

SAWYER FREE LIBRARY

Discover the Past. Create the Future.



STRATEGIC PLAN FOR FISCAL YEARS 2025-2029



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SAWYER FREE LIBRARY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
COMMUNITY CONTEXT	5
OUR PLANNING PROCESS	7
OUR PLAN	8
Executive Summary	
Library Vision	
Library Mission	
Library Values	
Library Strategic Goals	
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	10
RESEARCH REPORTS	
Focus Groups and Key Informant Interview.....	11
Trends Research	17
Staff SOAR Exercise	19
Library Usage	22
Community Survey Results	24

INTRODUCTION

In 1884, Gloucester's benefactor Samuel Elwell Sawyer purchased the Saunders House at 88 Middle Street as the home for the Sawyer Free Library. Sawyer located the Library in the heart of downtown Gloucester, giving it a prominent place in perpetuity among our civic, cultural, and religious institutions. Sawyer believed that education and being of service to the community were the keys to individual and collective achievement.

In the 20th century, community support funded building extensions in 1913 and 1976 for the Sawyer Free Library to address changing library service priorities and community demographics. For nearly 140 years, Sawyer's generous gift and admirable objectives endured. Now, well into the 21st century, the buildings are once again in critical need of revitalization and re-imagination for the Library to best serve the community for generations to come.

The Sawyer Free Library is at a pivotal moment in its history as it breaks ground on a major capital renovation and expansion that integrates three distinct structures with complete renovations of the Library's 1976 and 1913 buildings and an expansion of the footprint with a new 14,000 sq. ft. addition. This project reflects the community's values and vision for the future, while conserving what people love about Gloucester. The Library's tagline "**Discover the past, Create the future**" is apt in that we are preserving the facade of the original building and incorporating enhanced sustainability features with Net-Zero-Ready design and engineering that support multiple community goals. The 2025 Sawyer Free Library is the first of its kind on Cape Ann—a next generation public building serviced by all electric building systems and powered by renewable clean energy generated onsite.

The 2025 Sawyer Free Library will be a welcoming and comfortable community space for all people to connect with our community's storied past, enrich their current lives and feel empowered to face an ever-changing future.

New spaces include:

- A 100 seat Community Room, a one-of-a-kind resource for Gloucester downtown with moveable seating and state-of-the-art technology to host local and visiting presentations, performances and meetings.
- An updated and expanded Matz gallery space, which will showcase artwork of local artists in rotating, year-round exhibits.
- An Early Learning Center for infants and toddlers that serves as a place of discovery and exploration.
- A Children's Program Room for school-aged children to participate in hands-on activities and interactive presentations.
- A 1,300 square foot Teen Reading Room—an investment in spatial equity and a validation of the importance of this age group in our community—will be the only dedicated space in a public building that is open to teens after school, weekends, and during the school and summer vacations.

- A Library History Center, a researcher's haven with books and manuscripts chronicling Gloucester's rich history.
- A Digital Makerspace for entrepreneurs and hobbyists of all ages to explore new and emerging technologies. The digital lab is designed for media creation, digital preservation and coding.
- A Conference Room for groups of up to 16 people needing meeting space.

These community spaces amplify so many opportunities. Over the next five years, we look forward to fulfilling Gloucester's needs and aspirations with services that foster a spirit of community and participation.

