

Increasing Equity in Access & Opportunity



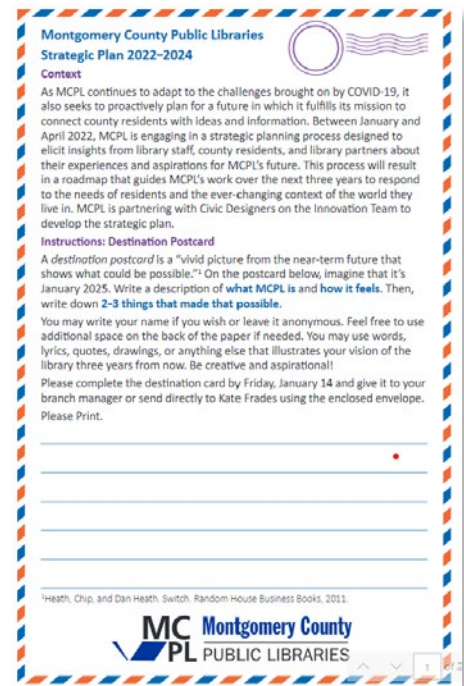
**A Community-Centered Vision
Strategic Plan
FY 2023–FY 2026**

OVERVIEW

Context

Montgomery County Public Libraries (MCPL) prides itself on connecting community members with ideas and information. The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged MCPL in many ways, but the organization has continually adapted to the circumstances to deliver on its promise to the community. In 2020, staff developed “Holds-to-Go” to give customers a contactless method to check out books and shifted programming from in-person to virtual. MCPL also offered a digital access card for new customers to use the library’s extensive digital resources, and eliminated library fines that functioned as a financial barrier for many residents.

As MCPL looked to the future, the organization identified the need for a framework that articulates a compelling vision for the libraries; honors, galvanizes and inspires MCPL staff across the organization; and responds to the needs of all county residents and the ever-changing context of the world they live in. To create this framework, MCPL partnered with the Montgomery County Innovation Team (Innovation@MCG) to deeply engage community members and MCPL staff in surfacing and prioritizing community needs for its next strategic framework.



Process

Together, MCPL and Innovation@MCG employed human-centered design methods such as future envisioning, user need statements and co-design workshops to build a collaborative strategic plan. We began the process by inviting every library staff member to complete a “destination postcard”¹ that captured their vision for MCPL in 2025. These postcards provided important insights about what staff perceive to be the role of the library and what it would take to more fully live into that role. We also invited county

Above, right: A staff destination postcard

Left: Positive feedback from MCPL customers

¹ Heath, Chip, and Dan Heath. Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard. Currency, 2010

residents and visitors to the library to share their reflections on and aspirations for the library through vision boards, focus groups and an online survey. The customer responses revealed strongly positive emotional associations with libraries, as well as a range of needs and preferences about the services that MCPL currently provides or might offer in the future.

Through workshops with every MCPL branch and team, all MCPL staff reviewed the feedback from customers, defined both customer and staff needs, and ideated on ways to address those needs. From these generative discussions emerged a new vision and mission for the library, grounded in a set of core values that represent what MCPL stands for as it turns toward the future. The vision and mission serve as the foundation for MCPL's strategic goals and priorities, which were co-developed with experts from MCPL, county departments and agencies, and community organizations.



Above: MCPL staff organize customer feedback from vision boards in branches and an online survey

Below: Customer and staff feedback, sorted into themes and color-coded by branch



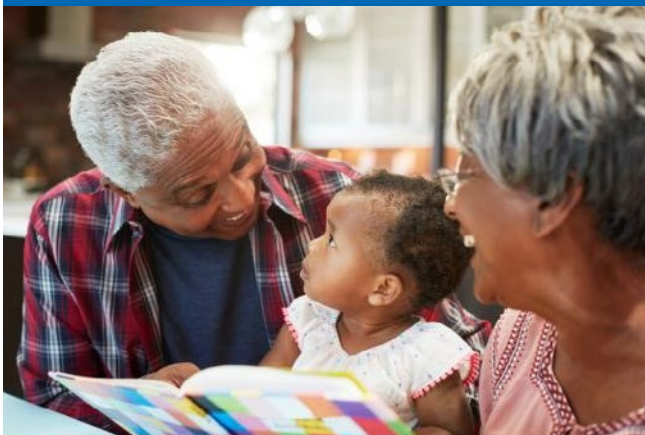
VISION, MISSION AND CORE VALUES

VISION

Montgomery County Public Libraries are an essential component of a just and equitable community, where all can thrive and grow.

