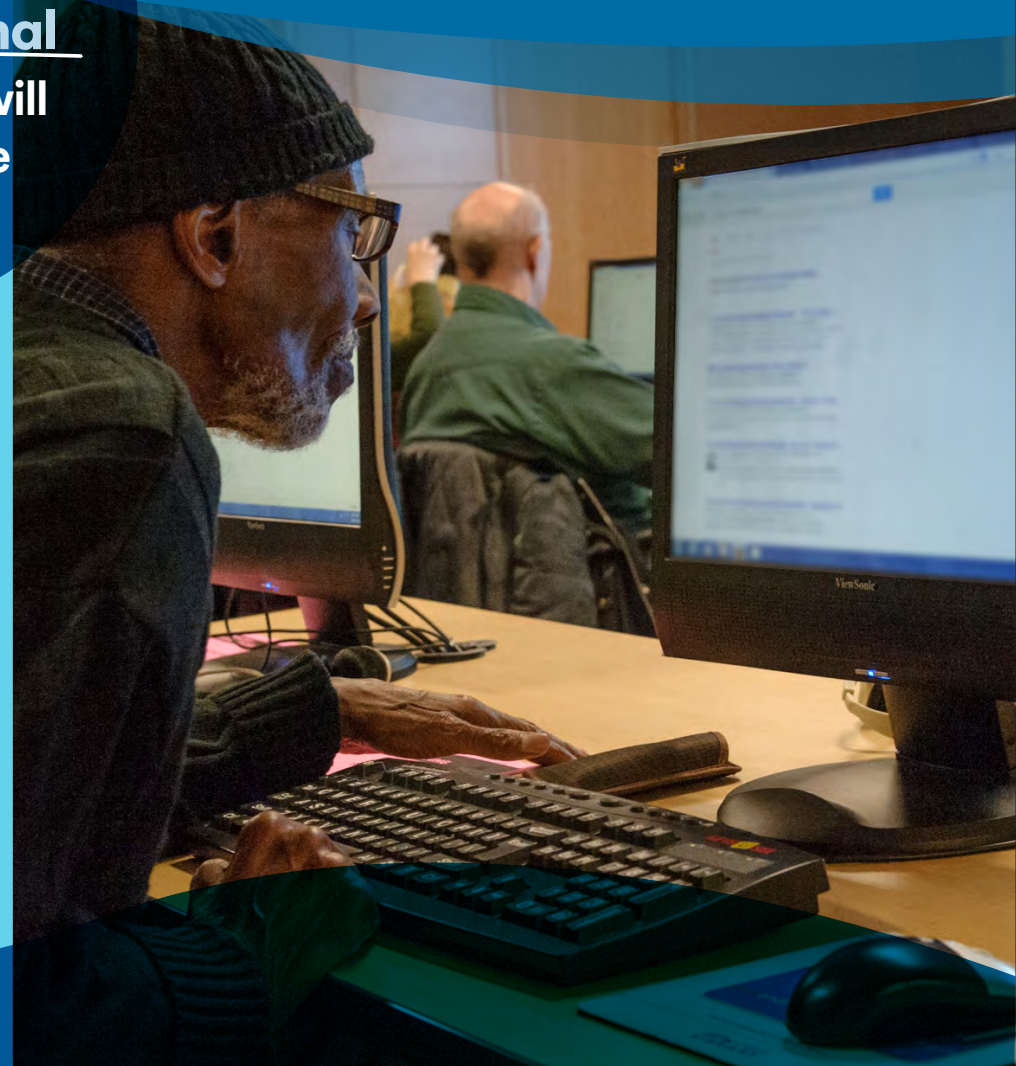
Since 1997, the TPL Foundation has raised over \$117 million from generous donors, significantly impacting those who rely on the Library's extensive resources and welcoming spaces.

On the next page, you'll find just one example of the many ways the TPL Foundation has strengthened the Library's impact in Toronto and innovated to help us achieve our strategic priorities.

The TPL Foundation and our Digital Strategy are key foundational supports that will help us achieve our Plan

aligning with our Digital Strategy

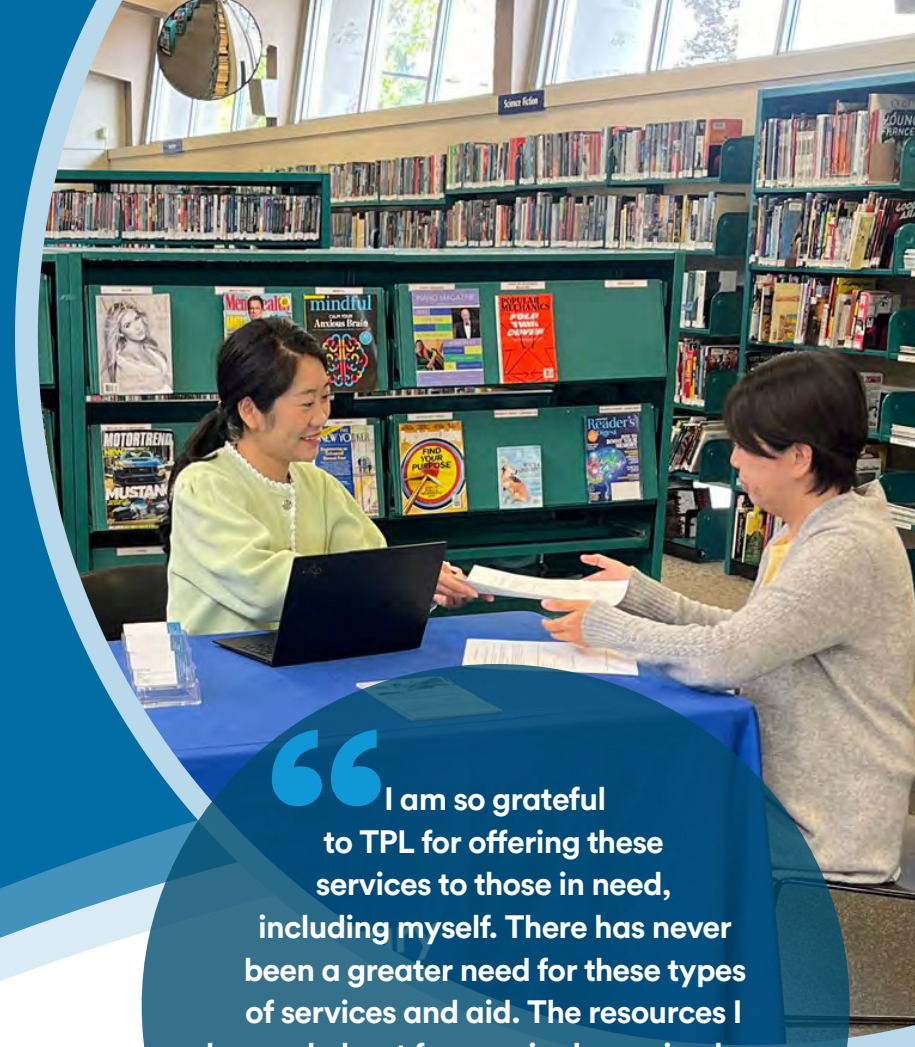
TPL's Digital Strategy ensures that our staff and customers have the right combination of technologies and supports to meet their evolving needs. It describes a shared vision, course of action, and required investments needed to deliver exceptional digital value and experiences, and to support the priorities and outcomes set out in TPL's Strategic Plan.



