



BEDFORD FREE LIBRARY

STRATEGIC PLAN 2025 - 2035

Letter from the Director



Dear Community Members,

We are excited to share with you the launch of our new strategic plan, which will guide the next chapter of our Library’s growth and impact. After much reflection and feedback from our patrons, staff, and community leaders, we have developed a clear roadmap that focuses on five key pillars. These pillars reflect our ongoing commitment to provide services, materials and spaces that best serve the needs of our community.

In the past 6 months we have collaborated with Katonah Village Library to develop a road map for the future of our libraries. It has been an interesting journey and while our libraries are physically different, the town-wide survey and community engagements show that our core values are aligned and patrons cherish the different offerings and the variety of spaces to visit.

1. Curating Discovery

Our Library’s role as a hub of knowledge and information is central to this plan. We aim to enhance our collections and services to foster curiosity and learning. By curating rich, dynamic, and accessible resources, we will provide our community with the tools to explore new ideas, connect with the world, and engage in lifelong learning.

2. Building Community

We recognize that a Library is not just a place for books, but a space where people come together. Through new programs, events, and partnerships, we will continue to create opportunities for people to connect, share experiences, and build meaningful relationships. Our goal is to continue to make the Library a vibrant gathering place for everyone.

3. Learning for Life

Education and learning are at the heart of everything we do. We are committed to supporting individuals throughout their entire learning journey—whether that be early childhood development, adult education, or ongoing skill-building. Our plan emphasizes the importance of access to continuous learning opportunities, enabling people of all ages to grow, adapt, and thrive in an ever-changing world.

4. Collaborating with Purpose

In an interconnected world, collaboration is essential. We will continue to actively seek partnerships with local organizations, nonprofits, schools, businesses, and other institutions to expand our impact. By collaborating with purpose, we will be able to deliver more innovative programs, share resources, and collectively address the needs of our community.

5. Optimizing Resources

Efficiency, kindness, and connection are core to our operations. In this plan, we are committed to optimizing our resources—both financial and human—to ensure that our library remains a well-managed, responsive institution. We will explore new technologies, and refine our processes, without losing sight of our excellent reputation for a warm and welcoming environment.

As we move forward with this exciting new plan, we invite you to join us in this journey. We will continue to listen to your feedback, adapt to your needs, and build a Library that serves as a true cornerstone of our community. Together, we can create a future where everyone has access to the tools they need to succeed.

We thank you for your continued support which makes all we do possible.

Warm regards,
Ann Cloonan
Ann Cloonan
Director
Bedford Free Library

OUR PROCESS

Bedford is home to three robust libraries—Bedford Free Library, Katonah Village Library, and Bedford Hills Free Library—each serving as a vital resource for its community.

This strategic plan, guiding the Bedford Free Library (BFL) for the next ten years (2025-2035), is built upon our enduring commitment to serving the community. Developed collaboratively over six months, this plan reflects a partnership between the Bedford Free Library and the Katonah Village Library, emphasizing collaboration and community engagement.

The planning process was a collaborative endeavor, led by the Libraries' Boards of Trustees, Directors from both libraries, and extensive staff and community. It prioritized robust input from staff and the community through both qualitative and quantitative feedback.

Our approach was deeply rooted in attentive listening. We actively sought and incorporated well-rounded feedback at every stage to ensure the strategic plan comprehensively addresses community needs and interests. Community members expressed their appreciation for our exceptional staff, dynamic collections, welcoming spaces, and engaging programs. They also highlighted their desire for enhanced connectivity, both within the library and beyond, and emphasized their reliance on our services for support, information, and enrichment.

Moving forward, BFL is committed to a distinct plan driven by collaboration with other libraries, town-wide assets, and community stakeholders. We aim to deliver excellent, responsive, and inclusive library services that enrich the lives of all residents.

