

Plainfield Public Library Strategic Plan 2024-2028

Letter from Director

Innovations and technological changes in the direction of Library Services have enabled libraries to move forward with the times. This is the first time that we, at the Plainfield Public Library, embarked on a strategic planning process that included surveys, and focus groups of our Plainfield community to discover what you would like to see at the Library moving forward.

Encouraged by your thoughtful participation, we present a plan that will mindfully steer our work and focus over the next four years.

Thank you for the time you have taken to assist us in creating a new path for the Library.

Planning Committee Members

- Cynthia Slade – Chair
- Eileen Palmer - Consultant
- Patricia Fleming – Board President
- Mary Ellen Rogan - Director
- Claudia Flores – Assistant Director
- Donna Rajcevic – Finance

Overview of Planning Process

The strategic planning process began in October 2022 and included three phases.

To determine key challenges and service goals, the first phase combined extensive consultation with Plainfield Public Library management and staff, key stakeholders, and residents through surveys, interviews, and targeted focus groups with a review of current library statistics and industry-wide public service trends.

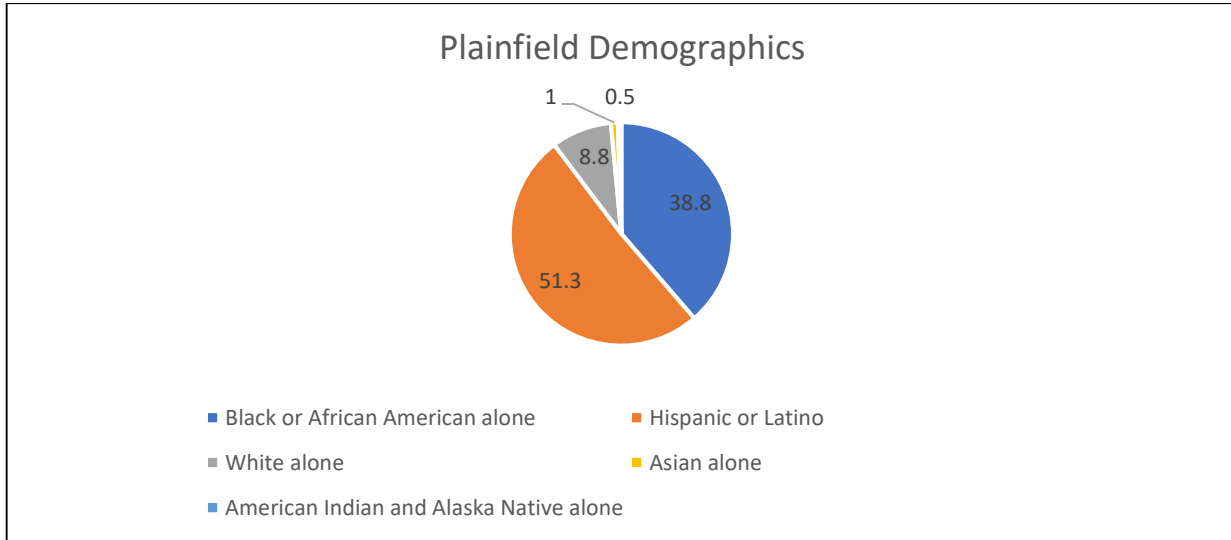
During the second phase, the Planning Committee used this data to develop the frame of the four year strategic plan which included five strategic goals, mission and vision statements.

During the third phase, Library staff developed a set of key objectives and tasks aligned to the Library goals and mission statement. This Implementation Plan will ensure that our strategic goals and action items are addressed, realistic timelines are established, resources are identified and provided, and responsibilities are appropriately assigned.