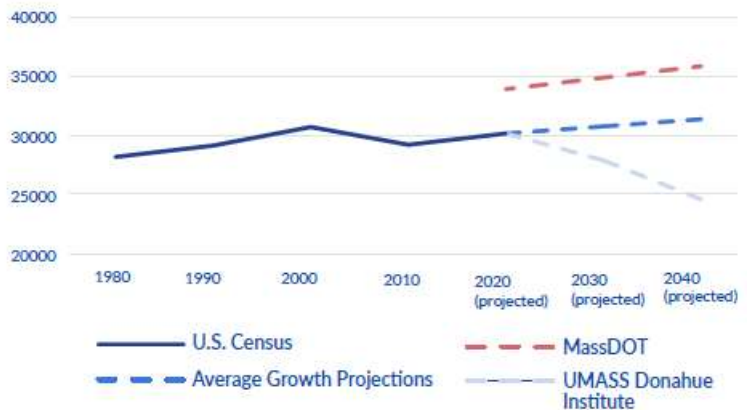
DEMOGRAPHICS

SLIGHT DECLINE IN POPULATION AND UNCERTAINTY FOR FUTURE TRENDS.⁵

The population of Gloucester has experienced a marginal overall decline (less than two percent) since the year 2000 with a low in 2010 that has rebounded somewhat but remains below the 2000 population. Presently, there exists a notable degree of uncertainty regarding the trajectory of future population trends, with conflicting projections offered by MassDOT and UMass Donahue Institute.

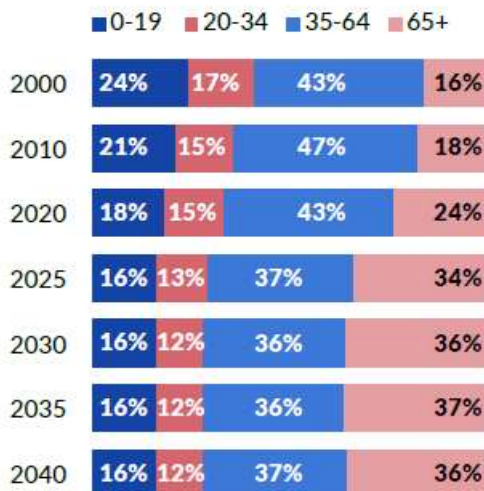
2000: 30,273
2010: 28,789
2020: 29,729

Gloucester Historic and Projected Future Population



HIGH PROPORTION OF OLDER RESIDENTS⁶

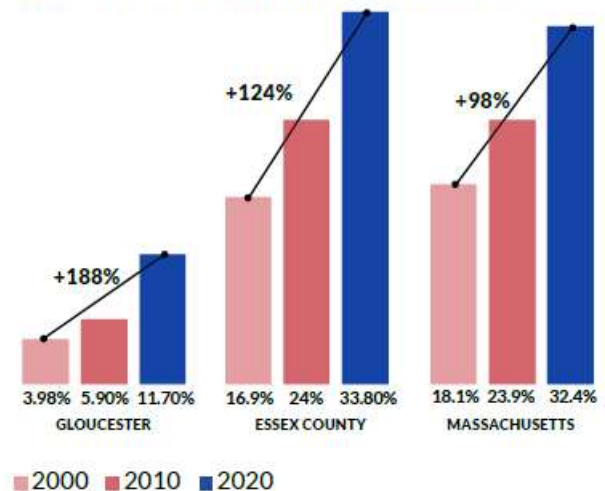
Gloucester's residents are aging, with the proportion of residents aged 65 or older expected to increase 12 percentage points by 2040.



GROWING RACIAL AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY⁷

Gloucester's population is growing more diverse faster than in the County and state but remains proportionally less diverse.

Percentage of Black, Indigenous, and Residents of Color in Gloucester, Essex County, and Massachusetts, 2000-2020

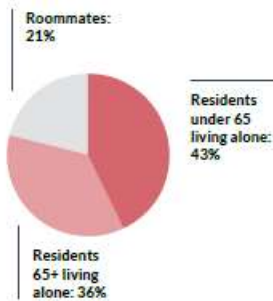


MANY PEOPLE LIVE ALONE IN GLOUCESTER, ESPECIALLY OLDER ADULTS⁸

While family households remain the majority at 61 percent in 2021, just under one in three Gloucester households (31 percent). Of all single-person households, 45 percent are aged 65 or older:

