

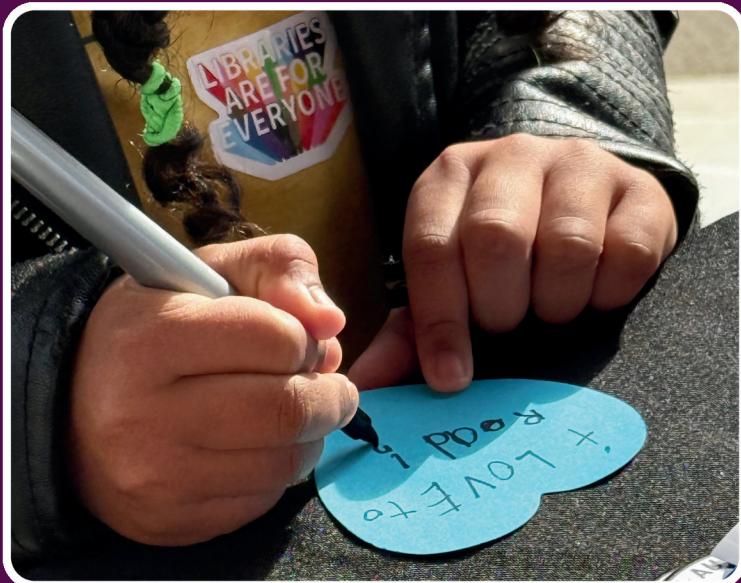


2025-2028

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Building Bridges to Knowledge, Community, and Opportunity

New Haven Free Public Library | nhfpl.org



Above: A young New Havener responds to an interactive prompt at an outreach event.



Dear New Haven Residents,

On behalf of the New Haven Free Public Library, thank you for your invaluable participation in our strategic planning process. Your ideas, feedback, and vision for the future of our library have shaped a thoughtful, forward-looking framework, designed to meet the evolving needs of our diverse city.

These new initiatives represent an exciting chapter, one that embraces innovation while deepening our commitment to service, connection, and learning. Together, we are building a Library that reflects New Haven's unique spirit and supports every resident in exploring, creating, and growing.

At the heart of this plan is a shared belief in the transformative power of reading and a broad spectrum of literacies. Language, digital skills, and financial understanding are among a few of the key forms of literacy highlighted here, each strengthened through collective support and shared responsibility. When we come together to learn and share, we help build important skills and empathy across generations.

We look forward to working with you as we bring this vision to life. I encourage all New Haven residents to get or renew their library card and explore all the library has to offer. Stop by our branches, check out books and movies, download eBooks and audiobooks, explore our research tools and Local History Room, come to an event, and ask our staff for help. And be sure to tell your friends and neighbors about our services and share your feedback when you see ways we can improve.

With gratitude and excitement for what's ahead,

Maria Bernhey
City Librarian and Director

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INTRODUCTION AND PROCESS

Building Bridges to Knowledge, Community, and Opportunity 2025-2028 New Haven Free Public Library Strategic Framework

In our last Strategic Plan, the **New Haven Free Public Library (NHFPL)** embarked on a comprehensive planning journey to build on its achievements and strengthen its connection with the city it serves. The result was *Growing Together: One City, One Future*, a five-year plan that redefined the Library's purpose. Once viewed primarily as an educational institution, NHFPL embraced our broader identity as a trusted and vital community hub.

As the world continues to change, so too do the roles and responsibilities of libraries, which have **evolved beyond their traditional role as repositories of books and information** to form deeper, more active partnerships with their communities. To meet these needs, the Library must be a place where learning and connection converge to support residents through expanded access to workforce development, community well-being, and social services resources to support the aspirations of all New Haven residents.

Recognizing this important shift, NHFPL's leadership team and the 2025-2028 Strategic Plan Steering Committee launched a new planning process that **reflects agility, inclusivity, and thoughtful reflection on community feedback** to develop responsive priorities for the Library's future. Drawing upon surveys and focus groups as well as Census data, Data Haven reports, and ongoing interactions between staff and patrons, NHFPL gathered insights from more than a thousand voices to shape its next chapter.



