

# Strategic Plan 2026-2031

# BEDFORD FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY

## *Mission*

The Bedford Free Public Library welcomes everyone to discover, learn, and connect.

## *Vision*

To serve as a trusted, inclusive, and inviting space for the community to explore new ideas, share meaningful experiences, and feel a sense of belonging without expectation.

*Plan approved by the Bedford Free Public Library Board of Trustees on May 26, 2026*



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## *Message from the Director*

Today's public library stands at the intersection of tradition and transformation. As a trusted community anchor, it preserves access to knowledge, promotes lifelong learning, and provides inclusive spaces for connection. At the same time, rapid technological change, shifting community needs, and evolving expectations for public services require libraries to think strategically about how they grow and adapt. Our strategic plan sets a clear direction for the Bedford Free Public Library over the next five years, ensuring that it remains both relevant and resilient in a dynamic environment.

This plan reflects a thoughtful assessment of the Library's current strengths, challenges, and opportunities. Grounded in data, community input, and the expertise of staff and stakeholders, it is shaped by the voices of patrons, partners, and employees. In listening closely, the Library aims to align its services with the real and emerging needs of the Bedford community.

At its core, our plan outlines a shared vision for the future—one that balances the enduring mission of free and open access to information with new approaches to how we deliver services. It identifies key priorities, measurable goals, and actionable strategies to enhance collections, expand programming, strengthen community connections, and invest in staff development and infrastructure. Through this roadmap, the library advances continuous improvement and accountability.

Ultimately, a strategic plan is more than a document; it is a commitment to the community. It affirms the library's role as a vital public institution dedicated to enriching lives, supporting education, and fostering civic engagement. By charting a deliberate, forward-looking course, the Library positions itself to meet the challenges ahead while continuing to serve as a welcoming and essential resource for all.

*Jaclyn M. Powers*

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Library Director

## *Needs Assessment: The Process*

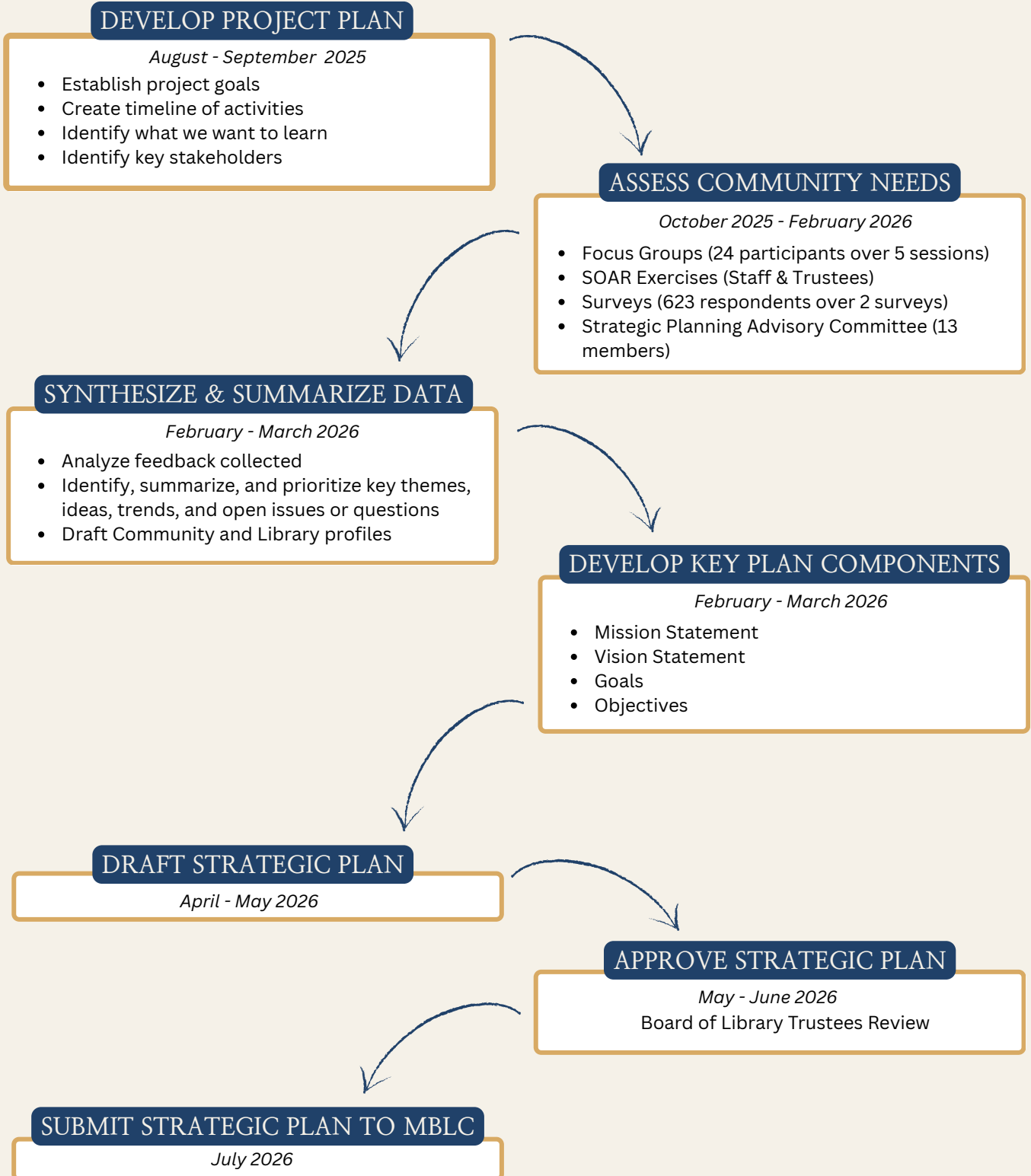
From fall 2025 to spring 2026, library leaders worked with Sage Consulting Services to develop a new strategic plan shaped by community input.