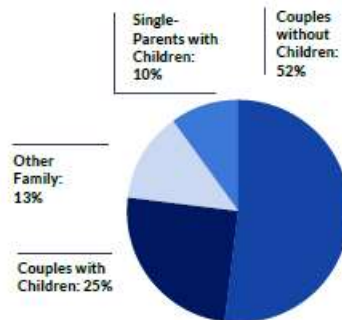
Total Non-Family Households

39%

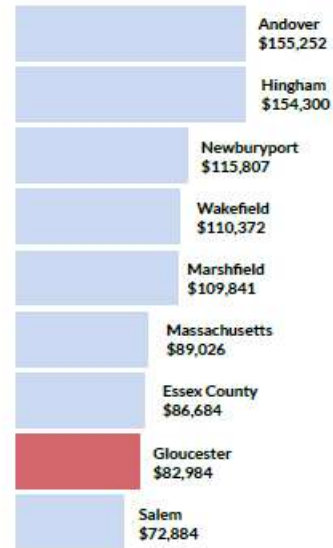


Total Family Households:

61%



GLOUCESTER HOUSEHOLDS HAVE LOWER MEDIAN INCOME THAN MOST COMPARISON COMMUNITIES⁹



RAPID LOSS OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN¹⁰

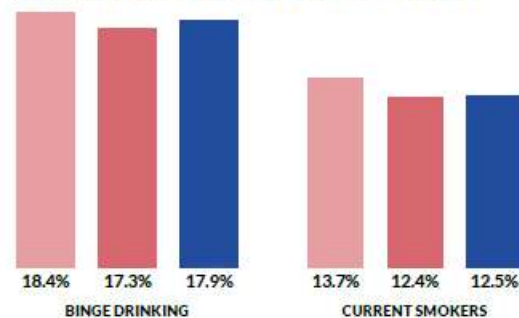
Gloucester saw a larger reduction in the number of households with children between 2000 and 2020 compared to the County and the state.



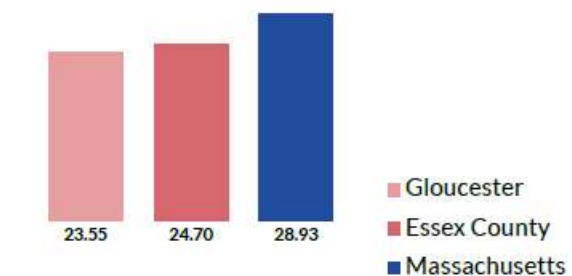
HIGHER SUBSTANCE USE IN GLOUCESTER WITH LOWER ACCESS TO TREATMENT¹¹

Gloucester residents aged 18 and older use alcohol and tobacco at higher rates than County and State averages and have less access to addiction and substance abuse providers.

Alcohol and Tobacco Usage for Adults 18+, 2021



Addiction and Substance Abuse Providers, Rate per 100,000 Population, 2021



[Gloucester Comprehensive Plan: Existing Conditions Profile, 2023.](#)

OUR PLANNING PROCESS

Research

The 2025-2029 Strategic Plan is informed by in-depth research into our value to the community, current trends in our changing environment and developments in the evolution of public libraries.

Research activities and resources included:

- focus groups and a key informant interview
- trends research into libraries, technology and digital equity, and sustainability
- Library usage data
- staff appreciative inquiry exercise (SOAR)
- community survey results

Development

The 2025-2029 Strategic Plan has four components that represent the foundational principles of the Sawyer Free Library:

- Library Vision: our aspiration for our future
- Library Mission: our purpose
- Library Values: our most deeply held beliefs
- Library Strategic Goals: our priorities

The Library Board and key Library stakeholders developed the Library Vision and Mission in a workshop “Elevating our Vision and Mission for our Future.” Library staff formulated the Library Values in a workshop “What Matters Most.” The Library Director and staff framed the Strategic Goals and the context for the annual Action Plan.