Kareem Weaver, an award-winning teacher and the founder of FULCRUM, discusses literacy and the right to read at Stetson Branch Library.

Our new framework, ***Building Bridges to Knowledge, Community, and Opportunity***, charts a transformative course for New Haven libraries alongside an ever-growing city. Rooted in its strong educational legacy, NHFPL envisions a future where it ignites possibility by creating vibrant spaces that foster learning, creativity, and connection – supporting self-empowerment for all library users. This vision guides every aspect of our work, from advancing literacy and lifelong learning to expanding pathways for economic advancement and civic engagement.

At the core of this vision lies a steadfast belief that literacy in all its forms is the foundation of opportunity. NHFPL remains committed to ensuring that every member of our community has access to diverse materials, programs, and services that cultivate the joy of reading and the skills to thrive.



Adult Services staff member Allison Hobson conducts microfilm research for a library user.



City Librarian Maria Bernhey with staff members Shana Johnson and Phillip Modeen at PrideFest outreach

INTRODUCTION AND PROCESS

As **New Haven's central hub for information and resources**, the Library builds indispensable partnerships with local organizations to share knowledge, increase capacity, and expand access to important resources. Through these partnerships, NHFPL offers openings for enrichment and helps chart pathways to economic empowerment, giving individuals the tools to shape their own future. By expanding equitable access to technology, information, and creative tools, the Library ensures that innovation, imagination, and opportunity remain within reach for all.



Teens work on a school project in the Ives Main Library Local History room.



Staff members are honored at City Hall by Mayor Elicker for going above and beyond, performing lifesaving measures for library visitors in need of help.

Steering Committee Members

Maria Bernhey
Jerry Boccia
Diane Brown
Luis Chavez-Brumell
Tyrone Dailey
Sandy Flores
Abby Franz
Jennifer Gargiulo
Seth Godfrey

Karina Gonzalez
Marian Huggins
Robert Kinney
Rory Martorana
Soma Mitra
J Wren Pennington
Manuel Romero
Arthur Volanthe



City Librarian Maria Bernhey, Lee Cruz, Fair Haven Branch Manager Kirk Morrison, and Artists Mitchell Rembert and Irisol Gonzalez-Vega pose in front of the Fair Haven Branch Library Peace Wall.

The Library's role as a cultural cornerstone is equally important, celebrating the creativity, stories, and voices that reflect New Haven's remarkable diversity. Our libraries have the potential to become even stronger platforms where personal expression and shared experience come together to inspire the Elm City's ongoing cultural growth and renewal.

As we look ahead, ***Building Bridges to Knowledge, Community, and Opportunity*** continues NHFPL's longstanding commitment to equity and innovation. This plan is rooted in feedback from our visitors, neighborhoods, staff, and city partners, envisioning a library system that not only meets today's needs but anticipates tomorrow's challenges, always striving to be a great equalizer and catalyst for progress.

Together with our partners, library users, and supporters, the New Haven Free Public Library is poised to build a future where everyone has the opportunity to learn, create, and connect. With optimism and determination, we will continue to build bridges toward a stronger, more connected, and more vibrant New Haven for generations to come.

Acknowledgements

Maureen Sullivan and Associates
Farnham Associates, LLC

nhfpl 
NEW HAVEN FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY

MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

Mission

The New Haven Free Public Library fosters lifelong learning, inspires curiosity, and builds community through shared access to resources, experiences, and opportunities for all.

Vision

The Library will ignite possibility by creating vibrant spaces that facilitate learning, creativity, and connection to support self-empowerment for all Library users.

Values

1. Advance Literacy

Ensure that our community has access to diverse materials, services, and training to nurture literacy and promote the joy of reading for all ages and abilities.

2. Inspire Belonging Through Vibrant Public Spaces

Create welcoming and dynamic environments where people gather to connect, collaborate, share ideas, deepen community ties, and empower personal growth.

3. Cultivate a Connected and Civically Engaged Community

Position the Library as a central hub where residents can connect with local organizations, share community knowledge, and stay informed of city-wide initiatives and resources.