innovative collaboration for a lasting impact

TPL's Financial Empowerment program works with community partners to offer financial counseling and literacy in library spaces, helping low-income individuals improve their financial well-being. Advisors from partner agencies assist with tax filing, helping customers access government benefits, save money on a limited income and plan for the future.

This initiative also represents an innovative approach to funding new library services. Through collaboration with the TPL Foundation, TPL has been able to transition generous donor support for this pilot initiative into permanent ongoing funding for the service — which we're continuing to expand over the next five years — from the City of Toronto.



“I am so grateful to TPL for offering these services to those in need, including myself. There has never been a greater need for these types of services and aid. The resources I learned about from a single session have already made an impact and I am looking forward to learning more in upcoming sessions.”
— TPL customer

Results achieved in one year at two library branches delivering the service:

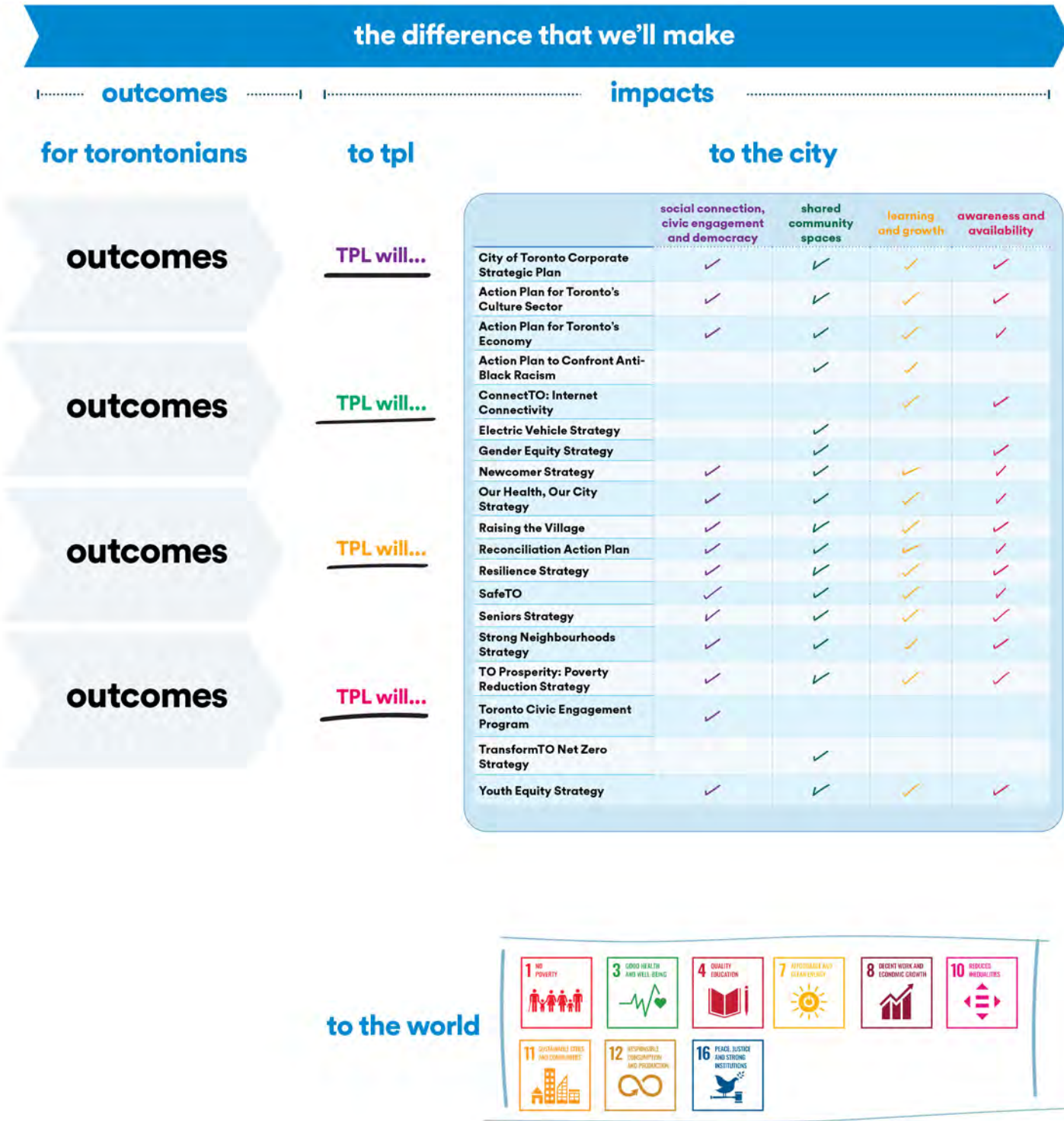
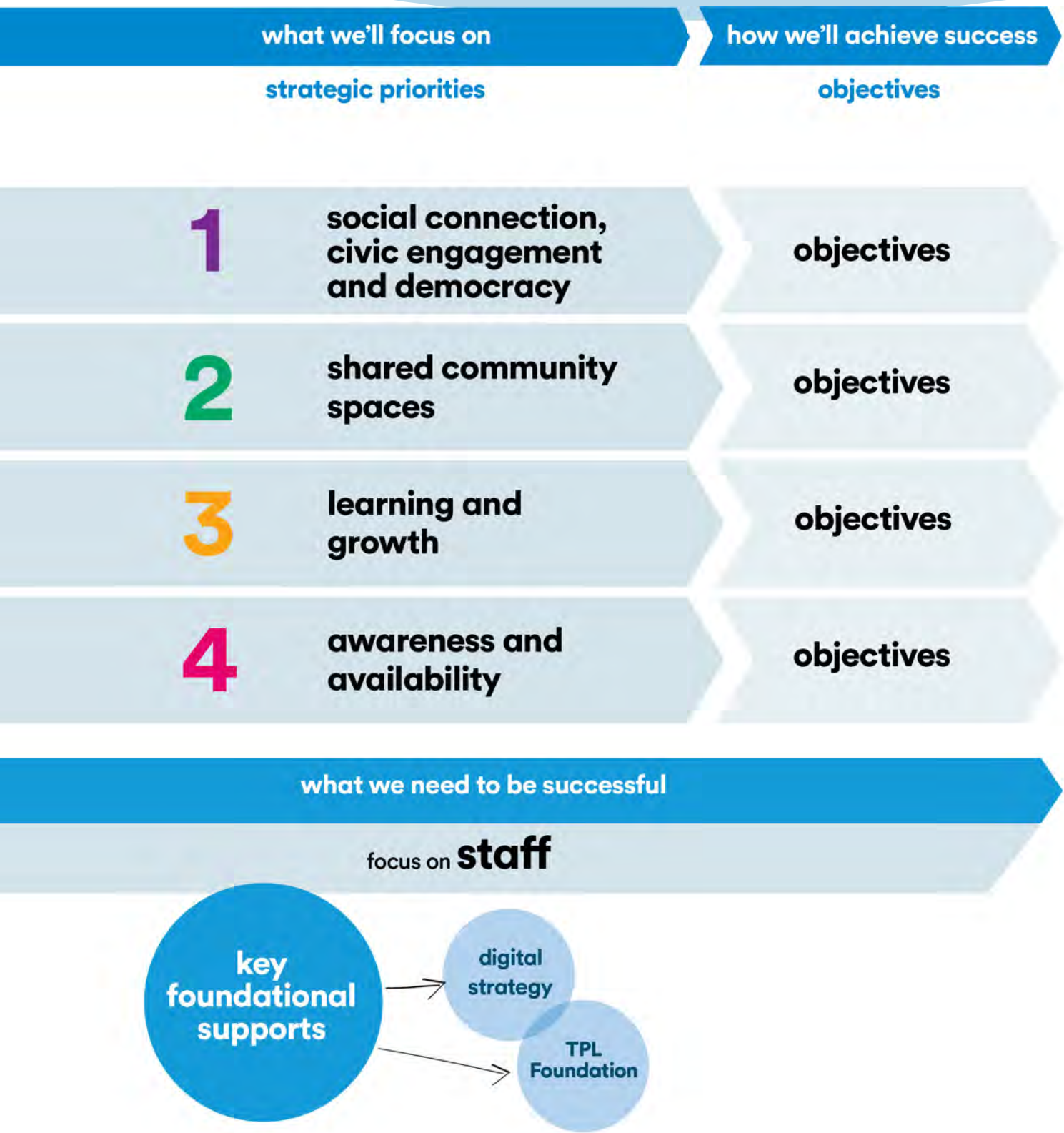
\$3M+
unlocked

by participants through tax filing and help accessing benefits

40
programs
on financial topics,
attended by
480+
participants

8
tax clinics
2,500+
one-on-one consultations

Here is a high-level view of the Plan, which will guide our work over the next five years.





1 social connection, civic engagement and democracy

IN TORONTO

and around the world, we are facing an increasingly polarized society fueled by rapid technological change and the spread of misinformation and disinformation. At the same time, loneliness and social isolation are becoming major challenges to both individual health and community well-being.

To be active participants in a civil and democratic society, we all need free and open access to diverse information and ideas, along with opportunities for open, respectful conversation.

Libraries are places where people from all walks of life come together to explore new ideas and connect with one another, fostering a sense of belonging and encouraging critical thinking, mutual understanding and collective growth.

- Toronto is one of the loneliest places in the country.¹
- People who are actively engaged in civic life are more likely to vote and less likely to be affected by polarized political messaging.²
- We heard clearly from consultations that Torontonians need support in digital media literacy, including practicing responsible and ethical digital citizenship, understanding how to protect personal privacy, navigating misinformation and contributing positively to online communities.



1 social connection, civic engagement and democracy

“Help us learn how to spot fake information and find what is reputable. This is important to maintain a democratic society.”
– feedback from Strategic Plan consultation

We will embed opportunities for **social connection, civic dialogue** and **critical thinking** in everything we do...

