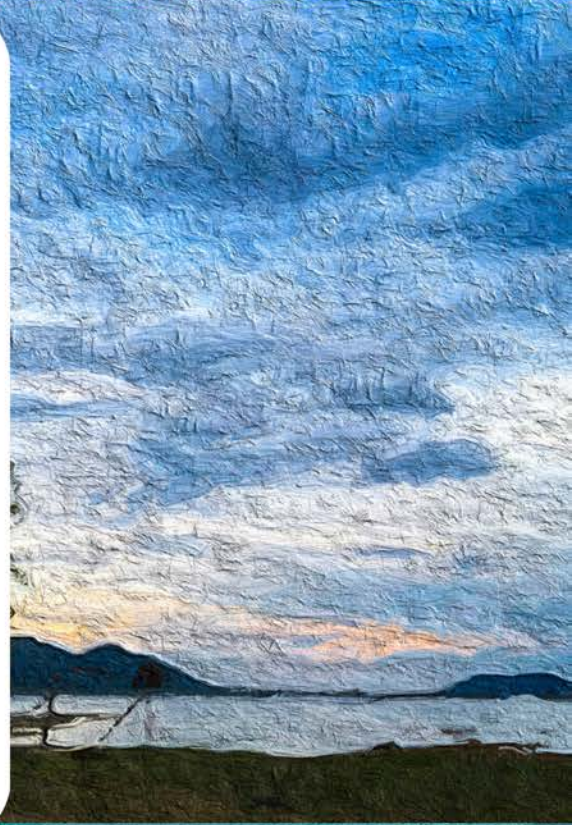


**Ocean County Library**

CONNECTING PEOPLE, BUILDING COMMUNITY, TRANSFORMING LIVES

# STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-2028

*Internal Framework for Implementation*





# Director's Message

**Dear Ocean County -**

While working on this plan, we heard from you about what makes our County and our libraries special. Over and over again, you came back to the people.

Many residents have lived here for all or most of their lives. They described close-knit relationships, a spirit of service, and a vibe that is creative, caring, and uniquely our own. We also heard from members who represent how our County is changing. New families are making us their home.

And we heard from our staff at the library, whose insights as both employees and community members are invaluable. Our staff is the creative engine that powers the experiences we offer to the community. Their commitment to be of service is unwavering. Their ideas for how to show up in your lives in meaningful, relevant ways are inspiring.

Thank you for your openness and contributions to the strategic planning process. We appreciate your trust and your investment in our future.

*Susan Quinn*

**Susan Quinn**

*Director, Ocean County Library*



# Mission & Values

The Ocean County Library **connects people, builds community, and transforms lives.**

In the next five years and beyond, the library will continue to show up for the community with a team of exceptional staff, amazing books and digital material, and a wealth of programs. The library will also retool its outlook to make sure we offer spaces and services that are deeply responsive to you - our current and future customers.



**We share these values with our community.**

## **RESPECT**

We value every community member's presence.

## **INTEGRITY**

We lead with honesty, transparency, and authenticity.

## **CUSTOMER SERVICE**

We serve our community with kindness and equity.

## **PROGRESS**

We commit to learning, adapting, and moving forward.

# Our Path

The team used **human-centered design** techniques to think holistically about customers and their experiences.



*We explored questions such as:*

“How do we stand in your shoes to make your experience even better?”

“How can we work together to solve community problems?”



Throughout 2023, **more than a thousand staff and community members** lent their creativity to the planning process.

**900 survey responses**  
from OCL staff and the public

**80 participants**  
joined in-depth conversations with  
community leaders, customers, and staff

**42 branch-led activities**  
including gallery walls, pulse surveys,  
and questionnaires


**13 staff workshops**  
with core management and an  
advisory group to reflect on  
research and design the plan



# What We Heard

## Our staff is our greatest asset.

More than 90% of survey respondents said friendly, knowledgeable staff are the most important part of the library experience - it is also the #1 area where you are most satisfied.



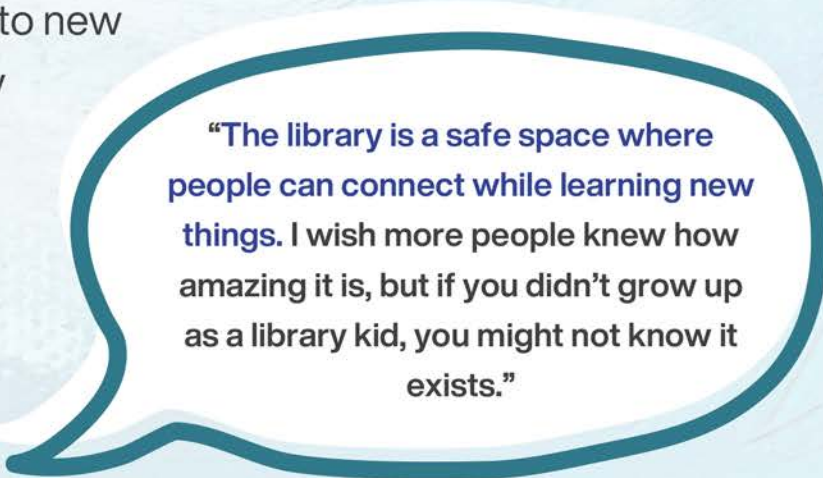
“The library is my home away from home! It’s like Sesame Street, you come in to see familiar faces.”