4. Build Lifelong Pathways to Economic Empowerment

Strengthen the Library's role as a trusted partner in workforce development by offering access to tools for professional advancement, skill-building, job readiness, and financial literacy.

5. Broaden Access to Cultivate Innovation, Information, and Imagination

Provide equitable access to technology, educational resources, and creative tools so community members can discover, explore, and grow in a rapidly changing world.

6. Celebrate Culture, Creativity, and Local Voices

Activate Library spaces as platforms for cultural expression, artistic collaboration, and storytelling that reflect and uplift the city's diverse communities.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Strategic Initiative 1: NHFPL locations as Centralized Hubs for Community Connection

Goal: Well-informed and connected communities that are active participants in a thriving city.

- **Core Area of Focus A:** Connection to Civic and Community Organizations
- **Core Area of Focus B:** Shared Community Knowledge, Expertise, and Support
- **Core Area of Focus C:** Increase Awareness of Library Assets

Strategic Initiative 2: Catalyst for Career Pathways and Upward Mobility

Goal: New Haveners advance confidently in their careers with the Library as a trusted partner.

- **Core Area of Focus A:** Workforce Skill Building and Employment Networking
- **Core Area of Focus B:** Financial Management and Literacy Education
- **Core Area of Focus C:** Expand access to Technology, Job Resources, and Career Pathways

Strategic Initiative 3: Libraries as essential learning spaces for Education, Exploration, and Enrichment for all

Goal: The Library is a local destination for inclusive learning and innovation, fostering global connection.

- **Core Area of Focus A:** Reading and Language Literacy for All Ages
- **Core Area of Focus B:** Broader Cultural, Informational, and Technological literacies
- **Core Area of Focus C:** Local History Development and Community Connection

Strategic Initiative 4: Incubator for Culture, Curiosity, and Creativity in a Diverse and Vibrant Community

Goal: Libraries serve as discovery spaces for community members to share and cultivate creative interests and talents.

- **Core Area of Focus A:** Facilitate Cultural Programming to Explore Self-Reflection and Personal Expression
- **Core Area of Focus B:** Create Space in the Community to Explore their Talents and Share Ideas
- **Core Area of Focus C:** Activate Library Spaces as Public Galleries for Local Creatives

STAFF PLANNING SESSIONS



Our first Staff Planning Session at Wilson Branch Library.

Library staff played a central role in shaping our new strategic framework. During a series of staff planning sessions held in the summer and fall of 2024, the systemwide library team gathered together to share their insights, experiences, and hopes for both the Library's and the community's future. These sessions built upon years of collaboration and on-the-ground experience serving New Haven's neighborhoods, capturing the everyday realities of library work and the deep community relationships that define it.

The discussions centered on themes of connection, equity, innovation, and belonging. Participants reflected on how library services could continue to evolve to meet changing community needs. **Our staff emphasized the importance of:**

- Ensuring that **every visitor feels welcome and represented** in our spaces and programs.
- Strengthening **internal communication** and **systemwide collaboration**.
- **Expanding outreach** that connects with New Haveners where they live, learn, and gather.
- Continuing to invest in **professional growth, technology**, and **creative capacity** to sustain innovation across all locations.

This input informed every level of the strategic planning process, helping to ensure that the goals of this plan are grounded in both community voice and staff expertise.



Small groups share ideas at the Stetson Branch Library Staff Planning Session.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

The Library conducted a multilingual digital and print survey to gather comprehensive community feedback on how residents engage with and value its services, spaces, and staff. The survey assessed patterns of library use, levels of satisfaction, and perceived barriers, while inviting participants to prioritize service areas such as a **broad range of literacies including reading, digital and health literacy, workforce development, cultural enrichment, and community connection**. Collected in five languages including English, Spanish, Chinese, Dari and Pashto, the survey responses were accompanied by optional demographic data, providing critical insights to guide equity-focused planning and decision-making.