...so that residents have the skills to **sustain a healthy democracy.**


what success looks like

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 civic dialogue and empowered to participate in community decision-making, contributing to a free and just democratic society.

Torontonians can navigate various information sources and apply critical thinking skills to assess the accuracy, reliability and credibility of the information.

 Develop and implement approaches for how all TPL programs can build social connections and combat social isolation.

 Develop and implement intellectual freedom programming and an awareness campaign focused on the issues of social connectedness and polarization.

some examples of what you'll see

 Develop and implement a vision and service model for a learning and engagement centre focused on democratic values.

 Expand existing and offer new programs that help develop digital citizenship and essential skills to identify misinformation and disinformation.

focus on staff

“We have a regular customer that truly sees the library as a friend. Staff really spend a lot of time with her because they know she's not there just for books and programs – she's there to connect.”

– TPL staff



Our staff will have the **skills they need** to facilitate opportunities for **social connection**, to support **information literacy** in the digital age and to champion **democratic values.**

Equip staff with the competencies to facilitate conversations and cross-cultural dialogue about public issues.

some examples of what you'll see

Provide staff with learning opportunities to effectively support social health and foster social connections in their everyday interactions.



2 shared community spaces

AS TORONTO'S population grows and living spaces get smaller, the city faces a shortage of inclusive public “third spaces” (outside of home and work) where residents can engage in meaningful activities. Without access to these community spaces, residents can experience greater isolation and have fewer opportunities to interact. In a growing and diverse city like Toronto, a lack of these spaces can deepen inequality and make it harder for residents to thrive. Additionally, there is a pressing need for the development of sustainable, climate-resilient buildings that can serve the diverse needs of the community.

Libraries provide welcoming, inclusive and free public spaces for people to work, study and connect. They are vital community hubs that support individual and community resilience. TPL has a Service Delivery Model that establishes delivery standards for the level of services, size and types of multi-use spaces that should be available – but aren't always – in all neighbourhoods across the city to support diverse local communities.

- Through public consultations, we heard that Toronto lacks sufficient third spaces where people can gather, collaborate and build connections outside of home and work.
- Many people with disabilities encounter significant barriers when trying to access indoor and outdoor public spaces.³
- Climate change is greatly impacting the environment and communities⁴, creating a need for sustainable library spaces that can adapt and create resilience to these challenges.

2 shared community spaces

We will accelerate the **enhancements of our physical spaces...**

...to establish more **welcoming, safe, inclusive and sustainable** multi-use environments that **build resilience and belonging** in every neighbourhood.

what success looks like

Torontonians have access to up-to-date 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.

The Toronto Public Library is one of the most important services this city has and it's immensely valuable. The library has always been able to provide me with the books and services that I want and need and has created a space in this city that feels easy and nice to be in. Thank you!

– feedback from Strategic Plan consultation



Accelerate the enhancements of our physical spaces that meet the community's needs, supporting social connection, collaboration and quiet study.

some examples of what you'll see



Enhance outdoor spaces for greater public use.



Broaden use of sustainable technologies and practices in new and existing branches.

focus on **staff**

“When I need a break from the world, with all its ups and downs (and downs and downs and downs) and/or my stressful life, I seek ‘refuge’ in a library branch. I can settle into a comfortable chair and look out the windows, or grab a children’s book to calm my senses (I am neurodivergent) in the beautiful illustrations. Or ‘just be,’ no questions asked... TPL offers me a place where I can just be; what an awesome gift.”

– TPL customer

Our staff will have **the supports, partnerships and expertise** they need to make our spaces more **welcoming and inclusive**. They will have the spaces and support they need to **collaborate, learn and thrive**.

some examples of what you'll see

Foster a safe and welcoming environment by implementing system-wide initiatives for welcoming spaces, workplace health and safety, mental health and public safety.

Provide training and resources to help staff offer trauma-informed services. This includes support from Library Safety Specialists and Mental Health First Aid training.



3 learning and growth

TORONTO IS

facing challenges that impact the personal and professional success of its residents. The high cost of living and rising education expenses are making it increasingly difficult, especially for those from lower-income backgrounds, to access the skills needed to succeed in a rapidly changing economy.

Compounding this issue is the digital divide, particularly in fields like technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI), which leaves some communities,

including equity-deserving groups, at a disadvantage. Moreover, the pandemic has deepened literacy gaps and contributed to a decline in reading habits. These barriers make it difficult for people to reskill, advance in their careers and reach their full potential.

Learning is key to personal and professional growth, empowering individuals to adapt, contribute and succeed in an ever-changing world. The Library is uniquely positioned to help address growing societal disparities and ensure that all residents

have the opportunities and support they need to succeed and contribute to Toronto's future.

- Toronto faces a complex array of social and financial challenges that are impacting the well-being of residents, resulting in an increase in mental health issues.
- The impact of generative AI is expected to be profound, offering significant opportunities for learning, innovation and problem-solving, but its benefits will depend on how effectively it is integrated into society and whether privacy violations and social inequalities are mitigated.⁵
- Students suffered deep learning setbacks in reading and math during the pandemic.⁶

digital innovation hub



focus on staff

3 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.

what success looks like

Children and youth have the literacy skills required to succeed and thrive.

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 skills they need to adapt to changes in technology and thrive in the modern world.

“More workshops on financial literacy for adults and children/teens. With rising costs of living, it is more important than ever to learn how to responsibly manage money, and how to invest for the future.”

– feedback from Strategic Plan consultation

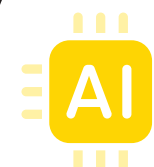


Expand and enhance literacy programs, such as Leading to Reading, in more neighbourhoods.

some examples of what you'll see



Expand financial literacy services that provide essential tools and counselling which help people access financial support resources.



Expand AI skills program options and increase access to AI software and technologies.