WHO WE ENGAGED WITH AND WHAT WE LEARNED

We engaged residents and stakeholders through various activities, including participation in existing programs, one-on-one conversations, and open house sessions. These activities were designed to gather the residents' ideas, needs, and interests, which helped shape ideas for specific programs, services, and the future vision of the Bedford Free Library.



Library Board of Trustee Meetings



Strategic Working Group Meetings



Open House Sessions



Engagement Materials



Completed Community Surveys



Minutes of Joy!



OUR VISION

Bedford Free Library is a hub for our community, empowering residents to **explore**, **connect**, and **grow**.

OUR MISSION

The Bedford Free Library empowers our community by providing personalized resources, fostering connections, and supporting lifelong learning through trusted staff expertise and collaborative partnerships.

COMMUNITY VALUES

**Welcoming Environment | Trustworthy
Resource | Collaboration | Kindness |
Social Responsibility**

EXPERIENCE PRINCIPLES

The Experience Principles embody BFL's commitment to a thriving community. They articulate how our community values are evident in the ways in which we serve and support every individual who walks through our doors.

Welcoming Environment

We create a warm and safe space where every visitor feels like a valued friend.

Trustworthy Resource

We make it easy to find reliable and available resources, information, and community referrals, offering personalized experiences for all our patrons.

Collaboration

We build strong relationships with our patrons by supporting their needs through collaboration, and our dedication to teamwork.

Kindness

We prioritize genuine care and intention, ensuring everyone feels well-supported to find what they need.

Social Responsibility

We provide expansive programs and community connections that foster growth for all ages and abilities.

AREAS OF FOCUS

The key priorities we're focusing on
to better serve our community

CURATING DISCOVERY

Engaging Collections
for an Interactive Library
Experience

BUILDING COMMUNITY

We Library Everywhere—
Building Community through
Co-Creation and Shared
Spaces

LEARNING FOR LIFE

Your Library, Your Lifelong
Learning Journey

COLLABORATING WITH PURPOSE

Stronger Together:
Partnering for Greater
Impact

OPTIMIZING RESOURCES

Essential Access and
Services for Thriving
Communities

CURATING DISCOVERY

Engaging Collections for an Interactive Library Experience

The Bedford Free Library creates an interactive and engaging experience by curating dynamic collections that spark curiosity and invite browsing. Building on the library's curated recommendations, we design thoughtful displays and themed selections—including books, multimedia, and non-traditional items—to make discovering something new easy and enjoyable.



Key Community Findings

Based on findings, the community identified curation and the provision of books and literature as the library's top role.

The community is excited to explore new materials and collections that were not previously on their radar.

The community members are looking for a more user-friendly, bookstore-like browsing experience.

The community is seeking offerings beyond books, including tools, kits, and art supplies.

Patrons really enjoy the museum passes and recommendations to cultural offerings around town.

"Every time I walk into the library, I head straight for the new collections and picks. it always gets me excited to explore new books and materials."

-A long-term resident in his 60s

Our Goals

- 01 Foster a bookstore-like browsing experience to enhance discoverability.
- 02 Enhance organization and navigation of the collection by highlighting different topics and interest-based themes and visual cues.
- 03 Design thematic displays that connect materials to real-world experiences and community interests.
- 04 Build a 'Library of Things'—a collection of non-traditional materials that patrons can borrow.

We're exploring ways to:

- Actively gather community feedback and suggestions to build collections and themed displays that truly reflect different cultures, interests, and passions.
- Start to build a collection of non-traditional materials to borrow(e.g., musical equipment, craft supplies, toys, tools, etc.).
- Make our collections easier to navigate by reorganizing shelves, improving signage and visual cues throughout the library.
- Create monthly Instagram features to promote new collections and materials through engaging Instagram posts and stories.



Halloween Storytime

BUILDING COMMUNITY

We Library Everywhere—Building Community Through Co-Creation and Shared Spaces

The Bedford Free Library will strengthen its role as the heart of the historic town center, connecting longtime and new residents through personal relationships and community engagement. We will foster a welcoming space where people can gather, make friends, and collaborate.