NHFPL hosted thirteen Community Engagement Sessions across New Haven to gather deeper feedback from residents. Held at all five library locations and online, these sessions were conducted in English, Spanish, and Chinese to ensure accessibility and inclusion. Guided by a structured discussion framework, participants shared aspirations, identified neighborhood priorities, and reflected on how the Library can build on its strengths to meet emerging opportunities in technology, education, culture, and civic life. The insights from these conversations grounded the planning process in authentic community voices and **a shared vision for a more connected, creative, and equitable city**.

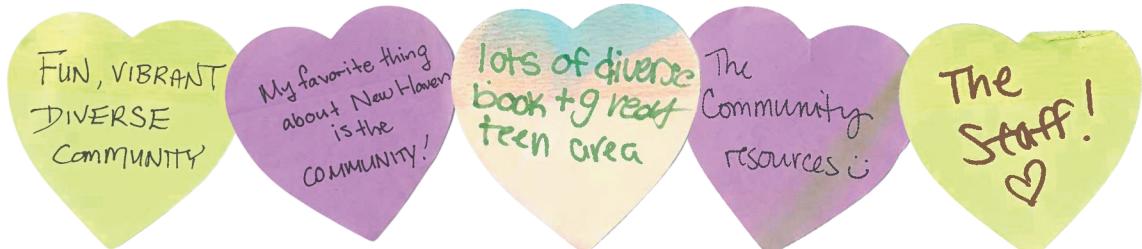
In addition to community listening sessions and surveys, we also solicited feedback far beyond the Library's walls. Throughout the summer and fall of 2024, NHFPL staff both administered surveys and gathered informal data at outdoor festivals, neighborhood events, and mobile outreach visits across the City. The recurring themes of **access, representation, and connection** reinforced the Library's ongoing commitment to inclusivity and responsiveness. These values remain at the heart of the 2025-2028 Strategic Framework.



Community Engagement Sessions at Stetson Branch Library (above) and Wilson Branch Library (below).



Through these combined methods, the Library developed a comprehensive understanding of its impact, shaping the direction of **Building Bridges to Knowledge, Community, and Opportunity**.

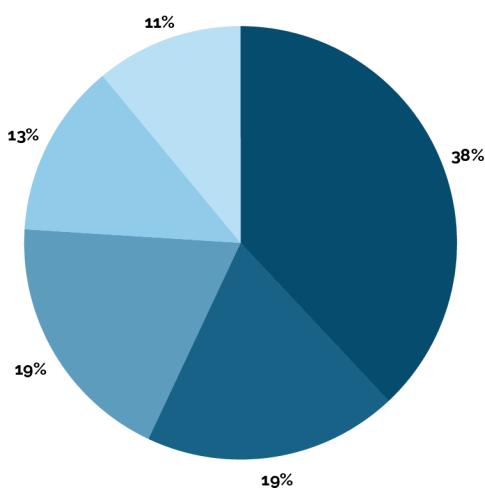


Above: Feedback highlights from an interactive display at the 2024 New Haven Pride Festival, where residents shared what they love most about New Haven and their Library

COMMUNITY PARTICIPANTS

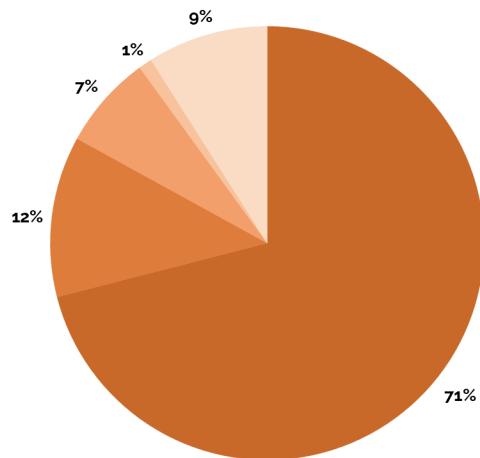
Data was collected through **thirteen** community engagement feedback sessions and **five** partner organization discussions, as well as a **youth services survey** and a 22-question **anonymous community survey** offered both online and on paper in **five languages** from September 2024 to December 2024. Participants were also invited to provide optional demographic information.

