



ERIE COUNTY
**PUBLIC
LIBRARY**

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STRATEGIC PLAN

2027-2031

ABSTRACT

Explore key focus areas that will drive Erie County Public Library to create a community where everyone feels welcome to explore ideas, discover the joy of reading, build essential skills, and grow with confidence through lifelong learning.

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A Message from the Director

Public libraries have long served as gateways to knowledge, opportunity, and human connection. In Erie County, our public library is more than a place to borrow books. It is a welcoming space where people gather to learn, explore new ideas, strengthen essential skills, and connect with one another.

This strategic plan reflects our commitment to ensuring that the Erie County Public Library continues to meet the evolving needs of the community we serve. Drawing on our daily work with patrons, staff, and community partners, the leadership team of the Erie County Public Library worked collaboratively to reflect on our shared values, identify priorities, and envision the future of library service in Erie County. In many ways, this plan serves as both a love letter and a promise to the community we are honored to serve. It reflects our deep appreciation for the role that the library plays in people's lives and our commitment to strengthening that role in the years ahead.

At its heart, this plan centers on people. It emphasizes cultivating a love of reading, strengthening literacy and life skills, creating welcoming and accessible library spaces, and delivering exceptional service to every member of our community. It also recognizes that a strong library depends on a strong team and responsible stewardship of the public trust.

Together with our staff, partners, and community members, we look forward to continuing the library's long tradition of service while building a future where every resident of Erie County has the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive. This strategic plan is our commitment to that future and to the community that makes the work of the library both possible and meaningful.

Strategic Plan Overview

The Erie County Public Library serves as a cornerstone of learning, discovery, and human connection for residents across Erie County. Libraries provide access to information, support lifelong learning, and create spaces where people of all ages can explore their interests and build meaningful connections with their community.

This strategic plan reflects ECPL's commitment to strengthening these roles while responding thoughtfully to the evolving needs of the community. Guided by our mission and vision, the library will focus on expanding opportunities for reading and discovery, strengthening literacy partnerships, improving library spaces, delivering exceptional service, supporting staff growth, and ensuring responsible stewardship of public resources. By focusing on these priorities, ECPL will continue to serve as a trusted community resource where people feel welcome, supported, and empowered to pursue lifelong learning.

Our Vision

A community where everyone feels welcome to explore ideas, discover the joy of reading, build essential skills, and grow with confidence through lifelong learning.

Our Mission

To serve *all* people in their pursuit of knowledge, to advocate for improving the quality of life of *our* community, and to strengthen the library *and its resources* for future generations.

Our Values

We pledge:

To cultivate a welcoming environment.

We create spaces where every person feels respected, included, and empowered.

To encourage curiosity and lifelong learning.

We celebrate reading, offer opportunities to explore new ideas, and promote a love of learning.

To serve with dignity and respect for all.

We listen with intent, respond thoughtfully, and treat every interaction as an opportunity to help someone succeed.

To advocate for the development and growth of the community.

We build partnerships, support literacy and essential skills, and connect people with the knowledge and resources they need to thrive.

To support and strengthen our organizational culture.

We work together to build skills and knowledge at every level and create a workplace built on trust and collaboration.

To steward the library for future generations.

We honor the public trust by caring for our spaces, collections, and resources so the library remains strong for our community today and tomorrow.

Focus Area 1

Inspire a Culture of Reading Joy, Discovery, and Curiosity

Reading is at the heart of the library's mission and is the gateway to community wellbeing. ECPL actively seeks to cultivate a community where reading is celebrated, curiosity is encouraged, and lifelong learning is joyfully pursued for personal and communal growth.

Goals:

1.1 Support lifelong reading

Aid struggling readers of all ages through supportive, guided reading opportunities while collaborating with community members and partners to create reading programs in underserved neighborhoods that reflect community voices, cultures, and interests

1.2 Celebrate reading and curiosity through enthusiastic public engagement

Incorporate playfulness, creativity, and personality into the library's public presence by communicating across varied platforms, identifying branding and promotional opportunities, and offering engaging experiences that celebrate reading, curiosity, and learning

1.3 Expand humanities-centered learning opportunities

Develop humanistic programs grounded in textual sources while embracing the full range of human creativity and inquiry, facilitated by knowledgeable partners and local subject experts

1.4 Elevate Heritage Room services and visibility

Foster a discovery of personal and communal history using the collection and resources of the Heritage Room, relevant programming, and outstanding research guidance

Focus Area 2

Strengthen Community Literacy and Educational Partnerships

Literacy provides the foundation for lifelong learning and opportunity. ECPL will create, sustain, and elevate partnerships with schools and organizations, to support literacy and learning across Erie County.

Goals:

2.1 Build stable partnerships with schools

Establish a presence within and across school communities through consistent and reliable outreach that empowers students and teachers, supports positive learning outcomes in alignment with state-standards, and reinforces the role of the public library as a lifelong resource

2.2 Extend library resources beyond library buildings

Work with community partners to expand the reach of library materials, e-databases, and programs, moving dynamically and responsively to support the needs of Erie County residents

2.3 Strengthen community literacy through accessible and collaborative programming

Offer literacy programs that are easy to access, reach underserved communities, use resources wisely, and are guided by community input

Focus Area 3:

Create Accessible, Functional, and Inclusive Library Spaces

Libraries are places where people gather to learn, explore ideas, and connect with their community. ECPL will ensure that library spaces continue to be welcoming, easy to navigate, and intentionally maintained to serve all members of the community.