Summary Findings

The Plainfield Community

Plainfield is an exceptionally diverse community, according to the most recent census (2022).¹



2022 U.S. Census Data	New Jersey	Plainfield city, New Jersey
Foreign born persons, percent, 2017-2021	22.90%	37.20%
Language other than English spoken at home, percent of persons age 5 years+, 2017-2021	31.90%	55.20%
Households with a broadband Internet subscription, percent, 2017-2021	89.40%	81.20%
High school graduate or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+, 2017-2021	90.50%	77.70%
Bachelor's degree or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+, 2017-2021	41.50%	20.60%
Persons without health insurance, under age 65 years, percent	8.40%	27.10%
Persons in poverty, percent	10.20%	17.10%

The Plainfield School District is an Abbott (now called SDA)² district where over 66.4% of students are considered economically disadvantaged and 40.7% are classified as English Language Learners.³ Plainfield averages around a 70% 4 year graduation rate compared to the state's average of a little over 90%⁴. The data for 2020-21 shows that during the height of the pandemic, Plainfield schools had dropout rates over ten times higher than the state average.⁵

¹ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/plainfieldcitynewjersey/PST045222>

² https://www.njsda.gov/Content/FactSheets/31_SDA_Districts.pdf

³ <https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/2021-2022/district/summary/39/4160>

⁴ Id.

⁵ Id.

These numbers indicate a diverse community with greater than the state average need for the types of digital connectivity, training, educational opportunities, and multi-lingual services that libraries are well-positioned to offer.

These findings are in line with the City of Plainfield Master Plan which also indicates future housing growth.⁶

Community Input Data Collection and Methodology

Additional data was collected via community and staff surveys, focus groups, and community influencer interviews. Overall the research, surveys, interviews and focus groups provided the strategic planning committee with a wealth of data to assess existing services and map out priorities for the future. The committee is especially grateful to our residents and community leaders for their time and thoughtful engagement in the strategic planning process. While the strategic plan can only summarize the results and identify trends useful in developing strategic priorities, there is a wealth of data in the responses that Library staff are examining in detail as they seek to develop and enhance Library services. Each element of the strategic plan is directly responsive to the information obtained with many actionable items being near verbatim transcriptions of community responses and suggestions.

Surveys

The Library conducted two surveys in late 2022, one for residents (in English and Spanish) and one for staff. In total, 522 people responded to the residents' survey, with 10% using the Spanish version, and 20% of the respondents being under the age of 18. Strategic planning team members have been provided with the full survey results as well as subsets of the responses in Spanish and the responses from those under the age of 18.

Focus Groups

Several focus groups were conducted in November 2022. Focus groups for seniors, Spanish speakers, and students were well attended with engaged participants.

Community Influencer Interviews

The strategic planning committee identified 15 community influencers and conducted one on one interviews with them to supplement the data gathered through surveys.

⁶ https://www.plainfieldnj.gov/departments/planning_and_zoning/master_plan.php#outer-275

Key Findings

Overall, those that were aware and made use of Library services were very satisfied and felt the Library was doing an excellent job.

Patrons have a desire for more programming across a spectrum of interests.

Survey responses, focus groups, and influencer interviews were remarkably consistent in identifying three needs:

- Better marketing.
- Aesthetic and structural improvements to the building exterior and interior, focusing on safety and visibility.
- Expansion of all programming with a focus on literacy/educational services (both traditional and digital) across all age groups.

Additional Findings and Noteworthy Responses

- English Speakers
 - 27% of adult English speakers surveyed did not have a Library card.
 - 17% of people who don't use the Library said it was that they didn't find the Library or the surroundings safe.
 - 33.58% didn't know what the Library offers.
 - 20.4% didn't have transportation.
- Spanish Speakers
 - When asked why they don't use the Library or have a card:
 - 32.4% do not find the Library or surrounding safe.
 - 27.03% did not know what the Library offered.
 - 35.14% felt uncomfortable because of lack of English language proficiency.
 - 77.5% of Spanish survey respondents were unaware of access to free online services.
- Teens
 - 43% of teens surveyed had no Library card. The majority of whom said it was because they didn't know what the Library offers.
- Library Staff
 - Staff overwhelmingly felt the most important thing needed was to have improved security.
 - Staff cited frequent examples of patrons being scared to come to the building particularly at night, because of loiterers outside the building.

