



Bellingham Public Library

2020-2024 STRATEGIC PLAN



INTRODUCTION

OUR 2020-2024 STRATEGIC PLAN

We are proud to present our 2020-2024 Strategic Plan. We began our strategic planning process early in 2019 with the following questions:

- **What are people's hopes for their community, and how can we work together to help achieve these aspirations?**
- **What have other organizations studied or put into practice that can inform our thinking?**
- **What is our community like today, how is it changing, and how do these factors inform and shape library services?**
- **How are libraries across the country supporting and strengthening their communities?**

Our journey responding to these questions led to us developing our Community Story (page 3), affirming our Mission (page 4), identifying Shared Values (pages 4-5) and adopting Strategic Directions (pages 6-10) for 2020-2024.

Central to this strategic plan are the community voices that helped shape it. Our Community Conversations project — adapted from an initiative of the American Library Association and the Harwood Institute for Public Innovation — provided valuable feedback to help us better understand and respond to our community.

Thank you to the library staff, trustees, city leaders, and community members who contributed to building this strategic plan. We look forward to providing quality, responsive services that strengthen our community in the years ahead.



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LIBRARIES CAN HELP!

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Community voices are at the heart of this plan. During our three-month Community Conversations project, we spoke with 343 people in group meetings and individual interviews, conversations that provided rich, meaningful feedback to help better understand our community and incorporate diverse viewpoints into our planning. The feedback we gathered is summarized into our Community Story below. A report describing the Community Conversations project is available on our website or by request. We are inspired to use it to envision library services that are transformative and tailored to our community's needs.

OUR COMMUNITY STORY

People want to be connected, safe, valued, respected, and accepted by others, with opportunities to be engaged and ever-learning together.

But they are concerned that our community could be more inclusive, safe, and sustainable, with resources and opportunities more equitable and prevalent for all.

As people talk more about those concerns, they talk about the need for authentic connections that strengthen our understanding of each other's diverse experiences, that bridge inequities in access to community resources and economic opportunity, and that reduce divisions and feelings of exclusion.

They say we need to focus on building a welcoming and safe community with well-funded public spaces, where relationships and connections can flourish, where reliable information is accessible to everyone, and where barriers to opportunity are acknowledged and reduced.

And if non-profits, faith-based organizations, people in leadership positions, our government, and our good and creative neighbors **played a part in those actions,** **folks would be more likely to trust the effort and step forward.**



MISSION

Connecting our community with each other and the world.

SHARED VALUES

Our shared values reflect who we are, why our work matters, and what we believe as an organization. They describe, define, and inspire us.

BELONGING:

We believe in the power of belonging. When people belong, they are more able to learn, connect, survive, and thrive.

CHAMPIONS:

We are enthusiastic champions of public library values: freedom of speech and open exchange of knowledge and ideas, the right to read without judgement or restriction, and access to education and information free-of-charge and readily available to all.

COLLABORATION:

We are stronger because of our many partnerships, including two key relationships that form part of our foundation. As a department of the City of Bellingham, we are a valued city service and part of the fabric of community life. Our collaboration with the Whatcom County Library System strengthens our services in our community.



"Libraries stand for and exemplify something that needs defending: the public institutions that – even in an age of atomization and inequality – serve as bedrocks of civil society. Libraries are the kinds of places where ordinary people with different backgrounds, passions, and interests can take part in a living democratic culture."

Eric Klinenberg, "Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life"

EQUITY:

Libraries are powerful forces for community change by promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion. We work to foster understanding and accessibility, and to ensure all people see themselves and our city's diversity reflected in our collections, services, and facilities.

INNOVATION:

We embrace new ideas and new practices to meet the changing needs of our community.



INSPIRATION:

We inspire curiosity, discovery, and critical thinking, which we believe can change a life, a family, a nation, and a planet.

STEWARDSHIP:

Our focus on excellence includes reflecting and modeling careful stewardship of resources. We incorporate sustainable practices in our services and operations.



STRATEGIC DIRECTION

WELCOME & INCLUDE

We offer welcoming, safe places and experiences, where connections and understanding flourish.

WE WILL:

- Actively welcome all residents of Bellingham to use our library services and facilities.
- Bring people together for shared experiences that strengthen our understanding of each other.
- Invest in services that are accessible and comfortable for people of all cultures, abilities, and communities.
- Provide all staff with training and tools needed to provide safe, prepared, environmentally responsible services and spaces.

WHAT YOU MAY SEE:

- Invitations for city newcomers to join the library community and orientation activities for new patrons.
- Library services offered in multiple languages.
- Spaces and activities that welcome gathering and interaction.



"I want to live in a community where groups of people can work together toward shared goals to solve problems. Where people's voices are heard, and they feel safe."

Community Conversations participant

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

ACCESS & OPPORTUNITY

We connect people with opportunities and resources to solve problems and help them achieve their aspirations.

WE WILL:

- Provide services that support people, especially to bridge inequities in access to opportunities and community resources.
- Offer library services and experiences beyond our buildings to meet people where they are.
- Invest in appropriate staffing, training, tools, technologies, and vehicles to provide safe, efficient delivery of off-site services.
- Explore partnerships with social services providers to help support our most vulnerable populations.