The Sawyer Free Library’s 2025-2029 Strategic Plan is flexible and designed to accommodate our community’s evolving needs. The Library develops an annual Action Plan made up of specific objectives and actions designed to achieve the strategic goals and address current needs. The Action Plan is submitted to the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners annually.

OUR PLAN

Executive Summary

The Sawyer Free Library's 2025-2029 Strategic Plan builds on the Library's strong foundation and charts an optimistic future through its Vision, Mission, Values and Strategic Goals. The 2025 Sawyer Free Library will be an environment with ample information resources, robust technology, resilient infrastructure and knowledgeable staff. We welcome everyone in our community to explore this vibrant public space and discover pathways to new opportunities, individual and collective growth, social engagement and cultural connectedness. We are confident that this plan will affirm the importance of our Library in our community.

Library Vision: Our aspiration for our future

To be our community's beacon on the sea of time where connections flourish, creativity soars, and knowledge fuels an empowered future for all.

Library Mission: Our purpose

The mission of the Sawyer Free Library is to cultivate connections across our community, power imaginations, inspire learning and provide a free, welcoming space for all.

Library Values: Our most deeply held beliefs

Community: We build community by fostering belonging. We connect people to our community's storied past, enrich their current lives and empower them for an ever-changing future.

Access: We champion equal and open access to information and opportunities.

Future-Focused: We anticipate emerging practices and evolving technology in library and information science, prepare our staff and community for changes in our environments, and provide safe spaces and supportive assistance for learning.

Sustainability: We lead by example with a holistic approach to sustainability. Our building's sustainability features, educational resources and programming, and our capacity as a climate response center show current and future generations how to preserve our planet.

Intellectual Freedom: We protect the rights of individuals to pursue interests, knowledge and ideas through a spectrum of viewpoints.

Collaboration: We bring people and groups together to advance community needs and aspirations, and leverage our collective impact.

Library Strategic Goals: Our priorities

1. Create inviting spaces and community destinations
2. Connect people to community-responsive Library programs, collections, exhibitions, public technology and services
3. Deepen relationships with volunteers, organizations and funders
4. Invigorate our staff culture

The 2025-2029 Strategic Plan was approved by the Gloucester Lyceum & Sayer Free Library Board on November 28, 2023.

Mern Sibley, President

Fran Aliberte, Vice President

Joe Grella, Treasurer

John Day, Secretary

Geoff Bradford

Peter Brau

Jason Brisbois

Jen Holmgren

Beth Morris

Simon Paddock

Anne-Marie Wickey

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Library is grateful for the feedback from hundreds of people who live and work in Gloucester. We are especially grateful for the thoughtful and valuable input from the following focus group participants:

Fran Aliberte	Linnea Hagberg	Dick Prouty
Glenn Alto	Jennifer Hapgood-White	Rebecca Reynolds
Christine Armstrong	Alycia Hogan-Lopez	Kelsey Richards
Saira Austin	Colleen Hogan-Lopez	Bryce Rochford
Karen Bell	Judith Hoglander	Colby Rochford
Jennifer Beloff	Brian King	Gail Sarofeen
Sally Bradley-Golding	Florence Melvin	Esme Sarrouf
Jason Brisbois	Beth Morris	Joanne Senos
Traci Corbett	Penny Nixon	Mern Sibley
Susan Coviello	Bianca Numerosi	Emily Siegel
Jo-Anne Crawford	Sarah Oaks	Elise Sinagra
Tracy Davis	Susan Oleksiw	Sara Slifer Swift
John Day	Tolu Olubanjo	April Smith
Michael DeKoster	Simon Paddock	Carol Sweet
Melissa Dimond	Christy Park	Gemma Wilkens
Meredith Fine	Yashvi Patel	Elsje Zwart
Jane Gagliardi	Alicia Pensarosa	
Kecia German	Emmy Philbrook	

Thanks also to the 2025-2029 Strategic Planning Working Group that created the framework for the community engagement activities. Gloucester Conversations with the support of consulting partners Essential Partners conducted the focus groups.