## We are your free source for social connection.

At every age and stage, you highlighted how the gift of the library is the myriad ways it brings people together. In one partner’s words, if the plan dedicated itself to reducing the epidemic of loneliness, it would be a very solid plan.

## You want more people to be in the know.

Word-of-mouth is our number one marketing tool, yet we still need to raise awareness to new constituents about all that the library has to offer. This will be critically important as towns become increasingly diverse.



“The library is a safe space where people can connect while learning new things. I wish more people knew how amazing it is, but if you didn’t grow up as a library kid, you might not know it exists.”

# Strategic Priorities

Our strategic priorities provide a framework to help us **move toward the future** with passion, conviction, and intentionality.

**Accessibility**

**Partnerships**

**Learning Together**

**Personal Journeys**





# Objectives

## and Year One Actions

**1. Make continuous improvements to how customers feel about their experience inside our libraries.**

**Action 1:** Review floor plans and implement quick hits that are sensory-friendly and mindful of all abilities.

**Action 2:** Assess current staffing levels in every department.

**Action 3:** Develop a customer service model based on staff-patron interaction and visibility.

**2. Design services that are mindful of residents' transportation challenges.**

**Action 1:** Develop a transportation profile for each branch - post to the website and brainstorm opportunities.

**Action 2:** Study operating hours and library usage patterns - prepare scenarios and recommendations.

**3. Invest in the technology staff need to do their best work.**

**Action 1:** Train the internal team on how to evaluate services.\*

**Action 2:** Conduct an evaluation of the device lending pilot program.

**Action 3:** Enhance self-service functionality at the Toms River, Barnegat, and Lacey locations.

*\*The team prioritized evaluation in year one to position OCL to let go of activities that are not the best use of time and resources and pave the way for new solutions.*

# Partnerships

*Ocean County Library is an intentional and valuable partner.*

**In an increasingly complex world, libraries are embracing their role as convenors who bring partners together to solve problems.**

Partners appreciate the library's geographic reach and comfortable, free spaces. They know their constituents trust the library as a safe place to receive reliable information.

Ocean County's rich network of partners are eager to align efforts to meet the language, literacy, citizenship, educational, and social service needs of residents.



*This photo is from our annual Autism Resources Fair.*

# Objectives

## *and Year One Actions*

**1. Convene community partners in new and unexpected ways.**

**Action 1:** Study and recommend a model for creating a dedicated community engagement department.

**Action 2:** Work with Ocean County Senior Services - host a Countywide resource fair with organizations that provide services to seniors.

**2. Cultivate partnerships that reflect community strengths and diversity.**

**Action 1:** Identify partner-based options to recruit and hire local residents - expand existing programs.

**Action 2:** Strengthen current partnership with Ocean County College - raise awareness and cross-promotion.

**3. Empower staff to build a dynamic complement of local partners.**

**Action 1:** Develop elevator pitches for how OCL can be a valuable partner - train staff to identify shared goals and win-wins.

**Action 2:** Scan and inventory partners in each branch service area - host partner cafe meetups.



# Learning Together

*Ocean County Library brings diverse audiences together.*

**Our research activities affirmed how much customers value meeting one another at the library and the chance to socialize while exploring new interests.**

In addition to simply being together, residents emphasized that learning how to be together is important to them. There are a wealth of backgrounds and perspectives within the tapestry of Ocean County. Its municipalities and communities each have a unique local character and vibe, with a shared spirit of curiosity and a desire to connect.

# Objectives

## *and Year One Actions*

### 1. Design signature programs for two or more target audiences.

**Action 1:** Publish a design guide for staff - include tips to support sensory needs, spark teen creativity, and more.

**Action 2:** Offer multi-part series so customers can sign up once and socialize with a consistent group of people.

**Action 3:** Scale up Reading Buddies to more sites and revisit the Tech Buddies program with a new model.

### 2. Build awareness of opportunities for residents of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities.

**Action 1:** Bring back the National Community Issues forum - explore virtual options.

**Action 2:** Have a "Friends and Family" event(s) where current library users bring non-users to tour our building and services.

