



Stratford Library Association

STRATEGIC PLAN 2022-2025

July 2022

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Acknowledgements



Plan A Advisors is grateful to the board and staff of Stratford Library Association for their active engagement in the development of this strategic plan. The Steering Committee, chaired by Beth DaPonte, included fellow board members Maria Ferrera, Victoria Florek, David Harden, Jr., Sue Johnson, Alan Llewelyn and Gladys Ramos; community members Pat Naylor and Chris Silhavey; staff members Geri Diorio, Tom Holehan, Janice Pellegrino, and Lisa Wargo; Library Director Sheri Szymanski; and Library President Michael Aloï.

We are appreciative of those who participated in confidential one-on-one interviews who are acknowledged in the appendix to this document; and to the entire staff and the many community members who participated in roundtable conversations and who responded to a public survey that helped to shape this plan. Sheri Szymanski’s colleagues at the New Haven, Ridgefield, Wallingford and West Hartford libraries were gracious hosts as members of the Steering Committee made visits as part of our Peer Scan.

This planning period coincided with the trailing effects of a long (and seemingly endless) pandemic that caused us to hold most meetings by Zoom; an exception was our in-person retreat that we hope was as memorable experience for participants as it was instrumental in advancing work on this plan.

Plan A Advisors is particularly grateful to Beth DaPonte and Sheri Szymanski for the warmth of the relationship that developed over the course of our work together, which resulted in a plan that holds great promise for the Stratford Library and the community that it serves. We are eager to watch your success and available to offer guidance during this exciting and critical period in the organization’s development.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Adam Gaynor'.

Adam Gaynor, Ph.D.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Evan Kingsley'.

Evan Kingsley

Plan A Advisors

Forward



Board of Trustees

Michael Aloï, President
Robert Smith, Vice President
Donald Putrimas, Treasurer
Deborah Perman, Secretary
Judy Cleri
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Beth DaPonte
Maria Ferrera
Victoria Florek
Gavin Forrester
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Sue Johnson
Alan Llewelyn
Joel Pleban
Robyn Proto
Gladys A. Ramos
Peg Sheahan
Anthony Smith, Jr.

Dear Library Patron,

There is no better way to celebrate the Stratford Library's 125th Anniversary of serving the residents of Stratford than to give serious thought to and plan how the library will meet current and future needs. The Stratford Library Association's 2022-2025 Strategic Plan, created under the wise tutelage of Plan A Advisors, represents the results of a comprehensive process of community and board engagement.

The Strategic Plan and the process behind it helps prioritize the important work of the library's incredible staff and committed Board of Trustees.

The Stratford Library Association's Board of Trustees is grateful for the financial support received for the development of a strategic plan. For this process, the Stratford Library Association received funding from the Stratford Library Association Endowment and CT Humanities' Sustaining the Humanities Program through the American Rescue Plan (SHARP), with funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the federal American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act.

We are grateful to members of the Board of Trustees' Strategic Planning Committee who contributed countless hours to the strategic planning process. We are also grateful to the individuals who participated in the interviews, roundtables, and survey. These were all important ways to hear from the community. Mayor Laura Hoydick and her staff were generous with their time in support of this process.

With continued support from Town of Stratford, volunteers, staff, Library Trustees, and the larger funding community, we will accomplish the goals outlined in the plan. We invite you to join us on our path to success as we use this plan as our guide for the near future. With your support, we will accomplish all described in the following pages.

Sincerely,

Beth Osborne DaPonte

Sheri Szymanski

Strategic Planning Committee

Beth DaPonte, Chair
Michael Aloï
Geri Diorio
Maria Ferrera
Victoria Florek
David Harden, Jr.
Tom Holehan
Sue Johnson
Alan Llewelyn
Pat Naylor
Janice Pellegrino
Gladys A. Ramos
Christopher Silhavey
Sheri Szymanski
Lisa Wargo

Planning Process



The entire strategic planning process was guided by a Steering Committee comprised of fifteen representatives from the board, staff and community. The Steering Committee identified research participants who could offer a wide cross-section of perspectives.

A review of Library materials and demographic information provided helpful perspectives.

Confidential interviews (24) with stakeholders from the board, staff and community, coupled with roundtable conversations (four) with community representatives and staff contributed to an understanding of current conditions and programmatic opportunities.