Charlee Bianchini	Duncan Hollomon	Michael O'Leary
Anne Britton	Jen Holmgren	John Sarrouf
Kathy Eckles	Mark Murray-Brown	Ariane Wolff

Library staff contributed to the 2025-2029 Strategic Plan with their clear insights, professional expertise, deep understanding of the community and expert organization skills. Everything about the Library stems from the exceptional public service they deliver every day.

Joella Allen	Meg O'Neill	Christy Rosso
Joann Dunajski	Alexis Morrill	Leah Svensson
Helen Freeman	Annalise Nakoneczny	Julie Travers
Lisa Jonas	Beth Pocock	Justine Vitale
Jessica Laurie	Samantha Rogers	Joe Wilkins

RESEARCH REPORTS

FOCUS GROUPS AND KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW

Focus Groups

Between May and June 2023, the Library engaged 52 key stakeholders in seven focus groups designed to discover what they saw as our community's current and future needs and aspirations in order for the Sawyer Free Library to better serve our community for the next five years. The key stakeholders included Library family members, community leaders from four sectors (Social Services, Arts/History, Education and Performing Arts), and students.

The conversations of the focus groups produced deep and rich observations and comments, as well as deepened relationships.

Community needs and aspirations

Relative to Gloucester, participants of the five adult focus groups expressed aspirations for improvements to community engagement, quality of life and equal opportunity.

Community engagement: In order to address the community's challenges, inclusive consultation, collaborative planning and implementation, and connections to trusted knowledge sources-- community experts and local research—are imperative.

Quality of Life: The two most significant threats to quality of life are climate change and affordable housing for students, low- and middle-income workers and seniors. In order for Gloucester's unique assets to survive, investment is needed in our natural environment, waterfront and the infrastructure of our historic, maritime and artist communities. Improved mobility around Gloucester—public transportation, bike paths, streetscapes, parking and pedestrian walkways—would contribute to a more livable City.

Equal opportunity: For equal opportunity to exist, every resident must have their basic needs met, including food security, adequate healthy nutrition, affordable childcare, quality jobs, and timely access to physical and mental healthcare. Intellectual, artistic and technology development opportunities for adults and youth are fundamental to growing and thriving in the 21st century economy.

Library services

Participants of the five adult focus groups generated lists of services and resources that would support the community needs and aspirations. The following chart compiles the top priorities of each group.

<i>Public services</i> Programming	Health & Wellness; cooking demonstrations, nutrition workshops. Local authors, local history, thought leaders, Lyceum. Creative arts, arts marketing, playwright and director talks. Themed resource days for specific populations. Climate change and sustainability—convene community experts, local vendors/workers. Music performances, movies. Open houses, Community Nights. Intergenerational programming. ELL tutoring. Alternative housing options and affordable housing. Free of charge events that are welcoming, inclusive and accessible: remove all barriers to participation (language, low-hearing).
Collections	Newcomer packages. Multilingual resources. Mental health resources. Local authors, artists, and history.
Exhibitions	Matz Art Gallery artist receptions, student art showcase.
Technology & Things	Basic computer training. Tools, sewing machines, art supplies. Easy video and audio recording.
Staff assistance	Community hub, convener, bring community sector organizations together on a regular basis, collaborations. Roundtables/action tables to bring together funders, city government, and organizations for high priority community issues—affordable housing, support for working artists. Connect people to affordable housing.
Outreach	Increased outreach to: at risk families, community partners.
Promotion	Promote library services more widely.
<i>Staff</i>	Staff composition reflective of the community. Volunteer coordinator.

The two student focus groups recommended space amenities for the Teen Reading Room and activities that they would like to see happening there, as well as what they would like to do there.