We designed the process to gather input from a wide range of voices, including staff, board members, parents, teens, people who work from home, and town and community partners. From October 2025 through February 2026, Sage facilitated Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results (SOAR) exercises, focus groups, and two community surveys. We also formed a Strategic Planning Advisory Committee (SPAC), bringing together 13 members representing diverse community constituencies, including Library volunteers and staff. The SPAC provided invaluable input and advice on the strategic planning process.

Through focus groups and surveys, community members shared how and why they use the Library today and how it could play an even greater role in their lives. We gathered candid feedback on our services, programs, and spaces, with a focus on how they can grow and evolve over the next five years. We also explored what residents know about the Library, what they expect from it, and how they stay informed. Recognizing the Library's strong connection to local students, one survey and an interview focused specifically on teens. In March, we synthesized and summarized community members' feedback to identify key themes, shape strategic priorities, and guide future decisions.

The SPAC met in October 2025 and January 2026. In October, members brainstormed community engagement ideas and reviewed the Project Planning survey results. In January, Sage facilitated a community visioning exercise that invited participants to imagine the future they want for Bedford and to consider how the Library can help bring that vision to life. By listening closely to these shared aspirations, we identified meaningful ways the Library can support, strengthen, and contribute to that future. As a result, our plan reflects both what the Library can offer and what the community hopes to become.

# Strategic Planning Process





# Bedford Community Snapshot

Located about 20 miles northwest of Boston, Bedford is an historic New England town set along the Concord River and neighboring Lexington, Concord, and Carlisle. Residents take pride in Bedford’s rich history while continuing to shape a forward-looking, family-oriented community.

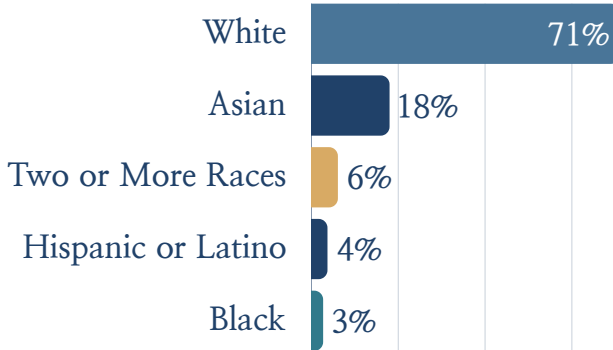
With excellent public schools and a strong tradition of civic involvement, Bedford is home to a highly educated population. Many residents work throughout Greater Boston in education, technology, healthcare, and other professional fields. With longtime residents, young families, and retirees calling Bedford home, the town places a high value on walkable neighborhoods, green spaces, and strong community connections. Bedford offers a welcoming, small-town feel with easy access to Boston’s cultural and economic opportunities and amenities.