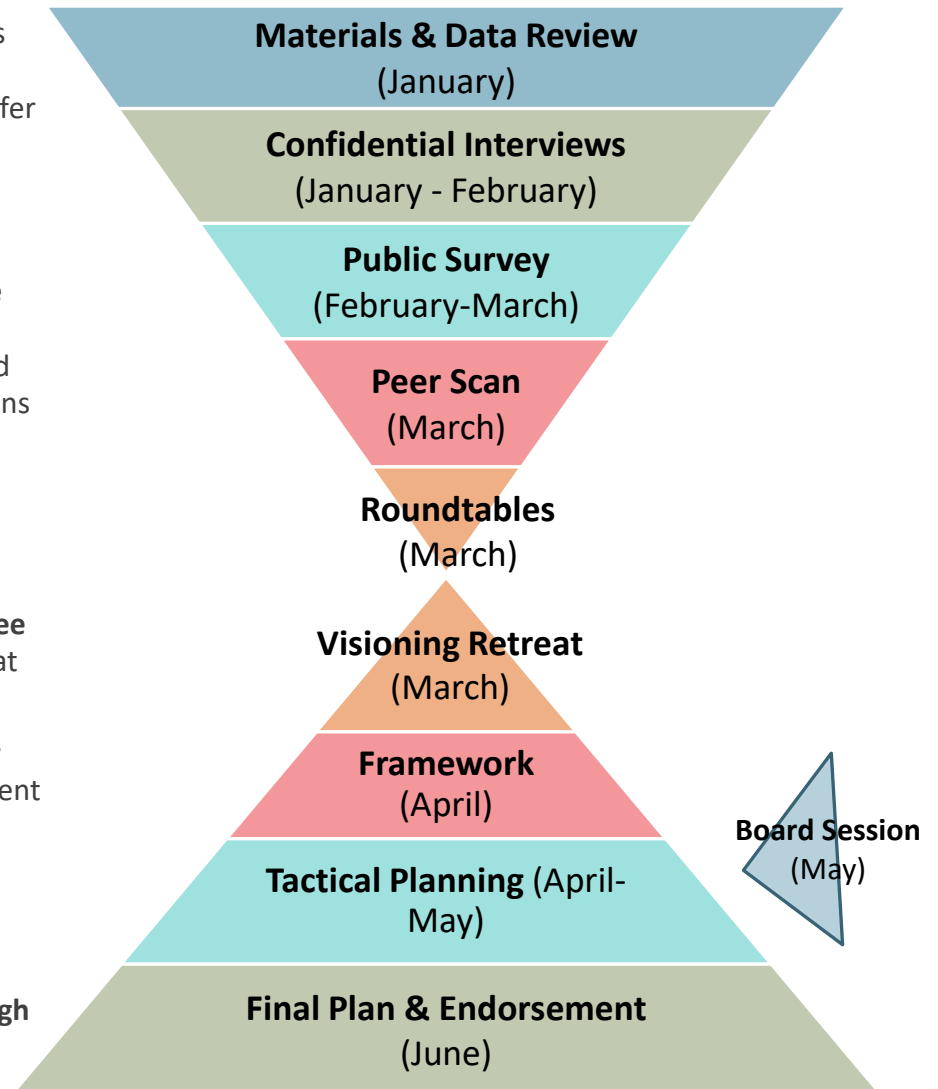
A Public Survey (411 respondents) yielded data on the community's use of the Library and ideas for its development.

A Peer Scan brought members of the Steering Committee to visit a range of public libraries (five) in Connecticut that offered inspiration and ideas.

A Visioning Retreat brought board members and senior staff together to develop the Library's new vision statement and to workshop a framework for the strategic plan.

Training and coaching sessions with staff led to the development of tactical plans for each strategic plan objective.

Additionally, Plan A led the Executive Committee through a consideration of board function and composition for a new era of service.



Plan Framework



About the Framework



A strategic plan’s “framework” is grounded in the organization’s mission statement, and consists of a plan vision, goals and objectives.

A *plan vision* describes the future state the Library hopes to achieve through this plan: the role that the organization aspires to play, and the impact it will have, on the community.