Patron Satisfaction

After removing answers from those who reported not knowing about library programming, results were as follows:

Among English Speaking Adults who attended programming in the last 12 months:

- 77% were either satisfied or very satisfied with adult programs.
- 66% were either satisfied or very satisfied with children's programs.
- 63% were either satisfied or very satisfied with teen programs.

Among Teens who attended programming in the last 12 months:

- 53% were either satisfied or very satisfied with adult programs.
- 58% were either satisfied or very satisfied with teen programs.

Among Spanish Speaking Adults who attended programming in the last 12 months:

- 57% were very satisfied with adult programs

Note: 61% said they would be interested in attending computer classes.

Programing Types

Across all surveys, responses were consistently close when patrons were polled on types of programs of interest. There was a broad interest for more artistic, cultural, entertainment, and educational programming. In the few instances where deviations were significant, these discrepancies were explained by a specialization of interest, for example, toddler and local history programs.

Scheduling

Overall, Saturday was the most popular time for attending library programs, followed by weekday evenings, then weekday afternoons and finally, weekday mornings. Though, those under 17 preferred weekday afternoons over weekday evenings.

All programming related questions generated extensive ideas for additional programming.

Marketing Issues

As with many libraries, there is a high lack of awareness about key services.

- 44% of respondents did not know the Library offered programs for Adults.
- 49% did not know the Library offered Children's programs.
- 68% of teens responding did not know the Library offered Teen programs.
- When asked about their awareness of naturalization, General Education Diploma (GED) and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, respondents were almost evenly split (46% yes, 49% no).

While the Library currently has a varied selection of programs targeting adults, children, and teens, many residents are unaware of Library programs and services.

Library Collections

Overall, the highest level of overall satisfaction was with the book collection.

- 38% of respondents indicated they did not know the Library had digital collections (47% of teenage respondents).
- 44% of respondents indicated they were Satisfied or Very Satisfied with the Library's digital collections.
- 70% of those responding indicated that the Library's materials in languages other than English met their needs.
- 30% said the collection did not meet their needs, indicating an area for potential growth for the collection. Spanish, Portuguese, and French were the languages most requested by respondents.

When asked about online resources (databases, homework services, etc.):

- 53% of respondents indicated they were unaware the Library offered them. Interestingly, awareness was slightly higher among teens. Several respondents indicated they were interested in learning more about these services.

Library Aesthetics

Almost 80% of respondents said they felt welcomed in the Library. Over 70% indicated the Library met their needs. These numbers were lower when looking at responses from those under 18 years of age. Many respondents felt that the Library building was not visible enough from the street. Some also indicated improvements to the parking lot and concrete steps should be a high priority. More inventive use of the outdoor Library space was identified by some as a way to better integrate the Library into the community and better utilize its footprint.

The majority of those responding report satisfaction with the Library's WiFi, computer and Internet services. Most respondents indicate they use the Library's computer/Internet services because the Library has technology they do not have at home and because it is a quieter place to work. This is especially true of the teens who responded.

Teens indicated a desire for a teen area within the Library, which was also a priority identified in the staff survey.

Generally, teens feel positive about the Library but do not feel engaged. Teens had a low awareness of available services for them, indicated a desire for teen-friendly spaces, and want Library services to 'meet them where they are.'

The focus group conducted at the Plainfield Senior Center was well attended with engaged participants. They were uniformly supportive of the Library even if they were not regular Library users. Those that do use the Library do so with children and grandchildren. Some expressed a desire for classes in technology designed for them. Many indicated lack of transportation was a barrier in using the Library.

