

# GALE FREE LIBRARY



## STRATEGIC PLAN FOR FISCAL YEARS 2023–2027

**Submitted by:**

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# Gale Free Library

## Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2023–2027

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## INTRODUCTION

The Gale Free Library serves a community of 19,500 people in Holden, MA. Located in Central Massachusetts, the Library is in the center of town.

We seek to provide outstanding library services to the community. To this end, the Library developed a strategic plan to guide the Library’s success throughout the next five years. The Plan covers fiscal years 2023-27 and is designed to be flexible.

## THE PLANNING PROCESS

In September 2019, the Gale Free Library hired strategic planning consultant Barbara Alevras of Sage Consulting Services to guide our planning process, facilitate a series of planning exercises, oversee the collection and analysis of internal and community feedback, and assist with drafting our strategic plan document.

To launch the strategic planning initiative, we identified our strategic planning project goals, significant activities, and key stakeholders. We also established a timeline and developed a detailed planning process flowchart to serve as a visual roadmap of our planning activities (see *Appendix A—GFL Strategic Planning Project Process Flowchart 2021*).

Throughout the spring of 2021, the Library solicited community input via a series of exercises designed to assess our performance and identify future needs, including conducting the following feedback exercises:

- **Two Focus Groups** with an array of community members.
- **Two Strengths-Opportunities-Aspirations-Results (SOAR) Exercises** with GFL’s staff and a combined session with the GFL trustees and Friends of the Library boards.
- **Three Surveys**, including one for the general community; one for the GFL trustees and Friends of the Library boards; and one for the GFL’s staff.

In addition to collecting subjective feedback, the Library compiled city demographics, Library history, and Library statistics. GFL incorporated the information into a document that presents an overview of community demographics and facts about the Library’s history, operations, and governance model (see *Appendix B—GFL Community and Library Profile*).



Visual representation of community’s response to question: “What are the first two words you think of when you think of the Gale Free Library?”

The subjective and hard data collected were analyzed, synthesized, and summarized. The key learnings, highlights, and trends are the basis for the mission statement, goals, and objectives presented in this *Strategic Plan*.

## **KEY LEARNINGS**

A thorough review of the data received from more than 175 people provided insights regarding internal and external stakeholders’ perceptions of the current Library and expectations for GFL’s future. Input helped us identify the Library’s major strengths and challenges and provided numerous ideas for how the Library can meet the community’s needs going forward.

### **Areas of Focus**

A detailed review and analysis of the input received throughout the planning process resulted in the identification of the following six focus areas:

- **COLLECTIONS** (digital and physical materials and media)
- **FACILITY** (physical space, furniture, aesthetics, configuration)
- **MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS** (finance, policies and procedures, leadership structure, operations, and management of staff and volunteers)
- **MARKETING** (branding, communications, and outreach)
- **PROGRAMS AND SERVICES** (activities and events, museum passes, reference, and accessibility)
- **TECHNOLOGY** (devices, online offerings, instruction, and operational applications)



Summary reports highlighting the trends and ideas derived from each feedback activity are available for review as appendices to this document (see *Appendices* on page 7). The target audience(s) and the number of participants per feedback mechanism are presented in *Appendix A—GFL Strategic Planning Project Process Flowchart 2021*.

Many creative ideas were received during each planning activity (see *Appendix F—GFL Ideas and Input Report 2021*). Where possible, these ideas were incorporated into the Library’s Strategic Plan.

# **THE PLAN**

## **Mission Statement**

**The Gale Free Library supports lifelong learning, literacy, and personal growth through books and other media, by offering community members of all ages access to cultural, educational, and technological information and resources that enrich their lives. It provides a community gathering place and opportunities to cultivate civic and social connections.**

## **Goals and Objectives**

The following strategic goals and supporting objectives specify how the Library will engage and support its mission statement. The goals and objectives stated here will enable the Library to effectively set priorities and allocate resources (financial and otherwise) during the Plan's five-year term.