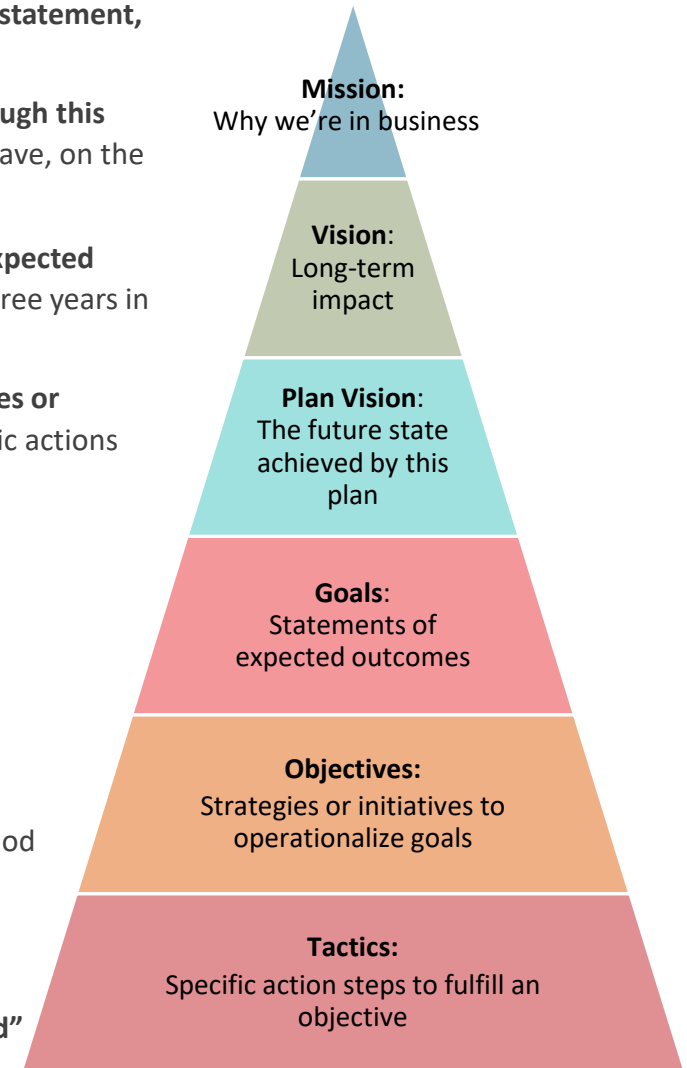
The Library’s strategic plan is framed by four key *goals*—statements of expected outcomes or impacts—that the organization aims to achieve in the next three years in support of its mission and to realize the plan’s vision.

Objectives were established to achieve each goal. Objectives are strategies or initiatives that are implementable over three years. Objectives have specific actions and measurable outcomes.

Each objective has been turned into a *tactical plan* that details the following:

- a. The person responsible for implementing the objective
- b. The rationale behind the objective
- c. The outcomes the objective intends to achieve
- d. The metrics that will be used to measure success
- e. The implementation steps that will be pursued over a three-year period
- f. The financial implications of the objective, including up-front and annual operating costs and anticipated savings or revenues it will achieve

The tactical plans for implementation live in separate documents “owned” by staff for implementation purposes.



Vision and Goals



The Library’s mission statement remains unchanged, because it describes the purpose for which the Library exists:

The **mission** of the Stratford Library is to empower and enrich our diverse community by providing access to innovative services, information, and ideas.

The plan “vision” describes the Library’s impact; what it hopes to achieve by the time the plan is fully implemented.

Our **vision**: Our Library will be a welcoming and dynamic community center for a diverse and evolving Stratford, recognized as the Town’s essential partner in guiding all residents to access the informational, educational, and cultural resources they need to thrive.

Stratford Library Association’s strategic plan is then framed by four goals—statements of expected outcomes or impacts—that the organization aims to achieve in the next three years. This plan establishes the following:

Goal I: Advancing our Community. The Stratford Library will advance the social, economic and educational needs of residents through programming and resources that support their success.

Goal II: Gateway to Stratford. The Stratford Library will expand community outreach and engagement so that every Stratford resident feels connected to the Library’s and Town’s rich resources.

Goal III: Addressing Human Needs. The Stratford Library will partner with human service providers to connect residents in need to resources that ensure their well-being.

Goal IV: Investing in the Library’s Future. The Stratford Library will strengthen both physical and organizational infrastructure to position it for continued excellence in its programs and services



Each goal is supported by a series of objectives designed to implement each goal which are outlined on the following pages. For each objective, the Library has a separate **tactical plan** for implementation

The Stratford Library will advance the social, economic and educational needs of residents through programming and resources that support their success.

Context: Stratford is a markedly more diverse community today, with dozens of languages spoken among residents. Through its programming and collections (books, music, film, databases etc.) and a robust relationship with the community's schools, the Library can play a role in recognizing and celebrating diversity and redressing any divisions. At the same time, many residents are struggling financially, and there is an opportunity for the Library, as a center of information, to play a role in advancing economic opportunity in an economy that increasingly relies on information as a bedrock of entrepreneurialism.