“Library staff are indispensable. They got me through my degree because my degree was super research-heavy. They were the knowledge holders on how to best make use of the system.”

– TPL customer

Our staff will have the **knowledge, tools, training and supports** they need to support the **development of digital literacy and skills** that our customers need.

an example of what you'll see

Create and implement structured learning pathways for core skill areas related to digital literacy and emerging technologies like AI.



4 awareness and availability

LIBRARY SERVICES

have a significant impact on residents, but not everyone is aware of the range of services the Library offers, nor can they always easily access them. For TPL to have the greatest impact, we need to ensure that residents in every neighbourhood can easily access our services. TPL's Social Impact Study (tpl.ca/social-impact) provided concrete evidence that demonstrates how libraries support the growth and well-being of Torontonians, particularly vulnerable and equity-deserving groups. Through consultations, Torontonians expressed a strong desire for expanded services to improve access in neighbourhoods across the city, and the need to ensure that people who will benefit most from these services are aware of them.

Libraries offer books and so much more — they provide welcoming public spaces for community connection, technology access, learning resources and cultural engagement. The best library is one that is open and responsive to the diverse needs of the community. Without easy access to library services, residents may experience greater social isolation, fewer opportunities for personal and professional growth, and a widening gap in educational and economic outcomes, ultimately affecting the community's overall well-being.

- According to a public survey conducted in 2024, Torontonians have a strong awareness of the traditional services of the Library, but fewer are aware of specialized offerings like homework help, specialized technology and support for entrepreneurs and small businesses.
- Torontonians across all neighbourhoods are seeking greater access to library services to better meet their evolving needs.
- Expanding library hours emerged as one of the key themes raised by Toronto residents during the public consultations.



focus on staff

4 awareness and availability

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**.

what success looks like

Torontonians are aware of what we offer and use a broad range of library services.

Torontonians can conveniently access library collections, programs, spaces and services equitably in neighbourhoods across the city where, when and how they want to.

Torontonians have a rich selection of innovative collections that reflect their evolving interests and needs.

“

It's the best library system in the world! I read because libraries and bookmobiles were available to me as a child. Keep supplying books to all of us!

— feedback from Strategic Plan consultation



Develop and implement membership and engagement strategies to actively engage new and existing members.

some
examples
of what
you'll see



Increase library open hours to maximize access to in-branch services and spaces.



Identify opportunities to reduce wait times for items.



I am working in Home Library Services (HLS) and most of my customers are home-bound and have disabilities (visual or physical). Lots of them call to just thank us and say TPL's HLS services are their only communication with the world around them, the only way they could get information about our changing world. Some said they are impatiently waiting for monthly delivery to explore the things happening around them.

— TPL staff

Our staff will have the **knowledge, tools and skills** to deliver **high quality, personalized service**. They are aware of what the Library has to offer and **act as champions** for the Library in their communities.

an example
of what
you'll see

Enhance staff knowledge and understanding of the breadth and depth of TPL services through training, communication, information-sharing and collaboration tools.

the difference that we'll make

In addition to the outcomes we're striving to achieve for Torontonians through this Plan, we're also looking to achieve longer-term positive impacts for TPL as an organization, for the city and for the global community.

to tpl

1 TPL will be recognized internationally as the centre for social connection, community dialogue and strengthening democratic values.

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

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

4 TPL will deliver exceptional value to all residents through increased awareness of services that are easy to access and well used.

to the world

Through our Plan, we're contributing to the achievement of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – a global blueprint to address poverty, environmental sustainability, social equity and economic prosperity.



to the city

This Plan sets out key outcomes to drive transformational change in our city. However, addressing complex social challenges requires collaboration across multiple sectors — including government, public, private, non-profit and academic partners.

Over the next five years and beyond, we will continue to strengthen and build partnerships to align goals, share data and set common measures to focus our efforts and amplify our collective impact.

Our goal is to address the city's systemic challenges and empower Torontonians to take advantage of opportunities, helping both the city and its residents thrive.

Some of the City of Toronto key strategies we're aligned with are below.

	social connection, civic engagement and democracy	shared community spaces	learning and growth	awareness and availability
City of Toronto Corporate Strategic Plan	✓	✓	✓	✓
Action Plan for Toronto's Culture Sector	✓	✓	✓	✓
Action Plan for Toronto's Economy	✓	✓	✓	✓
Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism		✓	✓	
ConnectTO: Internet Connectivity			✓	✓
Electric Vehicle Strategy		✓		
Gender Equity Strategy		✓		✓
Newcomer Strategy	✓	✓	✓	✓
Our Health, Our City Strategy	✓	✓	✓	✓
Raising the Village	✓	✓	✓	✓
Reconciliation Action Plan	✓	✓	✓	✓
Resilience Strategy	✓	✓	✓	✓
SafeTO	✓	✓	✓	✓
Seniors Strategy	✓	✓	✓	✓
Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy	✓	✓	✓	✓
TO Prosperity: Poverty Reduction Strategy	✓	✓	✓	✓
Toronto Civic Engagement Program	✓			
TransformTO Net Zero Strategy		✓		
Youth Equity Strategy	✓	✓	✓	✓



how we'll achieve and measure success

why measurement matters

Measurement ensures we're able to track our progress in implementing what we've set out to do. It also helps to ensure we're focused on the right activities that are delivering the impact we want. Alongside tracking outputs such as branch visits and program participation, which measure *how much* we are doing, we are also enhancing our ability to measure outcomes, which tell us more about *how well* we are doing and the impact we are having.