# Bedford Community Snapshot

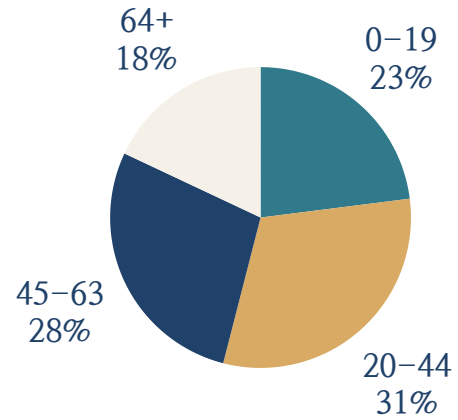
## POPULATION

14,394

### RESIDENTS BY RACE



### AGE DISTRIBUTION



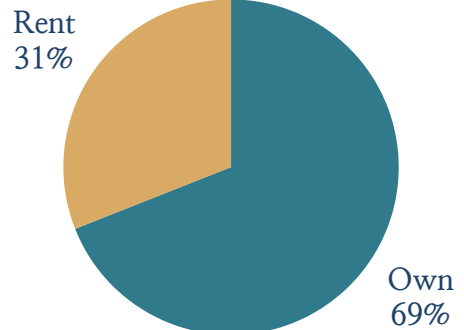
### RESIDENTS BY EDUCATION



25% OF RESIDENTS AGE 5+ SPEAK A LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH AT HOME



32% OF EMPLOYED RESIDENTS WORK FROM HOME



### HOUSING

A photograph of the Bedford Public Library building. The building features a modern design with large windows and a prominent entrance canopy. The words "BEDFORD PUBLIC LIBRARY" are displayed in large, bold, white letters on the dark metal structure of the canopy. The sky is overcast, and the overall tone is professional and institutional.

# *About the Library*

The Bedford Free Public Library is a cornerstone of civic life in Bedford, providing free and equitable access to information, ideas, and resources that enrich lives, support lifelong learning, and strengthen community connections. The Library offers a broad range of services, including circulating collections, digital resources, technology access, educational programs, and welcoming public spaces for residents of all ages.

With a long-standing commitment to responsive patron service and meaningful community engagement, the Library continues to evolve to meet changing needs. In addition to its traditional role as an information provider, the Library serves as a learning center, a gathering place, and a trusted connector for individuals and families across Bedford.

## *Bedford Free Public Library: 2019 vs 2025*

<b>Metric</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>% Change</b>
Town Population	14,171	14,394	<b>+1.6</b>
Total Print + Non-print Circulation	333,294	330,058	<b>-1%</b>
Total Physical Circulation	229,924	207,019	<b>-10%</b>
Total Digital Circulation*	25,789	74,792	<b>+190%</b>
Interlibrary Loans Received	47,816	58,524	<b>+22%</b>
Interlibrary Loans Provided	36,155	41,194	<b>+14%</b>
Visitors	203,290	155,773	<b>-23%</b>
Public Computer Sessions	17,635	11,760	<b>-66%</b>

\*ebooks, downloadable audio + video, and materials in electronic format combined.

# *Needs Assessment and Key Findings*

The Strategic Planning Advisory Committee developed and prioritized the following community vision statements for Bedford, based on the Library's ability to support and positively impact each statement.

## **Community Vision Statements**

1. Bedford offers diverse, inclusive, and equitable academic, vocational, and cultural lifelong learning opportunities that enrich residents' lives and foster curiosity and creativity.
2. Bedford develops, maintains, and promotes safe, attractive public facilities and recreational spaces that accommodate residents' diverse interests and needs. These places serve as community gathering centers for affordable cultural, recreational, and social activities that appeal to residents of all ages.
3. Bedford promotes collaborative programs, resources, and services that ensure all community members feel valued, connected, and supported; this cultivates community pride and fosters inclusive initiatives that expand, diversify, and strengthen local volunteerism, citizen awareness, and civic engagement in the community and its governance.
4. Bedford is an inclusive, welcoming community that values diversity, civil discourse, and citizen and civic engagement, and supports a network of neighborhoods, businesses, and organizations that offer community connections for residents of all ages.