Objectives:

1. **DIVERSITY.** Reflect the diverse composition of the community through collections, programs, public spaces, and cultural celebrations.
2. **ECONOMY.** Provide access to educational and entrepreneurial opportunities that support economic and personal advancement.
3. **SCHOOLS.** Collaborate closely with the school community to provide complementary educational content, programs, and support for faculty, students and their families.

The Stratford Library will expand community outreach and engagement so that every Stratford resident feels connected to the Library's and Town's rich resources.

Context: Although Stratford's population has not grown in recent years, a fifth of all residents are new to the community. The Library can play a role in welcoming and acclimating newcomers and encouraging civic engagement.

Objectives:

4. WELCOME. Welcome residents, new and established, through informational materials, programs, and initiatives that provide orientation to the Library, the Town and available resources, and that encourage the open exchange of ideas.
5. ACCESS. Ensure that all residents have access to the Library by strengthening outreach programs, language availability, and new program initiatives.
6. MARKETING. Develop and implement a marketing plan to reach more Stratford residents with news and information about the Library through investments in marketing tools and the people to do the work.

Goal III: Addressing Human Needs



The Stratford Library will partner with human service providers to connect residents in need to resources that ensure their well-being.

Context: Libraries are viewed as community hubs that provide information and programs without stigma or judgment. As such, Stratford librarians are increasingly asked to provide or connect residents to information about human services, the need for which has increased substantially in recent years. While librarians are not trained counselors nor case workers, there is a role for them to play in strengthening relationships with, and making referrals to, agencies with appropriately trained professionals best equipped to serve community members who are facing challenges.

Objectives:

7. HUMAN SERVICES. Facilitate patron access to services offered by relevant community providers and partner with them to ensure a seamless response to patrons in need.
8. TRAINING. Train library staff to respond to human service needs and make appropriate referrals.

Goal IV: Investing in the Library's Future



The Stratford Library will strengthen both physical and organizational infrastructure to position it for continued excellence in its programs and services.

Context: The Library staff is beloved throughout the community, but the Library building is a source of frustration to many. It is difficult to navigate and has many uncomfortable and inadequate spaces. In fact, while Stratford ranks far above the statewide average for percentage of residents with library cards, it ranks far below the statewide average in library square footage per capita. Some attention must be paid to the future of the building in terms of amount and quality of useable space.

Objectives:

9. FACILITY. Remake the Library facility for Stratford today and tomorrow as a welcoming and inspiring place to learn, create, and share.
 - a. Prioritize and implement short-term facility improvements to refresh and reorganize the Library building to support the programs and services to meet patron needs today.
 - b. Initiate an architectural feasibility study and master planning process to result in a substantially larger Library for Stratford with a breadth of facilities to meet patron needs tomorrow.
10. FUNDRAISING. Initiate an advocacy and development strategy to secure funding for long-term capital improvements.
11. STAFFING. Work to broaden the competencies of the staff through professional development and a hiring plan to reflect the community and address patron needs.
12. GOVERNANCE. Structure the board to ensure it reflects the community it serves, operates efficiently, and is positioned to attract a diversity of candidates.

Plan Implementation



Implementation of strategic plan objectives will range in cost, including facility improvements that require moderate-to-significant investment, and many others that will be cost-neutral or will be funded through the reallocation of existing resources. Each requires the commitment of human capital, however, and a consideration of the time and effort needed to implement an objective is an important factor in prioritizing and timing the start of each.

The fully developed implementation timeline organizes objectives according to a range of criteria around impact, priority, and cost and will depend, in part, upon resource development over time. Funding for implementation might be leveraged as follows:

- Budget efficiencies and re-alignment of budget priorities
- An allocation from reserve funds and/or endowment
- Advocacy for municipal funds for one-time initiatives or enhanced and ongoing programs
- Pursuit of government grants from the State or Federal government
- Targeted outreach to foundations, corporations or businesses for specific initiatives, possibly in partnership with peer organizations

Regardless of the funding model, it will be important to ensure that the strategic plan aligns with, and informs, parallel planning processes including:

- Budget
- Board development

Oversight for strategic plan implementation will rest with the Library's Director and management team. The Finance & Audit Committee should play an active role in ensuring that money is allocated to plan objectives each year. Twice annually, the Director should report to the board on strategic plan progress. A simple dashboard might be used to graphically represent the status of active strategic plan projects.