By measuring our performance, we can:

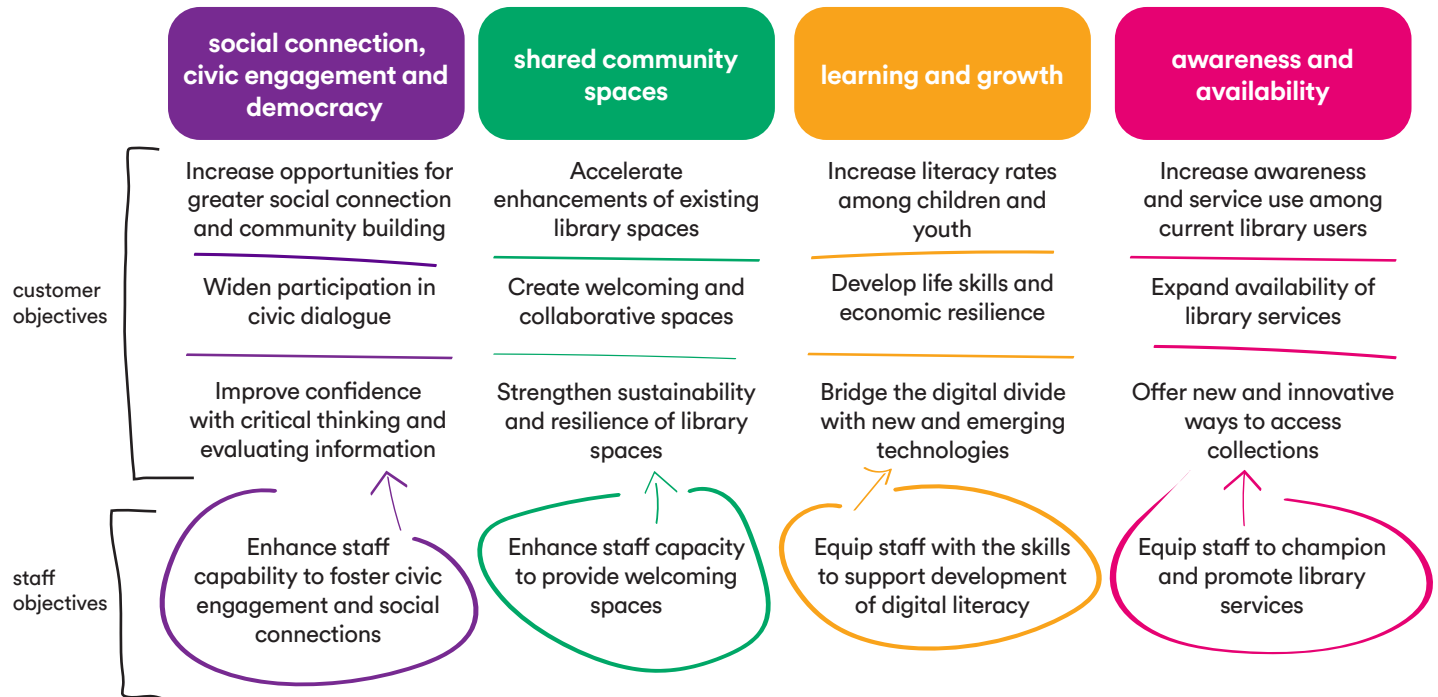
- maintain accountability and transparency to Torontonians;
- stay focused on the most important priorities for our communities;
- adjust to shifts in the service environment as needed;
- continuously improve the quality of our programs and services;
- make data-informed decisions now and in the future.

To help focus our work, we translated our four priorities into a series of objectives that describe how we'll achieve our outcomes.

As we've highlighted throughout the Plan, each of our priorities also includes a dedicated focus on staff to ensure they have what they need to support the achievement of our strategic priorities. And so, to support this work, we've defined objectives for our staff outcomes as well.

Below you will see all of our objectives to achieve customer and staff outcomes across all of our priorities.

Specific initiatives and measures will be identified for each of the objectives and will drive the execution of our Plan over the next five years. Along the way, we'll track, measure and evaluate our progress with a series of established strategic and business planning tools and processes, which will allow us to adjust our approach as needed.





finding books and belonging at the library

When World War II veteran Bert Hodes turned 101 years old, he realized he had gone through the entirety of his own book collection and decided it was time to get a library card to access new materials.

Much to Bert's delight, that library card has opened up a whole new world of possibilities. In addition to adding countless new books to his reading list, he joined the Seniors Club at his local Jane/Sheppard branch, which he attends every Friday. He has formed a strong bond with

the other seniors in the club, and has become a favourite of the branch staff, who appreciate his quick wit and positive outlook, and look forward to his regular visits.

On his recent 102nd birthday, the staff at Jane/Sheppard branch hosted a special celebration for Bert at the club's weekly meeting, complete with singing, dancing and a cake. In a speech he prepared for the occasion, Bert said: "I like coming to this place, it's a very nice place and I like the people who work here."

“Here at the library, [the Seniors Club members] have become like a little family. So we are like a little library family that takes care of each other.

– Senior Library Assistant Doriana Onorati



how we got here

Building TPL's Strategic Plan was a collective effort over a year-long process involving nearly 6,000 library staff, Torontonians, community partners and other stakeholders. Through extensive research, surveys, idea exchanges, consultation forums, focus groups and interviews, staff gathered valuable insights on how TPL can best support Torontonians and their communities now and in the future.



5,948*
participants

*largest consultation for
TPL to date

862
staff

5,086
residents,
community partners
and stakeholders

phased approach to consultation

phase 1

During this phase, we did research, an environmental scan and broad consultation. The results were grouped into eight themes which suggested how TPL can best support Toronto now and in the future.

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

phase 2

In the second phase, we did more consultation on the eight themes, including focus groups and interviews with staff, community partners, industry experts and audiences underrepresented in the first phase. Based on this input, we finalized our four priority areas to focus on.

- 1 social connection, civic engagement and democracy
- 2 shared community spaces
- 3 learning and growth
- 4 awareness and availability

research

The planning process began with extensive research to identify current contexts and trends. See pages 44-46 for highlights from this scan.