### 3. Create methods for staff to bubble up new ideas and contribute to prioritization and problem-solving.

**Action 1:** Offer staff micro-grants to try things out.

**Action 2:** Develop a quarterly staff poll around a problem-solving question.

*The photos on the previous page were taken during our English Conversation Group.*

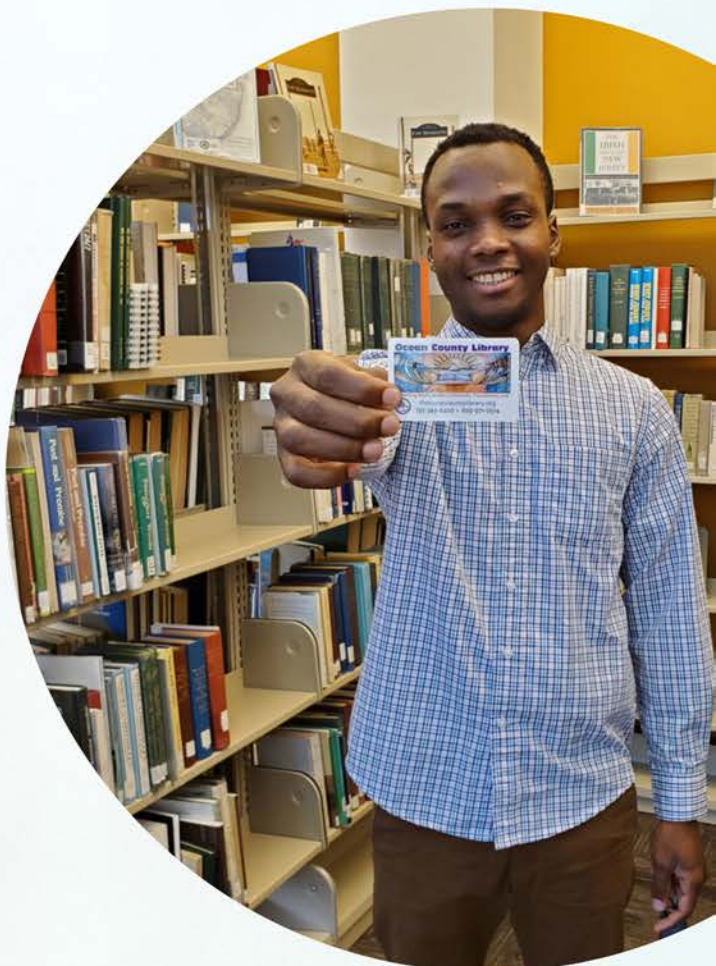
# Personal Journeys



*Ocean County Library invests in personalized journeys and pathways.*

**Public libraries celebrate literacy in the expanded form of the word.** In addition to the hallmarks of getting kids ready for Kindergarten and instilling a love of reading by sixth grade, libraries support a multitude of literacies that are essential life skills.

The ever-growing list includes: digital, financial, cultural, civic, environmental, entrepreneurial, and AI literacy. Whether books are read on paper or online, the public's need to acquire new, individualized skills for work and life will continue accelerating in the years ahead.



*These photos are from our Library Card Sign-up Month.*

## Objectives

### *and Year One Actions*

**1. Provide a robust and responsive collection - what people want is where they need it to be.**

**Action 1:** Purchase an opening day collection for the Stafford Library.

**Action 2:** Purchase an automated materials handling system to improve speed and efficiency to move materials throughout the library system.

**2. Build feedback mechanisms to evaluate what would keep community members engaged with their library.**

**Action 1:** Convene a gathering with groups who provide ESOL classes - brainstorm ways to add capacity.

**Action 2:** Train staff to conduct mini-focus groups and practice conducting two sessions.

**3. Offer staff development opportunities that model our values in action.**

**Action 1:** Review current mentoring opportunities at OCL including best practices and models for an organization-wide program - pilot first instance.

**Action 2:** Engage executive coaches for the Director and senior leaders to support their stewardship of the new Strategic Plan.

# Our Five-Year Future

*Consistent with our core value of progress, **the Strategic Plan is built to learn, adapt, and move forward every year.***

The strategic priorities and objectives are our five-year framework. They give us a generous tent in which to work. We captured a wealth of great ideas during the staff and community engagement process, which we will continue to revisit. Every year in January, we will refresh our yearly activities to build on the successes and feedback from the previous year.



## Imagining the Possibilities

2024

Build internal skills and organizational capacity. This continues to be important in subsequent years but is a primary goal for year one.

2025

Surprise and delight the community with new and strengthened partnerships. Scale up the staff mentorship program as a source of organizational pride and strength.

2026

Deepen partner relationships to meet evolving community needs. Balance local relationships at the branches and establish system-wide partnerships, with smooth handoffs and referrals.

2027

Assess the impact to date of signature services and events launched in year one of the Strategic Plan - i.e. national community issues forum, friends and family events, partner cafe meet-ups, and more. Look for ways to amplify what works based on a proven track record of success.

2028

Celebrate and take stock of OCL's strategic priorities and objectives. **What has stood the test of time? What should be refreshed to imagine new possibilities going forward?**



## Ocean County Library Commission

**Timothy McDonald**, *Chair*

**Paul F. Wolleon**, *Vice Chair*

**Susan L. Hutler**, *Ocean County Library Foundation Liaison*

**Henry J. Mancini**

**Christopher J. Mullins**

**Bonnie R. Peterson**

**Ruthanne Scaturro**

*Approved by the Ocean County Library Commission on February 20, 2024*

**Visit our website to learn more:**  
[www.theoceancountylibrary.org](http://www.theoceancountylibrary.org)