The focus group for Spanish speaking residents also included many participants supportive of the Library and its programs. Attendees offered programming ideas such as, job-modeling and parenting classes. They look to the Library to provide connections for new immigrants, including ways to mentor and support each other. They also expressed concern over wait lists for ESL

classes, some indicating a willingness to pay if it would allow the Library to provide more such classes.

The influencers interviewed were very positive in their view of the Library, with one calling the library a ‘gem of the community.’ Those interviewed consider the Library a community center and were very supportive of seeing the Library increase its engagement with the community. They hoped to see the Library increase opportunities to partner with other community organizations. They see the Library as an important bridge to addressing technology gaps among residents. Current Library initiatives in local history, literacy, and improving educational attainment for Plainfield residents are very highly regarded among this group. Not surprisingly, despite a higher awareness of the Library’s services and role in the community, influencers did not show much understanding of how the Library is funded. Overall the influencers are supportive of a growing role for the Library in the community and could be key resources in improving the Library’s visibility.

The Plan

Our Vision

To be a lifelong learning center of cultural, historical, and educational enrichment for the Plainfield community.

Our Mission

The Plainfield Public Library will provide all citizens of Plainfield full and equal access to information resources, technologies, and programs for a lifetime of learning and cultural enrichment, by promoting literacy, preserving the history of the community, and serving as a community center.

Goal One: Connect the Community

Expand the Library’s role as a community anchor and the guardian of Plainfield’s history.

- Objective 1 - Foster relationships with new/underrepresented audiences.
 - Provide a bilingual social worker.
 - Look into partnering with the social work intern program at Rutgers.
 - Invite marginalized groups to take advantage of library services.
 - Liaise with agencies that can direct clients to the library for services.
 - Increase teen presence in building.
 - Increase positive interactions outside the building with adolescents after schools.
 - Begin outside programs in the park designed to engage teens and to raise the Library profile among the demographic.
 - Create a teen space in the building.
 - Start with temporary space in Lab A as an interim as we look for a permanent solution.
 - Create a teen advisory board.
 - Increase community engagement through volunteering.
 - Diversify volunteer opportunities to attract historically underrepresented groups.

- Increase volunteer recruitment.
 - Dedicate staff member to oversee volunteering building wide.
 - Increase access for seniors.
 - More senior specific programming.
 - Senior computer classes.
 - Senior book club.
 - More senior outreach.
 - Explore solutions to transportation obstacles.
 - Have sessions at the Senior Center for audio and ebook downloads.
 - Pop-up Library for book borrowing at Senior Center.
- Objective 2 – Continue to preserve and protect the history of Plainfield and the surrounding areas.
 - Collect and preserve genealogical and historical materials that reflect the multicultural diversity of Plainfield.
 - Digitize materials to give universal access through our web portals.
 - Explore new technologies to improve access.
- Objective 3 – Facilitate connections between Plainfield’s residents and community organizations.
 - Actively maintain and update a directory of service providers and relevant information on services and events to help direct clients.
 - Establish sending/referral protocols with community organizations leading toward “seamless hand-off.”
 - Increase on-site satellite services by community organizations establishing temporary sites at the Library such as:
 - Flu/Vaccine clinics via city health department.
 - Tax preparation via AARP.
 - Unemployment counseling via American Job Center (AJC).

Goal Two: Advance Lifelong Learning

We will advance lifelong learning through outstanding collections, programs, classes, and services.

- Objective 1 – Transform educational programming to reflect the multicultural diversity of the community.
 - Pilot Spanish classes for English speakers.
 - Highlight resources for middle school children.
 - Streamline library cards applications for middle schoolers, making the process easier for guardians who are not available to come to the library and sign papers.
 - Create programs to encourage love of libraries as middle schoolers transition to high school.
 - Offer programming for Neurodivergent patrons; i.e., multisensory programming. Some examples include:
 - Shared art projects.
 - Book groups for neurodivergent adults.