Key Community Findings

The community is looking for more events, including family movie nights, street parties and weekend gatherings.

Residents show a deep commitment to contributing their skills and knowledge to the library through volunteerism.

The community sees the library as a gathering place where people from different parts of Bedford come together for programs.

Many families visit the library shortly after moving to Bedford, believing it to be a valuable resource to help them adapt and integrate into the community.

Parents and caregivers request sensory play spaces, accessible meeting areas for parent groups, and extended evening and weekend hours.

“I’ve volunteered at the library for years. It’s not just a place that brings the community together; it’s a space that nurtures talents and skills so we can grow together.”

-A 70-year-old community volunteer

Our Goals

- 01

Continue to foster community connections by hosting inclusive and diverse programs for all ages.
- 02

Strengthen volunteer engagement by creating structured roles and develop a Community-Wide Talent & Resource Database—connect libraries by sharing community talent, organizations, and volunteers.
- 03

Build community-driven programs, utilize volunteers, engage youth, prioritize personal connections, and foster continuous learning.
- 04

Develop a Community Welcome Kit and programs to help new residents navigate library services, programs, and local resources.

We're exploring ways to:

- Enhance the library as a 'second living room' by reconfiguring the space to create areas for gathering and socialization.
 - Expand healthy living programs by partnering with locals to offer yoga, meditation, and foster a healthy lifestyle.

- Welcome newcomers with informative packets detailing the town's offerings, including local events, welcome gatherings, and historic walking tours.



LEARNING FOR LIFE

Your Library, Your Lifelong Learning Journey

We are a warm and welcoming space for learning at every stage of life, from early childhood to adulthood. We will continue to offer diverse opportunities for families and individuals to build skills, explore new interests, and engage in creative, hands-on experiences that spark curiosity and build confidence in an ever-changing world.



Storytelling with Photography Workshop

Key Community Findings

The community is passionate about history, art, and music, actively seeking creative learning opportunities such as history programs, art exhibitions, music performances.

During community engagement sessions, people frequently mentioned their interest in literature-focused events, such as local author talks and creative writing programs.

Residents are eager to improve their well-being through healthy aging groups, nutrition workshops, and accessible movement classes.

Parents of school-age children are seeking more after-school spaces and programs where their children can hang out, play, and explore with friends.

"I bring my teens here all the time while I write or read. The library keeps us connected, even as we explore our own interests."

- Mom in her 40s

Our Goals

- 01

Expand engaging library experiences that spark curiosity, support personal growth, and inspire new interests for all ages.
- 02

Foster intergenerational connections through mentorship, storytelling, and collaborative projects.
- 03

Offer more project-based learning opportunities for teens to explore their passions.
- 04

Strengthen information literacy and promote responsible technology use through shared programs (e.g., scam awareness, cybersecurity).
- 05

Enhance access to digital and physical resources, including interlibrary loans and research tools.

We're exploring ways to:

- Offer small-group sessions to help older adults confidently navigate digital programs and technology.
 - Continue to support all local school programs and collaborate when possible to enhance play and creation-based experiences.
 - Expand after-school programs to better support youth.

- Provide quiet study spaces for tutors, students, and homeschooling families.
 - Host networking events where local entrepreneurs and businesses can share insights and connect.
 - Facilitate intergenerational connections through active programming like game nights.



Musical Mother Goose Program

COLLABORATING WITH PURPOSE

Stronger Together: Partnering for Greater Impact

We are committed to expanding the Bedford Free Library's offerings by cultivating meaningful partnerships and deepening collaboration with Bedford libraries. Our goal is to support co-hosted programs, generate greater community advocacy, and attract more visitors, ensuring all residents have access to enriching resources and experiences.



Garden Class at Bedford Farms

Key Community Findings

Community members appreciate being involved and co-leading programs with the library and want to expand this collaboration.