Ages



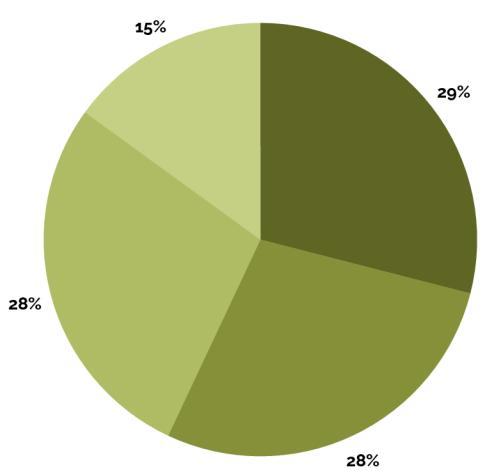
- Age 55-79 • 38%
- Age 35-44 • 19%
- Age 18-34 • 19%
- Age 45-54 • 13%
- Other / No Response • 11%

Highest Education Degree



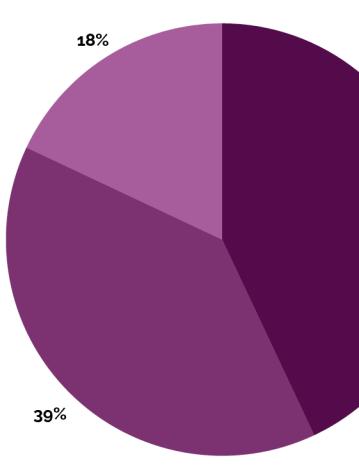
- College Degree or Higher • 71%
- Some College or Associate Degree • 12%
- Highschool or GED • 7%
- Less Than Highschool Degree • 1%
- Other / Not Disclosed • 9%

Household Makeup



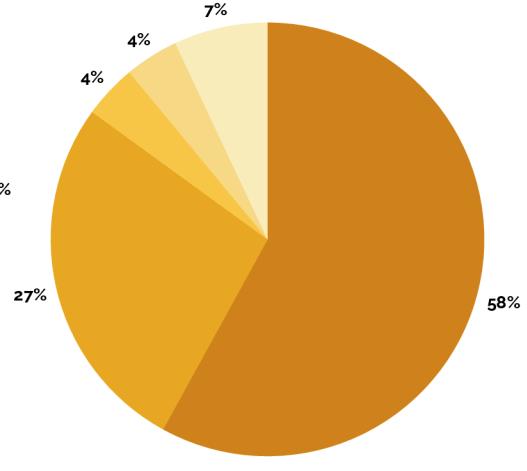
- Families with Children • 29%
- Independent • 28%
- Independent over 56 • 28%
- Other / No Response • 15%