 300+
sources
consulted



focus groups and interviews

Smaller group conversations and consultations were conducted to validate and prioritize focus areas while particularly targeting and engaging with underrepresented audiences.

 14 focus
groups and
interviews

focus groups

- 4 equity-deserving groups
- 4 staff groups
- 1 Indigenous community group

interviews

- 5 with members of Indigenous communities

idea exchange

An online platform made it easy for staff, customers and the public from across the city to share ideas. Participants could also rate others' suggestions based on what they considered most important.

 3,900+
public and staff

 3,500+
ideas shared

 102,000+
ratings

survey of torontonians

A telephone and online survey was conducted with both users and non-users. This survey aimed to explore and understand the use, perceptions and value of library service for Torontonians.

 1,207
responses

81% users

19% non-users

consultation forums

These longer-form consultation sessions were focused on specific themes, and workshopped ideas and gathered input from staff, partners and industry experts.

 6 staff
consultation
forums

3 expert
forums

City of Toronto

digital inclusion

social connectedness



context and trends

arts and culture

Toronto's arts and culture sector is a vital economic driver that contributes \$11 billion to the city's GDP.⁷ It supports a wide range of creative industries and attracts global audiences that help build Toronto's reputation as a leading cultural hub. Art also fosters a sense of community and promotes cultural and social inclusion.⁸ Public support for the arts is high, with 89% of Torontonians believing that art makes the city a better place to live in.⁹

democracy, government and civic engagement

While Canadians tend to be relatively interested in public affairs and politics,¹⁰ younger demographics are moving away from traditional forms of political engagement like voting,¹¹ and visible minorities and people with lower levels of education are less likely to vote in the federal election.¹² Torontonians are connected to fewer friends and family and are less likely to volunteer or participate in

community activities than they were before the COVID-19 pandemic.¹³ In an increasingly polarized world that is driven by rapidly changing technology and misinformation and disinformation, there is a need for increased civic literacy and critical thinking skills.

Civic engagement in Toronto continues to be a critical element in decision-making processes. Recent political issues shaping Toronto neighbourhoods include: affordable housing, transit, cost of living, health care, public safety, education and the environment.

economy and work

Toronto's economy has experienced both growth and challenges, shaped by factors such as the pandemic, global economic shifts and the city's evolving industries. Toronto is one of the most expensive cities in Canada. Its Consumer Price Index rose 3.9% in 2023, the highest increase since 1991,¹⁴ and food and housing prices have continued to rise.¹⁵ Although Toronto's labour market is expanding,¹⁶ there is a significant labour shortage in sectors such as the service and food industries.¹⁷ Unemployment remains disproportionately higher among equity-deserving groups.

Racialized minorities and immigrants experience greater unemployment and underemployment collectively.¹⁸

education and training

The pandemic and the rapid implementation of emerging technologies has transformed the landscape of learning in many ways. The use of artificial intelligence in elementary and high schools presents an opportunity to encourage critical thinking but raises ethical concerns among educators.¹⁹ The pandemic also led to considerable learning gaps in reading and math,²⁰ and intensified the issue of loneliness among children and youth.²¹ There is increased need for student mental health supports and tools to support inclusion and engagement in schools,²² and to address incidents of school violence.²³

Digital and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) skills are the biggest category of skills lacking in the Canadian workforce.²⁴ Toronto also faces a growing shortage of skilled trades workers due to a lack of younger workers entering the trades to replace the aging workforce.²⁵

environment and sustainability

Climate change will continue to significantly impact Toronto's environment and communities in the coming years. The global average temperature in 2023 was the highest ever recorded, and the 10 warmest years on record have occurred in the past decade.²⁶ Increases in extreme weather events, including more frequent heat waves, heavy rainfall and flooding, air quality issues, biodiversity loss and public health risks, are expected across the city.²⁷

housing

Toronto has one of the most expensive housing markets in Canada and is experiencing a housing shortage as population growth exceeds development.²⁸ The cost of housing is rising faster than income levels with 42% of Toronto tenants spending more than 30% of their income on shelter.²⁹

Homelessness is becoming increasingly prevalent in Toronto, particularly among people under 40, who now represent a significant portion of those affected.³⁰

mental health and well-being

Toronto faces complex social challenges that are impacting the well-being of residents. Social determinants of health, such as income and race, significantly contribute to health disparities within Toronto communities.³¹ Mental health issues and opioid overdoses have surged in Toronto³² and have been further exacerbated by the pandemic.³³

The underfunding of mental health services and lack of adequate community support has placed libraries on the frontlines helping people in crisis.³⁴

non-profit sector

Non-profit organizations in Toronto are adapting to shifting social, economic and technological landscapes. Nearly two-thirds of non-profits have reported a surge in demand for their programs and services, while half have faced pandemic-related revenue losses. Since the pandemic, residents have been interacting with other people and volunteering less frequently, resulting in fewer donations to social services.³⁵