The community looks forward to more programs partnering with other town assets (e.g., collaboration with Seniors Helping Seniors, the Health & Safety Committee).

Community members suggested a shared calendar for Bedford libraries to track library programs and events.

Participants are interested in an app to filter programs by age and save events at each library.

The community wants libraries to take a more collective approach to programming and events.

"I bring my children to the library for their programs. It's so exciting to see the libraries working together on more programs and other offerings in the future."

- A mom with two children

Our Goals

- 01

Develop a strategy for cooperative library offerings, including shared databases, joint marketing, and coordinated programs, to enhance capacity, resources, and funding.
- 02

Co-host programs and events to increase participation and reach new audiences.
- 03

Build strategic partnerships and community engagement efforts to increase awareness and long-term support.
- 04

Align and promote library resources and event listings on the website to connect patrons with programs, events, and community services.

We're exploring ways to:

- Extend library outreach beyond its walls by activating spaces throughout town with pop-up library services and partnerships.
 - Conduct a partner audit and refine collaboration policies to strengthen relationships with organizations across Bedford.

- Support the promotion of community-led social gatherings and activities within the library.
 - Deepen town-wide relationships and increase awareness of library offerings, particularly within the local schools.



Storytime at Rochambeau Farm

OPTIMIZING RESOURCES

Essential Access and Services for Thriving Communities

Bedford Free Library is an essential hub of information, and we are dedicated to continuously evolving to meet the community's needs now and in the future. We will enhance accessibility and sustainability through improvements to our spaces, physical and digital infrastructure, and staff development.



Key Community Findings

The community expressed that limited library hours restrict access, especially in the evenings and on weekends, and many request extended hours

The community expressed the need for better physical accessibility, including an elevator and improved ADA-compliant design.

Parking is a barrier preventing community members from visiting the library.

The community members are seeking more spaces for coworking, meetings, studying, and learning.

The community expressed the need for library services beyond the building, including book delivery and more book drop-off locations.

The community seeks more ways to stay informed about library offerings.

"I work in the city, so I wish the library offered more programs and events in the evenings or on weekends."

-A new mom who lives in Bedford

Our Goals

- 01 Ensure library services are accessible, welcoming, and responsive to community needs by optimizing hours, space use, outreach, and program sustainability.
- 02 Expand awareness of information, resources, and essential services by enhancing digital platforms and infrastructure.
- 03 Improve physical spaces to enhance accessibility and flexibility to support evolving community needs.
- 04 Invest in staff development to strengthen community engagement, collection management, youth mentorship, and technology support.

We're exploring ways to:

- Install book drops at multiple locations and introduce electronic lockers for convenient hold pickups.
- Collaborate with the historical society and reconfigure the space to improve ADA compliance, enhancing accessibility, functionality, and flexibility.
- Launch a mobile book delivery service to bring books and materials directly to patrons.
- Update new AV system to enhance programs and presentations.
- Offer Saturday programs and occasional evening hours to support working parents.
- Develop a new website to provide accessible and reliable information and a town-wide resource.
- Provide work spaces to collaborate, have meetings and one-on-one sessions.