# SOAR Summary Results

	TRUSTEES	STAFF
S	<b>STRENGTHS</b>	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Management, operations, governance</li> <li>2. Financial stability</li> <li>3. Core services</li> <li>4. Institutional resilience</li> <li>5. Unique cultural asset</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Consistent patron experience</li> <li>2. Programming</li> <li>3. Physical space</li> <li>4. Magnet destination</li> <li>5. Local history collection</li> </ol>
O	<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Maintain patron privacy and institutional independence</li> <li>2. Strengthen the Library's trusted reputation</li> <li>3. Offer community building activities and adult programming</li> <li>4. Increase partnerships</li> <li>5. Discover additional funding sources and modernize marketing</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reconfigure and maximize unused space</li> <li>2. Meet the needs of young adults, seniors, veterans, and Hanscom families</li> <li>3. Digital skills training and tutoring space</li> <li>4. Leverage outdoor space and local expertise</li> <li>5. Support growing community of remote workers</li> </ol>
A	<b>ASPIRATIONS</b>	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Library is a sanctuary and stabilizing presence</li> <li>2. Space is redesigned and flexible</li> <li>3. Extend services beyond the building</li> <li>4. Leadership in science literacy, public health, and sustainability</li> <li>5. Library is a welcoming, accessible, and comfortable environment</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Focus on awareness and relevance in the community</li> <li>2. Develop robust programming</li> <li>3. Adequate and engaged staff</li> <li>4. Library as the first place people think of for information and enrichment</li> <li>5. Optimize space to meet demands</li> </ol>
R	<b>RESULTS</b>	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Community impact and visibility</li> <li>2. Adequate funding, donations, and partnerships</li> <li>3. Outreach beyond library walls</li> <li>4. Sustainability and energy efficiency</li> <li>5. Teen engagement and training activity</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Measurable service activity and usage</li> <li>2. Space utilization and service accuracy</li> <li>3. Cardholder growth</li> <li>4. Staffing stability and engagement</li> <li>5. Participation by new and targeted populations</li> </ol>

# *Needs Assessment and Key Findings (cont'd)*

## **Focus Groups**

The Library held three general community focus groups in January and February 2026. Participants described the Bedford Free Public Library as a trusted resource rooted in books, excellent staff support, and strong foundational services. They value the Library's accessibility, expertise, and long-standing presence in the community.

At the same time, participants expressed a clear desire for the Library to build on these strengths by becoming an even stronger community connector, communicator, and flexible gathering space. They highlighted several priorities: enhanced outreach, improved facility flow and comfort, expanded technology-learning opportunities, and stronger partnerships. Together, these areas of focus will position the Library to meet emerging needs while preserving its core strengths.

In early February 2026, the Library conducted a focus group with six local parents who regularly use the Library. Participants described the Library as a welcoming, helpful, and deeply trusted community resource. Their families visit regularly to borrow materials, attend programs, and spend time together. Many participants emphasized the Library's importance as a safe space for children and teens. They expressed strong appreciation for the Bedford Free Public Library.

Parents also identified opportunities to strengthen the Library's impact by expanding programming for older youth, improving family-friendly spaces, enhancing technology services, and creating more welcoming areas for gathering and collaboration. Addressing these opportunities will help the Library continue to evolve as a vibrant community hub that supports learning, connection, and engagement for Bedford families in the years ahead.

# *Needs Assessment and Key Findings (cont'd)*

## **Teen Interview**

The Library conducted an hour-long interview with an insightful Bedford teen and library user. The teen described the Bedford Free Public Library as a welcoming, trusted space that is frequently used for studying, reading, and connecting with staff. The teen shared that positive relationships with librarians contribute to a friendly environment where teens feel comfortable spending time and asking for help.

The interview also pointed to several opportunities to further strengthen teen services through enhanced technology access, expanded nonfiction resources, clearer communication about teen programs, and additional creative and educational opportunities. These insights reinforce the Library's potential to be both a learning hub and a place for creative exploration, nurturing teens' curiosity, confidence, academic success, and personal growth.