Housing Status



- Own a Home • 43%
- Rent • 39%
- Other / No Response • 18%

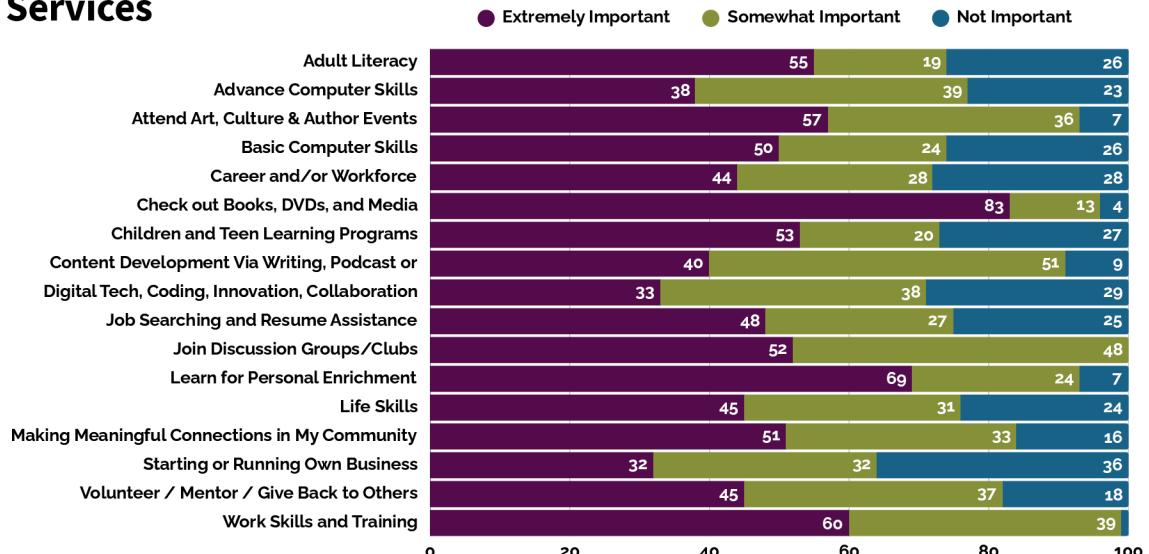
Employment Status



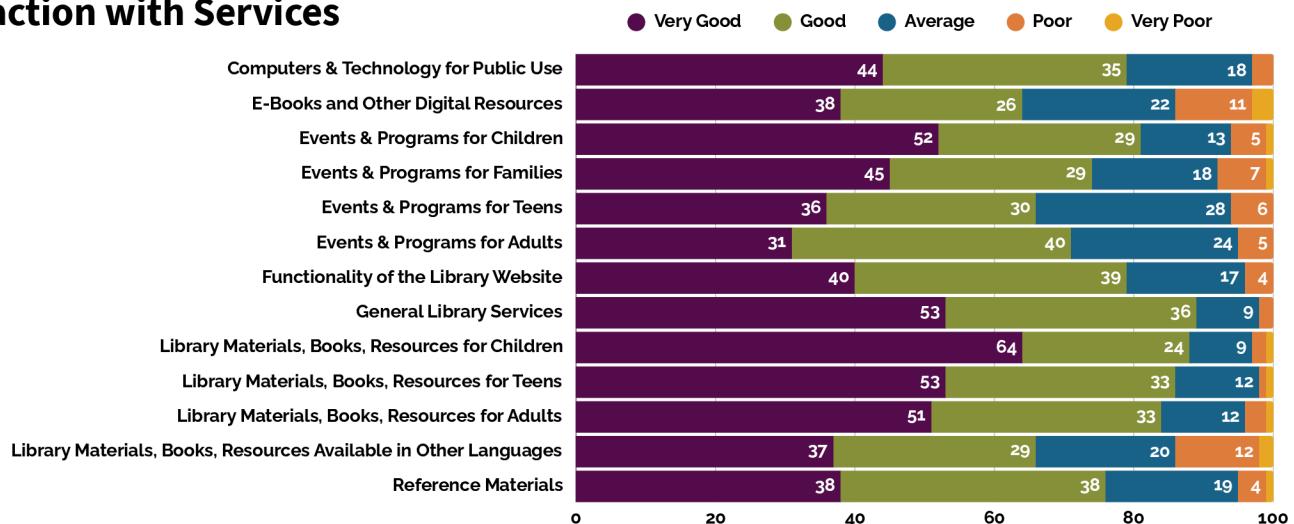
- Working • 58%
- Retired • 27%
- Homemaker • 4%
- Looking for Work • 4%
- Other / No Response • 7%

COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS

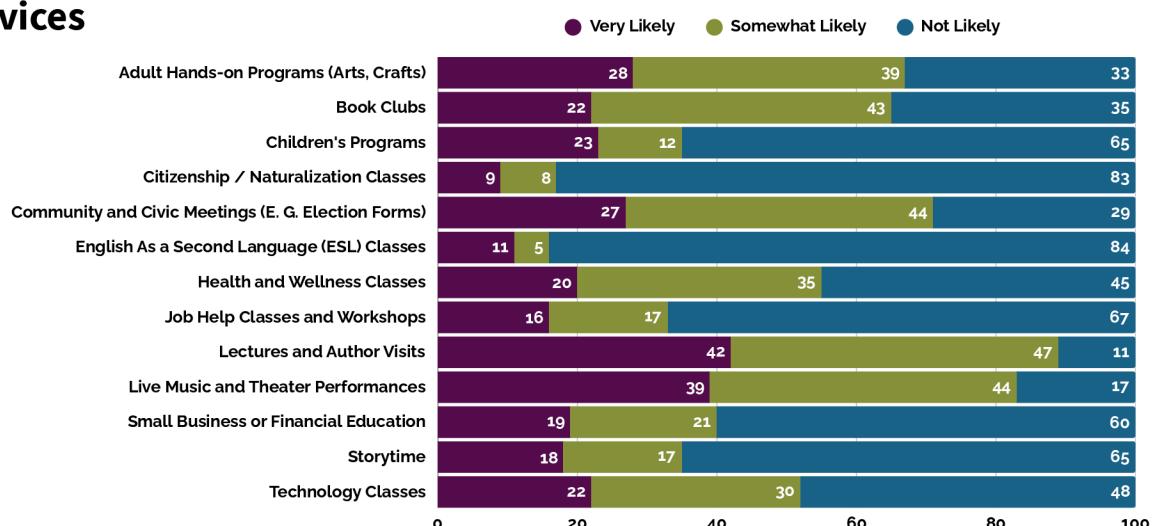
Importance of Services



Satisfaction with Services



Interest in Services



STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 1

NHFPL Locations as Centralized Hubs for Community Connection



Above (L to R): Fire Safety Story Time at Wilson Branch and Ives Main Libraries; Puppeteer Iyaba Ibo Mandingo performing for families at Stetson Branch Library with hand-crafted puppets he created.

Twenty-first century libraries have evolved from a place to borrow books into a vibrant nexus of civic engagement, where neighbors meet, share ideas and talents, strengthen community, and access resources for education and enjoyment. NHFPL is no exception. **Each library location strives to be a welcoming, dynamic gathering place** where residents come together for civic engagement, shared learning, and discovery of local resources.



A meeting of the neighborhood Community Management Team at Fair Haven Branch Library.

This framework enhances the Library's role as New Haven's connective tissue. We serve as a trusted guide; connecting residents to a wealth of resources and ensuring that information remains accessible to everyone in our community. Building on this commitment, the Library will cultivate stronger **partnerships with local organizations**, host more **community forums**, and create meaningful **opportunities for resource sharing**. Across locations, NHFPL will expand **access to citizenship and naturalization resources**, increase **opportunities for civic engagement with elected officials**, and explore new ways to promote our own programs so residents better understand the services available to them.



A panel at Stetson Branch Library discusses immigration and the concept of "home".

Community well-being flourishes and the cultural life of the city deepens when residents have access to reliable information and opportunities to participate. The Library, already a trusted and essential hub, seeks to build on this foundation through expanded resources and a more intentional, organized approach to sharing information. NHFPL connects New Haveners to knowledge, services, and one another, making learning and engagement part of everyday life.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 2

Catalyst for Career Pathways and Upward Mobility

As a cornerstone of lifelong learning and community advancement, the **New Haven Free Public Library drives career mobility and economic opportunity**, equipping residents with the tools, knowledge, and confidence to pursue upward pathways. Our wide range of programs and resources support adults seeking career growth, teens preparing to enter the workforce, and library users looking to strengthen their financial stability and digital proficiency through expanded learning opportunities.

Library users have access to a wealth of free in-person and online-based resources that help them pursue personal and professional growth. In the new framework, we position the Library as a place where individuals develop the confidence and competencies needed to succeed in an increasingly digital world through a comprehensive suite of **digital literacy programs, library-led workshops, and one-on-one support.**

A commitment to financial and self-sufficiency underpins this work. Residents can access workshops and resources that **demystify budgeting, debt management, and retirement planning**, laying the groundwork for **long-term financial health** and stability. Aspiring business owners can **connect with local entrepreneurs** to share best practices and make their dreams a reality.



Computer classes at the Ives Main Library (pictured here) and branches equip jobseekers with the tech skills they need to succeed in a competitive job market.