### **GOAL 1: Provide an updated and flexible interior and exterior space.**

- 1.1 Maximize space utilization.
- 1.2 Comfortable furniture and fixtures accommodate multiple needs (studying, reading, etc.).
- 1.3 Maintain a safe, accessible, and attractive facility and grounds.

### **GOAL 2: Provide emerging enrichment opportunities for all generations.**

- 2.1 Varied programming attracts community members of all ages.
- 2.2 Foster collaborative relationships with local institutions and community groups.
- 2.3 Grow and maintain a diverse and current collection.
- 2.4 Increase family and teen engagement.

### **GOAL 3: Increase community awareness of library resources.**

- 3.1 Execute a comprehensive, forward-looking marketing plan.
- 3.2 Promote Library offerings using multiple marketing channels and platforms.
- 3.3 Continuously solicit and respond to community input.
- 3.4 GFL's presence extends beyond its physical footprint.

### **GOAL 4: Improve foundational staff resources.**

- 4.1 Provide tools and techniques that meet staff's operational needs.
- 4.2 Support a positive, collaborative work environment.

## Annual Action Plans

Annually, the Library develops an Action Plan for the following fiscal year. The Action Plan identifies new initiatives and actions which support the Library’s goals set out in the Strategic Plan. It does not include routine, ongoing operations, or administrative tasks.

The Action Plan is a flexible short-term document that accommodates changes as needed. The Library will be able to address any new or evolving changes due to resource issues or other unforeseen events.

The Library’s Action Plan will be submitted to the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners as a separate document.

## Plan Performance Management

The Library Director will review ongoing progress towards meeting the Strategic Plan’s goals and objectives quarterly. The results will be shared with staff and highlighted in the Library’s Annual Report.

## PLAN APPROVAL

On September 9, 2021, Gale Free Library’s six-member Board of Trustees unanimously approved the Strategic Plan.

### BOARD OF TRUSTEES

- Richard Maurer, Chair
- Alan Degutis, Vice-Chair
- Penelope Morgan, Secretary
- Russell Dye
- Rick Sheils
- Virginia Powell-Brasier

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Library appreciates the time and effort put forth by the community, Library staff, Board of Trustees, and the Friends of Gale Free Library. Their input was informative, thoughtful, and insightful. We sincerely thank everyone for their assistance and contributions to the process of developing the Gale Free Library’s Strategic Plan for Years 2023-2027.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Gale Free Library strives to meet the community’s needs and to deliver varied and engaging resources. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Library focused on continuing to provide all its resources via creatively modified and new access and service models (curbside, take-home crafts, “surprise me” bags, and by-appointment browsing).

Currently, the Library is fully open. We are happy to see everyone and to encourage the continued use of all our resources, new and old.



## APPENDICES

1. **Appendix A—GFL Strategic Planning Project Process Flowchart 2021:** The flowchart visually depicts the Library’s planning methodology, including the timeline, assessment mechanisms, and process participants.
2. **Appendix B—GFL Community and Library Profile 2021:** This document presents a demographic profile of Holden, the Library’s history, and information related to the Library’s services, programs, and governance.
3. **Appendix C—GFL SOAR Exercise Summary Results 2021:** This report documents the results of an environmental assessment of the Library’s strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results. Library staff, the Board of Trustees, and the Friends of Gale Free Library board members participated in this virtual exercise.
4. **Appendix D—GFL Focus Group Summary Report 2021:** This report presents feedback and ideas about the Library’s collections, programs, services, and staff generated in two virtual focus groups with community members.
5. **Appendix E—GFL Community Survey Summary Results 2021:** The community survey was conducted in April 2021 via SurveyMonkey. This report presents a summary of the results, including helpful graphs and charts.
6. **Appendix F—GFL Ideas and Input Report 2021:** This report presents an itemized list of ideas and miscellaneous feedback collected throughout the strategic planning process. It summarizes and prioritizes the input received based on each item’s relative significance.