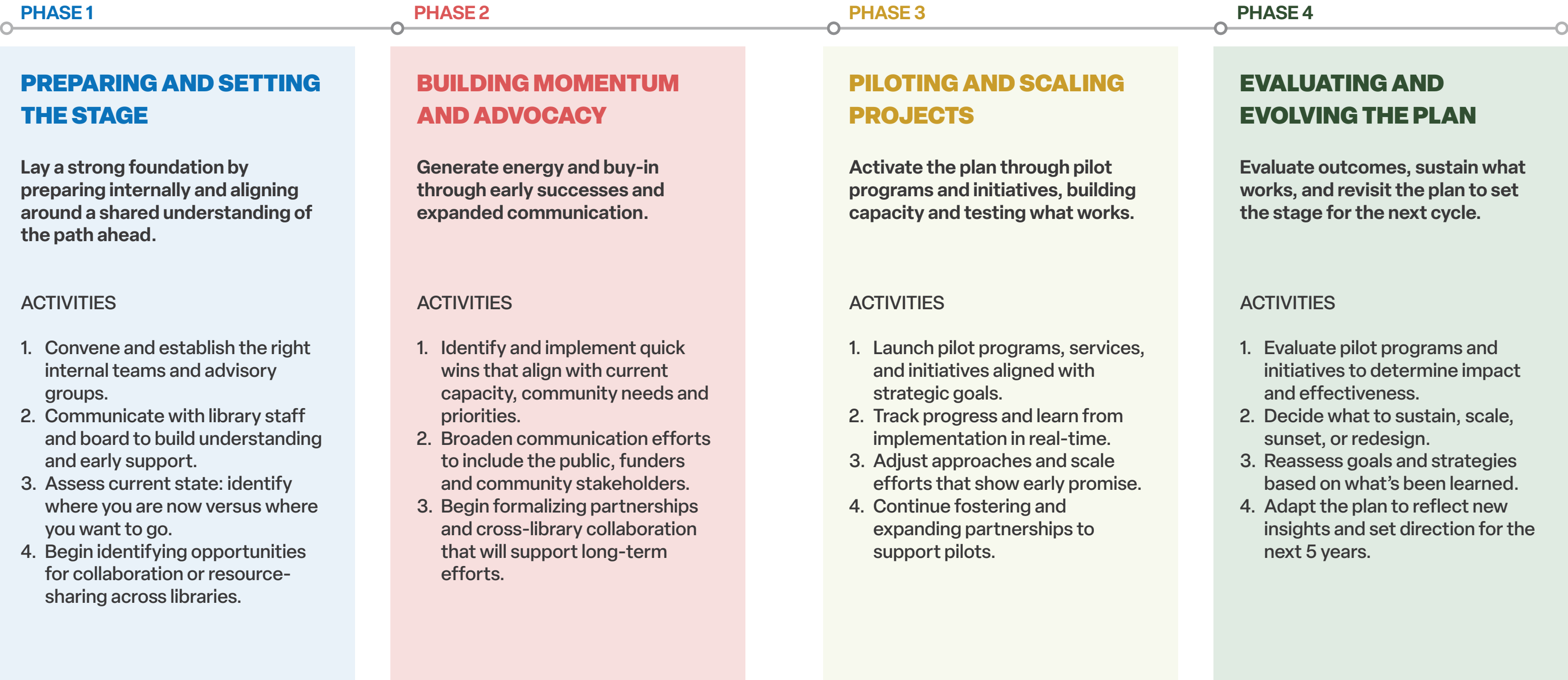
Ask Addie (Technology Program)

ACTIVATING THE PLAN*

**Section to be shared and refined collaboratively.*

IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP

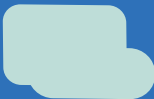
This roadmap outlines a multi-year journey to guide the Bedford Free Library through a thoughtful, collaborative process of strategic transformation. Rooted in shared values and a commitment to community, it provides a flexible yet focused framework for planning, piloting, and evolving together.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We extend our sincere thanks to the dedicated staff, the Board of Trustees, and the engaged community members of the Bedford Free Library and Katonah Village Library. Your active participation in the workshop sessions and the knowledge you shared about your neighborhoods, communities, and daily programs have been invaluable. Your thoughtful insights and generous contributions have greatly enriched this document, and we are deeply grateful for your time, effort, and commitment.

Additional thanks go to the dedicated volunteers who contribute their time each week at the library, as well as those who lead and support programs. We are also grateful to the Town of Bedford and individual donors for their ongoing financial support. Finally, we thank the local businesses and nonprofits who partner with and champion the library in so many meaningful ways.



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THANK YOU!