MISSION

We provide equitable access to information, ideas, and experiences that spark imagination and expand possibilities for all.



OUR VALUES

Discovery

We are champions of curiosity, exploration, and growth. We support members of our community to expand their knowledge, learn new skills, spark ideas, and make connections.

Intellectual Freedom

We believe in free, open, and confidential access to ideas and information for all as a cornerstone of a thriving democratic society.

Equity

We believe all residents of Montgomery County deserve equal and inclusive access to all the library's resources, regardless of race, age, gender, religion, sexual orientation, income, education, language, disability, and/or immigration status.

Respect

We strive to treat everyone with kindness, provide a safe and welcoming environment for all, and honor the knowledge and lived experience of all members of our community.

Service

We connect members of our community with the information they want and need, as efficiently as possible. We anticipate and adapt to the changing needs, desires, and expectations of community members.

Community

We are the backbone of our community, a place to connect with each other. We forge strong, reciprocal relationships with residents, community organizations, and other county departments in service of our shared goals.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

To accomplish its mission over the next three years, MCPL will continue to provide its core services for all while supporting the following populations in particular to thrive:

GOAL 1 Children 5 and under are ready for kindergarten	GOAL 2 Teens are ready for college and/or the workforce, and to be lifelong users of the library
GOAL 3 Speakers of languages other than English can participate fully in American society	GOAL 4 Residents with limited access to technology and/or the internet can navigate a digital world to get what they need

To achieve these goals, MCPL will explore launching its strategic priorities at branches located in and around **Equity Focus Areas**.² These are parts of Montgomery County that are characterized by high concentrations of lower-income people of color, who may also speak English less than very well. Residents in these areas are susceptible to systemic racial and social inequities, which MCPL acknowledges its historic role in perpetuating and its ongoing role in disrupting. MCPL pledges to work with these and other communities implicated in the strategic plan to understand and respond to their needs and interests.

² “The Equity Focus Areas Analysis,” Montgomery Planning, last updated 26 April 2022, <https://montgomeryplanning.org/planning/equity-agenda-for-planning/the-equity-focus-areas-analysis>

GOAL 1

Children 5 and under are ready for kindergarten

RATIONALE

COVID-19 has widened pre-existing gaps in kindergarten readiness across the county, particularly for Latinx students, who comprise 35% of county kindergarteners.³ MCPL provides high-quality early literacy supports, from rich programming to an expansive children's collection, and will work to ensure that all children and families are able to access them.

ACTIONS

- Develop an early literacy framework for MCPL in partnership with county agencies, departments and organizations working on early childhood development
- Optimize opportunities for children and caregivers to engage with libraries, particularly in communities with high concentrations of Spanish-speaking children and low-income households
- Conduct community outreach and engagement to promote the library's early literacy programs, including 1000 Books Before Kindergarten and MCPL's Summer Reading Program, and resources such as Every Child Ready to Read

OUTPUTS

- Increased participation in MCPL's 1000 Books Before Kindergarten and Summer Reading Challenge, with a focus on increasing promotion in Equity Focus Areas
- Increased # of and participants in, storytimes, particularly at branches located in or near Equity Focus Areas
- Increased # and circulation of children's materials, particularly at branches located in or near Equity Focus Areas

POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

Improved kindergarten readiness rates, particularly among English learners and children from low-income households.



³ Ready at Five, Coming Back Stronger: Resilience And Opportunity, 2021–2022 Kindergarten Readiness Assessment Report, 2022, <https://www.readyatfive.org/kindergarten-readiness-assessment>.