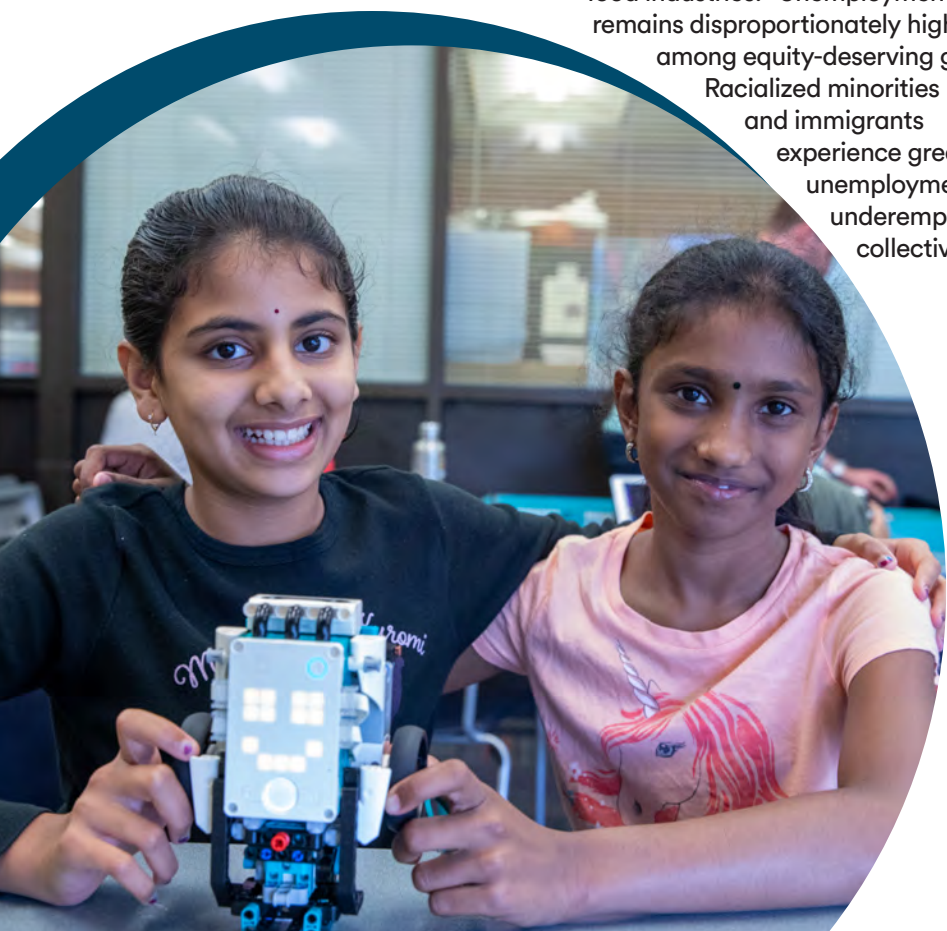
public safety

Violence in Toronto has become a pressing issue, with various forms of crime and social unrest impacting the city. In 2022, Toronto's Violent Crime Severity Index rose by 16%, while hate crimes surged by 42%,³⁶ correlating with global events.³⁷ Additionally, steep rises in violent incidents have been reported on public transit³⁸ and in schools in recent years,³⁹ underscoring the broader issue of public safety in the city.

reconciliation and Indigenous communities

The legacy of colonial practices, such as residential schools, continues to affect Indigenous communities, contributing to inter-generational trauma.⁴⁰ Indigenous communities are more likely to experience poverty, food insecurity and limited access to healthcare.⁴¹ Substandard housing conditions are widespread, with 23% of Indigenous people in Toronto experiencing homelessness.⁴² Indigenous individuals, particularly women and youth, face significant challenges in employment and economic security, with these issues worsened by the pandemic.⁴³

Most youth feel positively about their Indigenous identity.⁴⁴ Studies show that active use or learning of an Indigenous language has positive health benefits, especially for mental health and suicide prevention.⁴⁵



social development

Toronto is ranked the third most impoverished city in Canada, primarily due to soaring housing costs and the overall high cost of living. The city is also experiencing significant population growth, driven by high levels of immigration.⁴⁶ Toronto's population is also aging at a rapid pace,⁴⁷ and the top emerging issue facing seniors in Canada is staying socially connected and active, with 30% of Canadian seniors at risk of social isolation.⁴⁸

Equity-deserving groups and vulnerable populations continue to face challenges including increased social isolation, mental health issues, homelessness, discrimination⁴⁹ and barriers to employment. In addition to these challenges, six in 10 Canadians with one or more disabilities encounter barriers related to accessing indoor and outdoor public spaces.⁵⁰

technology

Although the pandemic accelerated digital adoption, many Torontonians, especially those from equity-deserving groups, continue to experience the digital divide.⁵¹

Seniors lack access to technology and the digital literacy skills required to navigate the digital world, limiting their access to information about important programs and services. This contributes to increased social isolation among seniors, reduces their autonomy⁵² and puts them at greater risk of falling victim to online scams and cybersecurity incidents.⁵³

As emerging technologies develop, safeguarding data and addressing the ethical implications of artificial intelligence usage have become increasingly important. Torontonians need support in digital media literacy, including responsible and ethical digital citizenship practices in work, learning and daily life.⁵⁴

transportation

Toronto is the busiest city in North America in terms of construction with 1.14 billion dollars in infrastructure work and development-related construction. This work causes road closures and significant city-wide congestion for motorists, cyclists, pedestrians and street transit.⁵⁵ Since the pandemic, increased construction and shifting travel habits and patterns have worsened congestion as the city grows.⁵⁶

The city is also one of the most expensive for public transit in Canada.⁵⁷ Due to rising costs, transit is becoming less affordable for those who rely on it, including racialized groups, people with disabilities, younger adults and low-income households.⁵⁸ Active transportation continues to increase, with more people cycling to their destinations.⁵⁹

“

I'm sitting in the library, sharing space with other patrons, shifting around to make room for everyone because it is sooo busy. What a wonderful thing.

Even better, I was sitting next to a nice, young woman who was reading a novel. She got up and said, 'Well, time to go, but I've got nowhere to go.'

I'm a social worker, so I spent 20 minutes trying to help her out. How wonderful that she felt safe, warm and secure for a few hours this morning. Our libraries are a vital part of our communities. Thanks for all you do.

– TPL customer



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“ It is a Wednesday morning and I am at the Toronto Reference Library, my favourite place in the city. On Yonge Street just above Bloor Street, the library is my go-to for everything from story and book research, to coffees with friends, to cultural events. It is well out of the way of where I live, work and play, and yet I come out of my way to visit.

When I go to the Reference Library,
I never want to leave.

by Brian Bradley, Toronto Star
January 3, 2023