Goals:

3.1 Improve accessibility across all ECPL locations

Develop and integrate consistent and effective signage, visual landmarks, and versatile furnishings to increase the overall usability of library facilities

3.2 Optimize and organize the collection

Invest staff and financial resources to assess use and organization of the collection to identify meaningful areas of development and support patron needs

3.3 Expand equitable access to the collection and displays

Increase opportunities for underserved groups to interact with the collection and displays by collaborating with knowledgeable partners to identify and remove barriers to entry and engagement

Focus Area 4

Deliver Exceptional, People-First Service

People thrive in supportive and welcoming environments. ECPL will continue to strengthen a service culture centered on empathy, respect, and meaningful engagement through professional interactions.

Goals:

4.1 Extend meaningful engagement beyond existing patrons

Create opportunities with non-library users to connect them with library spaces and resources

4.2 Ensure strong staffing and professional service delivery

Provide optimal levels of qualified clerical and professional staffing at all locations and service points to effectively connect the community with resources appropriate to their needs

4.3 Build a consistent patron service environment

Establish an approach to patron service that prioritizes respect, active listening and thoughtful response

4.4 Enhance service coordination across libraries

Strengthen relationships and collaboration with partner libraries to promote programs, collections, and services that appeal to the patrons' interests and needs

Focus Area 5

Cultivate Staff Growth, Leadership, and Collaborative Organizational Culture

A strong library depends on strong staff. ECPL will support staff development, encourage leadership growth and foster a collaborative workplace culture that benefits both employees and the community.

Goals:

5.1 Create an organizational structure founded on clarity, opportunity, and need

Establish a sustainable and effective staffing structure by identifying gaps, developing clear job descriptions and creating paths for advancement

5.2 Prioritize skill-building and educational opportunities for staff

Develop financial and logistical avenues that support forward-thinking training opportunities for all staff relevant to job expectations, growth interests, and library initiatives

5.3 Create an integrated professional library network

Provide and promote professional development and networking opportunities for staff to build connections within ECPL as well as with District member libraries and organizations with aligned missions

Focus Area 6

Ensure Long-Term Financial and Operational Sustainability

Sustainable library services require thoughtful planning, responsible financial stewardship, and data-informed decision making.

Goals:

6.1 Improve financial transparency and strategic resource allocation

Create a budgetary breakdown of functional categories relevant to library departments to better evaluate financial standing and identify areas of opportunity

6.2 Align financial planning with strategic priorities

Use improved financial analysis to guide investments that strengthen core services, collections, facilities, and community programs

6.3 Strengthen operational decision-making through data

Develop clear metrics and reporting practices that allow leadership to evaluate program impact, operational efficiency, and long-term sustainability

Looking Ahead: Erie County Public Library in 2032

It is the year 2032 and, for 135 years, the Erie County Public Library serves as one of the most trusted and welcoming community resources - a place where everyone can learn, explore, and connect.

Our community is bound together by a love of stories. Across Erie County, residents see the library as more than a collection of books, but as a vibrant resource for learning, discovery, and connection. Families gather for storytimes that spark a lifelong love of reading. Students rely on library databases to strengthen essential skills, complete schoolwork, and explore new ideas. Adults routinely use the library to get lost in a book, take a class, and build connections. The library has become foundational for our community.

Library spaces throughout the county feel intuitive, welcoming, and accessible. Clear signage, thoughtful design, and responsive technology make it easy for all visitors to find what they need. Collections, programs, and interactions are engaging and relevant, inviting curiosity and exploration across interests for all age groups.

While library buildings are important, Erie County Public Library has no borders. The library serves our community beyond the walls of our buildings, continually finding ways to connect residents to resources.

Technology is accessible and integrated throughout the library, ensuring that all residents, regardless of background or income, can participate in a digital world. From up-to-date devices and connectivity to digital literacy support, the library remains a reliable resource for closing the digital divide.

Strong community partnerships have helped close educational gaps and expanded access to learning across the region. We collaborate regularly with schools, ensuring that students experience the public library as both a natural extension of their education and a staple of society. Library staff work alongside community groups to create initiatives that reflect local needs and celebrate the diversity of Erie County.

In every interaction, library staff are recognized for their approachability, expertise, and commitment to service. They work together, support one another's growth, and use their skills to meet community needs with warmth and confidence and take pride in the positive role the library plays in people's lives.

Thoughtful stewardship of public resources ensures that the library remains sustainable through strategic decision making, responsible budgeting, and investment in infrastructure to keep the library in a strong position to serve future generations.

The Erie County Public Library continues to embody the values that shape its mission: welcoming everyone, nurturing curiosity, strengthening the community, and honoring the public trust.

In 2032, the library stands as a cornerstone of learning, connection, and possibility for every resident of Erie County. Through the steady work of staff, partners, and community members, the vision outlined in this strategic plan has become a lived reality. The library remains what it has always aspired to be: a place where everyone in Erie County feels welcome to explore ideas, discover the joy of reading, build essential skills, and grow with confidence through lifelong learning.