GOAL 2

Teens are ready for college and/or the workforce, and to be lifelong users of the library

RATIONALE

While county high school graduation rates are on the rise, disparities persist for teens who identify as Black or Latino, speak limited English, and/or live in low-income households.⁴ MCPL staff report that teens are showing up to the library in greater numbers than before the COVID-19 pandemic, seeking space away from home and school, and ways to connect with each other and the world. MCPL commits to making the library a welcoming place for teens and working with teens to design programs that serve them and their interests.

ACTIONS

- Recruit for and hire a youth program specialist to design, implement, and evaluate services for teens across MCPL
- Establish a teen advisory board at each branch that represents the branch community (e.g., race, age, gender, schools)
- Create, recruit and hire for a teen librarian/library associate positions at each branch

OUTPUTS

- Increased # of active users between ages 13-18
- Increased circulation among teen users
- Increased # of teen programs and participants
- Increased # of teen volunteers and SSL hours awarded
- Increased # of outreach events in teen spaces, organizations and events

POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

Increased English Language Arts proficiency, high school graduation, college matriculation and workforce participation rates, particularly among underrepresented students



⁴ “MCPS Graduation Rate Increases for Class of 2021.” Montgomery County Public Schools, 17 Mar. 2022, <https://ww2.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/press/index.aspx?pagetype=showrelease&id=13127>.

GOAL 3

Speakers of languages other than English can participate fully in American society

RATIONALE

One-third of Montgomery County residents were born outside the U.S.; on average, this group faces disparities in housing, education, and employment that other residents do not.⁵ MCPL will work to ensure that residents who speak languages other than English are able to access services and resources that can help them navigate society and connect with opportunity.

ACTIONS

- Improve county residents' access to multilingual library staff
- Expand outreach and engagement efforts in predominantly Spanish-speaking communities
- Recruit for and hire an Assistant Director for Programs and Outreach
- Improve language accessibility across programming and collections

OUTPUTS

- Increased # of outreach events to communities that speak languages other than English
- Increased program offerings and attendance focused on speakers of other languages
- Increased # and circulation of world language materials
- Increased recruitment and certification of multilingual library staff

POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

Increased rate of employment (and reduced gap) in family-sustaining jobs, rate of educational attainment, and English proficiency rates



⁵ *Interactive Self-Sufficiency Standard*, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/OCA/CommunityAction/interactiveSelfSufficiency.html>.

GOAL 4

Residents with limited access to technology and/or the internet can navigate a digital world to get what they need

RATIONALE

Libraries play an important role in improving digital equity and inclusion so that all individuals and communities can connect with the information needed to participate fully in our society, democracy and economy. MCPL will work to expand community members' access to and proficiency using technology and the full spectrum of digital resources available at the library.

ACTIONS

- Offer more digital skill building classes for both customers and staff that are designed with/for, promoted to, and delivered in communities that most need them
- Work with community partners to assist customers with digital tasks
- Improve access to functional, user-friendly technology (internet, devices) and digital services in areas where, and/or for populations for whom, connectivity and access is limited

OUTPUTS

- Increased usage of computers, laptops and mobile hotspots, particularly in low-access areas of the county
- Increased # of technology and digital literacy programs and participants, including classes and office hours (onsite, virtual and out in the community; multilingual)
- Increased usage of MCPL's digital services (e.g., Northstar, LinkedIn Learning)
- Increased # of technology & digital literacy focused outreach events in low-access areas of the county
- Increased # of partnerships with organizations working on digital inclusion

POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

Increased access to, and proficiency and confidence with, technology and digital resources



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

MCPL would like to thank the many community members who took time to share their experiences, insights and feedback with the libraries. We are proud of and inspired by the fact that this strategic framework reflects the needs and desires of the community. We also thank every MCPL staff member who engaged in the strategic planning process, even as they distributed masks and test kits, reopened libraries on Sundays, and worked harder than ever to make libraries safe, welcoming, helpful and fun for community members at a time of unprecedented need. We are particularly grateful for the staff members who helped collect customer feedback, co-facilitated community focus groups, coordinated meetings, and provided feedback on the draft strategic goals and priorities.

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