Implementation Timetable



This timeline represents a rough prioritization of Strategic Plan Objectives for which staff have developed detailed tactical plans. The projected expenses do not include capital improvements and associated planning costs. While the Library Director is ultimately responsible for ensuring progress on implementation of the Strategic Plan, the table below shows the staff positions who have direct responsibility for particular objectives.

OBJECTIVES	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	Responsible Party
1. DIVERSITY. Reflect the diverse composition of the community through collections, programs, public spaces, and cultural celebrations.	\$0	\$1,000	\$1,000	Assistant Library Director
2. ECONOMY. Provide access to educational and entrepreneurial opportunities that support economic and personal advancement.	\$5,000	\$5,000	TBD	Head of IT Services
3. SCHOOLS. Collaborate closely with the school community to provide complementary educational content, programs, and support for faculty, students and their families.	\$0	\$2,000	\$2,000	Heads of Teen & Children's Services
4. WELCOME. Welcome residents, new and established, through informational materials, programs, and initiatives that provide orientation to the Library, the Town and available resources, and that encourage the open exchange of ideas.	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	Supervisor, Check Out Desk
5. ACCESS. Ensure that all residents have access to the Library by strengthening outreach programs, language availability, and new program initiatives.	\$2,500	\$2,000	\$2,000	Head of Children's Services
6. MARKETING. Develop and implement a marketing plan to reach more Stratford residents with news and information about the Library through investments in marketing tools and the people to do the work.	\$15,000	\$10,000	\$10,000	Public Relations & Programming
7. HUMAN SERVICES. Facilitate patron access to services offered by relevant community providers and partner with them to ensure a seamless response to patrons in need.	\$0	\$0	\$0	Head of Adult Services
8. TRAINING. Train library staff to respond to human service needs and make appropriate referrals.	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$3,000	Asst. Library Dir.
9a. FACILITY. Prioritize and implement short-term facility improvements to refresh and reorganize the Library building to support the programs and services to meet patron needs today.	\$1,600,000	\$10,000	\$10,000	Library Director
9b. FACILITY. Initiate an architectural feasibility study and master planning process to result in a substantially larger Library for Stratford with a breadth of facilities to meet patron needs tomorrow.		\$50,000	TBD	Library Director
10. FUNDRAISING. Initiate an advocacy and development strategy to secure funding for long-term capital improvements.	\$10,000	\$20,000	\$20,000	Library Director
11. STAFFING. Work to broaden the competencies of the staff through professional development and a hiring plan to reflect the community and address patron needs.	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000	Library Director
12. GOVERNANCE. Structure the board to ensure it reflects the community it serves, operates efficiently, and is positioned to attract a diversity of candidates.	\$0	\$0	\$0	President
Total	\$1,641,500	\$109,000	\$54,000	

Strategic Planning Committee

1. Beth DaPonte, Chair
2. Michael Aloï
3. Geri Diorio
4. Maria Ferrera
5. Victoria Florek
6. David Harden, Jr.
7. Tom Holehan
8. Sue Johnson
9. Alan Llewelyn
10. Pat Naylor
11. Janice Pellegrino
12. Gladys Ramos
13. Chris Silhavey
14. Sheri Szymanski
15. Lisa Wargo

Interviews

1. Mike **Aloï**, SLA Board
2. Janice **Anderson**, RYASAP
3. Caitlin **Augusta**, SLA Staff
4. Tess **Beck**, SLA Staff
5. Pablo **Colon**, Avengrid
6. Mary **Dean**, Stratford Economic Dev.
7. Jack **Dellapiano**, Stratford HS
8. Geri **Diorio**, SLA Staff
9. Curtis **Eller**, PAL
10. Katie **Graf**, Bunnell HS

11. Beth **Grimes**, SLA Staff
12. Tom **Holehan**, SLA Staff
13. Laura **Hoydick**, Stratford Mayor
14. Don **Marsala**, SLA Staff
15. Katie **McFadden**, SLA Staff
16. Amanda **Meeson**, Sterling House
17. Teresa **Neville**, SLA Staff
18. Joel **Pleban**, SLA Board
19. Olga **Peña**, small business owner
20. Gladys **Ramos**, SLA Board
21. Kate **Sheehan**, SLA Staff
22. Ty **Sims**, S. End Community Center
23. Sheri **Szymanski**, SLA Staff
24. Tammy **Trojanowski**, Baldwin Center

Roundtables

1. Staff (x2)
2. Community partners and volunteers (x2)

Peer Scan Visits

1. New Haven
2. Ridgefield
3. Wallingford
4. West Hartford
5. Westport (self-guided)