# Needs Assessment and Key Findings (cont'd)

## Surveys

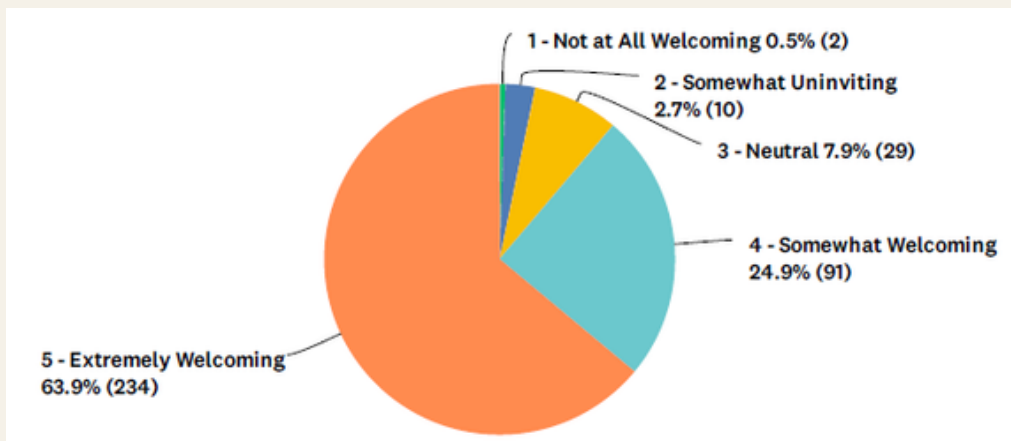
The Library conducted two surveys—one for community members over 18 and one for students 12-18. We received 475 and 121 responses, respectively.

### Community (Adult) Survey

Adult respondents were most likely to visit the library on a weekday afternoon; Saturday mornings and weekday evenings were the least popular times.

Nearly 90% of adult respondents come to the library to pick up or select books and other physical materials. Only 6% come to use Library computers or Wi-Fi, a trend reflected in the sharp decrease in public computer usage since 2019.

Most visitors (89%) find the library somewhat or extremely welcoming.



For programs, respondents expressed the most interest in book clubs and in lectures or classes focused on art, culture, music, history, and literature.

When it comes to learning about library programs and services, respondents shared clear preferences for the library’s website (65%), e-newsletter (51%), and *The Bedford Citizen* (50%). By comparison, social media was selected by (21%), suggesting it may be best used as a complementary channel rather than the primary source of program information. This highlights an opportunity to prioritize the channels residents already use while continuing to strengthen outreach across platforms.

## Needs Assessment and Key Findings (cont'd)

What's one word or phrase you would like people to associate with our Library five years from now?



### Youth Survey

Although only 69% of youth respondents have a library card, more than 80% visit at least quarterly with most visiting weekly. Among those who don't visit or don't visit often, the most common reason given was that they're too busy.

Students are most interested in the library being a comfortable place to relax and spend time with friends, a space to study or work on group projects, and a reliable source for borrowing books and other physical materials.

Respondents were very forthcoming when asked to describe the hardest part about being a kid or teen today. Common themes included stress and anxiety, academic workload and time management issues, pressure from parents, social media addiction, bullying, and the challenge of finding balance.

# Goals and Objectives

## GOAL 1: Rise to Our Potential

- **OBJECTIVE 1:** Create an infrastructure that empowers staff to problem-solve and lead with confidence.
- **OBJECTIVE 2:** Provide comprehensive staff training at all levels that encompasses public service and librarianship and encourages innovation.
- **OBJECTIVE 3:** Cultivate a joyful, respectful workplace culture that supports both exceptional patron service and meaningful collaboration among colleagues.

## GOAL 2: Reimagine Library Spaces

- **OBJECTIVE 1:** Rethink spaces to provide distinct areas for collaboration, quiet focus, and informal gathering.
- **OBJECTIVE 2:** Prioritize comfort, accessibility, and intuitive wayfinding.

## GOAL 3: Tell Our Story

- **OBJECTIVE 1:** Create a unified and consistent identity across all departments.
- **OBJECTIVE 2:** Raise our profile in the community by increasing awareness of library services across all platforms and demographics.

## GOAL 4: Empower Through Technology

- **OBJECTIVE 1:** Develop seamless internal systems that allow staff to focus on meaningful service and community connection.
- **OBJECTIVE 2:** Ensure public technology is accessible, welcoming, and designed so everyone can participate fully in a digital world.
- **OBJECTIVE 3:** Create opportunities for the community to explore emerging technologies, creative tools, and forward-thinking ideas.

## GOAL 5: Inspire Lifelong Learning

- **OBJECTIVE 1:** Deliver high-quality programs designed to engage thoughtful, intellectually curious individuals.
- **OBJECTIVE 2:** Expand and enhance high-demand collections, including browsable materials and nontraditional resources.
- **OBJECTIVE 3:** Provide opportunities designed to introduce patrons to new topics, formats, and experiences.