As a community, we recognize the importance of supporting teens and young adults as they move into the next stage of their education and careers. New Haven Public Schools plays a vital role in providing these resources, and our programming is curated to complement and strengthen that support. Our

school-to-career transition programming helps New Haven youth build their first resume, develop

interview skills, navigate university and FAFSA applications, and **explore college and training opportunities.**



A small business presentation in The Exchange at Ives Squared in the Ives Main Library.



Small business owners meet at Mitchell Branch Library.

By working together, we help create a network of support that ensure students have access to the guidance and information they need to take confident steps into the future.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 3

Libraries as essential learning spaces for Education, Exploration, and Enrichment for all

The Library continues to reaffirm its core commitment to **literacy in all its forms** and to meaningful enrichment, while thoughtfully expanding educational resources through new and innovative approaches. Serving at the epicenter of community enrichment and connection, our culturally inclusive spaces encourage curiosity and discovery across all ages.

Student **tutoring** and homework help, expanded **Stay and Play** sessions, and **life skills classes** for teens are just a few of the ways we provide vital foundational tools for academic success. For adults and families, **English language learning**, **digital inclusion**, and **workforce readiness** initiatives open doors to opportunity and personal growth.

Preserving and sharing New Haven's rich historical legacy and the diverse range of stories that have shaped it are equally important to the Library's mission. NHFPL aims to capture these impactful voices and experiences through program offerings and **reimagined access to local history resources**. By making historical records easier to navigate, residents are encouraged to discover their heritage, celebrate their community's stories, and build a deeper understanding of our neighbors and our past. An **expanded Memory Lab** will further support this work with new tools and guided programming for residents to **preserve personal records, photographs, and oral histories**, capturing these important memories for posterity. This expansion aligns with the City of New Haven's **Cultural Equity Plan** and the shared goal of honoring the history of our neighbors and telling the collective story of New Haven for future generations.



Families learn together led by teacher Ms. Mendy (far right) at the READy for the Grade program at Fair Haven Branch Library.



New Haven Nail Artist Kate Proulx let's participants practice nail art at a Mitchell Branch Library nail art workshop for youth.

Image Credit: Abbey Kim, New Haven Independent



Teens design their own tote bags in a Stetson Branch Library makerspace program.



Ives Squared Librarian Rose Simpson demonstrates Memory Lab tech to visitors.



Public Services Administrator Rory Martorana, Arts and Ideas Associate Director of Education & Community Impact Shamain McAllister, and City Librarian Maria Bernhey at the 2025 Big Read Kickoff party at Willson Branch.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 4

Incubator for Culture, Curiosity, and Creativity in a Diverse and Vibrant Community

Art and imagination are essential to a strong and inspired city where cultural expression fuels connection and community. This spirit is reflected in **New Haven's recent national recognition** – and growing spotlight for its vibrant art scene. Building on this momentum, NHFPL contributes to the local arts ecosystem by offering **creative workshops, exhibition space, and opportunities for collaboration** with a wide range of arts and cultural organizations throughout the city.

As a place where literature and creativity organically intersect, **the Library curates meaningful opportunities to bring art to life** and

serves as a third space that connects artists and audiences. Flexible learning environments serve as launchpads for innovation by **showcasing local artists, hosting makers and storytellers**, and cultivating opportunities to build community, connection, and belonging among those who create.



The New Haven Revisited exhibition showcased artwork by local high school students.



The artwork of Desiree Upchurch on display at Ives Main Library in her traveling exhibit, UNBOUND.



A showcase of the Wabi FOCUS Fellowship photography, Urban Frames, presented with a generous grant from the David T. Langrock Foundation.

Working in partnership with local arts organizations and independent artists across the city, NHFPL has already built a strong foundation of arts programming and will continue to explore new and diverse opportunities for growth. These offerings include a recently refreshed makerspace at Ives, the citywide reading program, free theater tickets and theater-led story time programs for children, artist talkback programs, as well as film presentations, music performances, and instructional classes like drawing, painting, and photography.

Your New Haven Free Public Library card gives you access to a rich palette of possibilities, inviting you to discover the forms of creativity and expression that encourage self-exploration.