- STEM programs for neurodivergent teens.
 - Use Wonderbooks in the Children’s Department for multisensory story-time.
 - Have sessions for home school parents and children similar to those that are held when traditional schools visit.
 - Provide inclusive historical programming to represent the diversity of Plainfield’s community.
- Objective 2 – Provide innovative opportunities for vocational, life and technology skills.
 - Host a series of financial workshops on homeownership, business, money management, estate / retirement planning.
 - Host a series of parent workshops on current topics affecting children such as: drugs, gangs, self-help programs, college applications, scholarships, etc.
 - Host a series of teen workshops on topics such as: suicide, bullying, drugs, peer pressure, depression, college applications, etc.
 - Host a series of senior workshops on topics of interest to seniors such as: Medicare, Social Security, Eldercare, empty nest issues, financial matters, downsizing, health care, etc.

Goal Three: Develop Marketing Strategies

Develop new marketing strategies to increase awareness of our services and resources.

- Objective 1 – Update Library website.
 - Form staff website committee to survey patrons, staff, and other library websites and compile and report findings.
 - Hire a website designer with experience in library websites to design a new website incorporating the committee’s findings
- Objective 2 – Improve and increase clarity, functionality, and visibility of signage
 - Install exterior signage identifying building
 - Update all signage and brochures including making sure both English and Spanish versions of each exist.
 - Set up prominently displayed kiosk with brochures and program flyers in English and Spanish.
 - Improve signage directing people around the building including computer labs, passport office, study rooms, lower level, and meeting rooms.
- Objective 3 – Use creative outreach strategies
 - Expand marketing, publicity & outreach.
 - Explore use of Plainfield Cable TV (PCTV) for broadcasting:
 - Notices/advertisements.
 - Library webinars.
 - Book talks.
 - Institute pop-up classes on digital services around the city.
 - Change monthly newsletter to weekly.
 - Increase Library’s external presence with increased participation at offsite community events

Goal Four: Provide Fun and Safe Spaces

Provide inspiring, safe and functional spaces for the public and staff.

- Objective 1 – Update and beautify building exterior and Library grounds.
 - Repair drains in parking lot to prepare for new blacktop.
 - Remove old bike racks which are both an eyesore and an area that becomes a hangout for loiterers.
 - Update building plan to facilitate a renovation of the outside of the building one side at a time.
 - Seek help from local garden club or Rutgers program.
 - Reach out to the Plainfield Shade Tree Commission to replace trees around the building.
 - Fence the perimeter on East 8th and 9th Streets to protect hedges on those sides.
 - Determine cost to hire a landscape company to keep up bushes, trees and plants if the City or other local resources cannot assist.
- Objective 2 – Improve security both inside and outside the Library.
 - Arrange for security at least from Mondays through Thursdays.
 - Update lighting in parking lots and around the building.
 - Update cameras around the Library as needed.
 - Add panic buttons to public service areas.
 - Arrange for CPR training.
 - Hold Active Shooter Training for staff.
- Objective 3 – Create comfortable workspaces for patrons around the building.
 - Purchase a selection of comfortable chairs and lap-top seating for the public.
 - Add more study spaces on the main floor.
 - Advertise and make available puzzles and board games for the public.
- Objective 4 - Create a dedicated Teen Space.

Goal Five: Plan for the Future

Provide long-term strategies to enable stability and growth.

- Objective 1 – Continue to search for grant funding sources.
 - Search out grants for all departments.
- Objective 2 – Find donors to provide long-term support.
 - Look for donors who will endow departments and/or spaces at the library.
Possible funding opportunities include:
 - Literacy Department.
 - Local History Department.
 - Children’s Department.
 - Computer Labs B and C.
 - Passport Office.
 - Teen Space.
 - Library Grounds Beautification.
 - Specific programming such as Summer Reading or Local History webinars.

- Objective 3 –Redesign the interior of the Library to plan for the future focusing on creating more flexible use of space and updating technological infrastructure.
 - Arrange for architect to design the lower level area.
 - Search for funding sources.