WHAT YOU MAY SEE:

- Services and activities that promote digital, financial, and cultural literacy for all ages.
- Library programs and services offered at non-library locations.
- Partnerships focused on coordinating community resources and removing barriers to opportunity.



STRATEGIC DIRECTION

READ & LEARN

We inspire a lifetime of reading, learning, curiosity, and discovery.

WE WILL:

- Establish the library as the best place in Bellingham for people of all generations to learn together.
- Support readers of all ages and abilities with rich, diverse collections and opportunities to strengthen literacy skills and cultivate a love of reading.
- Provide all staff with training and tools needed to effectively deliver and promote library reading and learning services.
- Continue improvements in library technology and automation to focus staff resources on direct services to the public.

WHAT YOU MAY SEE:

- Inspiring hands-on learning experiences for all ages.
- New resources that respond to changing community needs.
- Opportunities for readers to engage with library staff and each other.



RADLEY MULLER

"We can only weather the rate of change we are facing by building sense of community. Without an intact social matrix, change is more of a challenge."

Community Conversations participant

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

INFORM & INVOLVE

We provide information and activities to stay abreast of community issues and events, fostering informed, active participation in civic life.

WE WILL:

- Offer access to materials, tools, and expertise to help develop critical-thinking skills.
- Help people stay in touch with issues that matter in their community and promote informed, active participation in civic life.
- Partner with city leaders to foster public education and involvement in City of Bellingham strategic priorities.
- Consistently inform and involve partners, stakeholders, and community members in decisions about library policies and services.

WHAT YOU MAY SEE:

- Programs to foster media literacy and respectful civic dialogue.
- Collaboration with city officials and others on issues that matter to the Bellingham community.
- Regular opportunities to provide feedback about library services.



RADLEY MULLER



STRATEGIC DIRECTION

THRIVE & GROW

We are a valued community partner and trusted city service, playing a central role in Bellingham life.

WE WILL:

- Work with city leaders to achieve level of service standards to increase staffing, hours of operation, materials expenditures, and facility square footage.
- Enhance library facilities to deliver quality, contemporary services that are technologically innovative, thoughtfully located, and environmentally wise.
- Foster strong public and private support for the library.
- Measure and evaluate library services and operations to continue improvements and ensure strategic progress.

WHAT YOU MAY SEE:

- Progress on capital improvements and level of service standards.
- Plans for library services in the north area of city.
- Strategies for obtaining long-term, sustainable funding.



RADLEY MULLER

"Education is necessary for a community to have an empowered voice: for quality of life, for justice, for building community voice, and to address pressing issues."

Community Conversations participant

WORKING TOGETHER

The Bellingham Public Library 2020-2024 Strategic Plan aligns with key city initiatives, contributing to their impact and leveraging our resources to serve our community.

	Bellingham Public Library Strategic Plan 2020-2024				
CITY OF BELLINGHAM	WELCOME & INCLUDE	ACCESS & OPPORTUNITY	READ & LEARN	INFORM & INVOLVE	THRIVE & GROW
<i>Legacies & Strategic Commitments</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Comprehensive Plan 2016 Capital Facilities Chapter</i>		✓		✓	✓
<i>2018-2022 Consolidated Plan</i>		✓		✓	✓
<i>Climate Action Plan 2018 Update & City Council Resolution #2018-06</i>				✓	✓
<i>Bellingham Public Library Services and Funding Models Study 2017</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Bellingham Central Library Space Planning 2018</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

We collaborate with many other organizations. Listed below are those that provide support that makes our services possible. Visit us online or contact us to find out more about these and other partners.

- Whatcom County Library System
- Bellingham Public Schools
- Friends of the Bellingham Public Library
- Washington State Library
- Western Washington University
- Whatcom Community College
- Bellingham Technical College
- Northwest Indian College





Bellingham Public Library

CENTRAL LIBRARY
210 Central Avenue
Bellingham, WA 98225
(360) 778-7323

FAIRHAVEN BRANCH LIBRARY
1117 12th Street
Bellingham, WA 98225
(360) 778-7188

BARKLEY BRANCH LIBRARY
3111 Newmarket Street #103
Bellingham, WA 98226
(360) 778-7290

bellingshampubliclibrary.org

Check our website for our hours of operation, community drop-boxes, online services, and more!

What's next? Our 2020-2024 Strategic Plan will shape our priorities for the years ahead. Look for our annual action plans and reports on our accomplishments to see how we're doing!



ON A TYPICAL DAY

1,699

HOLD REQUESTS
FILLED

5,475

BOOKS, EBOOKS,
DVDs, & OTHER ITEMS
BORROWED

399

QUESTIONS
ANSWERED

224

PUBLIC COMPUTER
SESSIONS

1,874

WEBSITE VISITS

2,218

VISITS TO OUR THREE
LOCATIONS

25

LIBRARY CARD
SIGNUPS

94

PROGRAM
ATTENDANCE