<i>Space amenities</i>	Mini fridge and drinks. Big comfy chairs. Table with art supplies. Food—candy, chips, cinnamon rolls, pretzels, muffins, hot chocolate. Flexible seating. Mix of independent study and social gathering seating.
<i>Public services</i> Programming	Book Club. Performing groups. Trivia nights. Climate change group/environmental club.
Experience	Volunteering. Tutoring of younger students. Work at a Library café. Student Advisory Group.
Exhibitions	Student art.
Collections	Books that support school projects.
Technology & Things	Podcast groups. High tech equipment and software. Collaborative computing. Digital equity.
Staff assistance	Support with learning tools and resources.
Outreach	Bus transportation to the Library after school and CATA bus home.

Key Informant Interview

Library Director Jenny Benedict and Superintendent of Gloucester Public Schools Ben Lummis met to:

- review Sawyer Free Library’s current support of students
- view the programmatic design of the 2025 Sawyer Free Library and new opportunities that it presents for students
- consider the alignment of the Library’s 2025-2029 Strategic Plan and the upcoming Municipal Digital Equity Planning with the Gloucester Public Schools’ strategic priorities.

Current Student Support

The Sawyer Free Library has an integral role in the educational landscape for Gloucester’s young people. In addition to the extensive collection of physical materials in the Children’s room, Library staff engage with students through classroom visits, special events, in school extended student learning, onsite showcases of student work, and job and volunteer

experiences. Sawyer Free Library also fulfills a crucial need for free, quality, out-of-school programs and resources for children, teens, and young families.

The Superintendent expressed his appreciation for the Library's support of GPS students and confirmed his endorsement of them continuing. Due to the opening of the new East Veterans Elementary School, students will no longer be making class visits from St. Ann's and Library staff will no longer be making class visits to the elementary school. The Superintendent and the Library Director discussed the gap in professional library services in the elementary schools and agreed to continue the conversation at a future date.

Early Years		
Initiatives	Type	Timing
Storytimes	Early literacy skills	Weekly
Backyard Growers storytimes	Early literacy skills	July-August
Countdown to Kindergarten	Special event	Annual
Early Intervention	Support services	Bi-weekly
Pre-School visits	Early literacy skills	Monthly
Elementary		
Veterans Memorial Elementary K-3 grades	Classroom visits	Bi-weekly
Veterans Memorial Elementary 4-5 th grades	Library visits	Bi-weekly
East Veterans 4 th Grade Book Battle	Extended learning	Annual
Beeman 5 th Grade Gloucester 400+ Project	Extended learning	One time
Summer Reading Program	Extended learning	June-August
ELL Parent Coffee	Community building	Annual
Student Art Exhibitions	Student showcase	Weekly
Middle School		
SFL Orientation and Library Card sign-up	Classroom visits	Annual
Summer Reading Program	Extended learning	July-August
Themed After-School Program (Anime Club, Comic Con Club)	Extended learning	Weekly in 6-8 week segments

Young Gloucester Scientists Club	Extended learning	Jan-Aug
High School		
SFL Orientation and Library Card sign-up	Classroom visits	Annual
Summer Reading Program	Extended learning	July-August
Internships	Job experience	July-August
Community service	Volunteer experience	Year round
Gloucester Arts Festival	Student showcase	Annual

All Ages		
Poetry without Paper	Extended learning Student showcase	April
GloCon	Extended learning Play	Annual

2025 Sawyer Free Library

In the 2025 Sawyer Free Library, the entire 2nd floor is dedicated to young people, spanning both the existing building and the new addition. The renovated, expanded and modernized building features the following youth spaces:

- **Children's Program Room:** a 50-seat space with age and size-appropriate furniture, presentation equipment, sinks, and art and science supplies for children to participate in hands-on activities and interactive presentations.
- **Children's Reading Room:** a spacious room for children to discover reading and learning through 31,000 physical materials, 4 research workstations, and 2 educational gaming stations.
- **Early Learning Center:** Within the Children's Reading Room, a space for babies, toddlers, and preschoolers with seating for caregivers; ample floor space for young ones to explore books, puzzles, and games and participate in story time activities; and 2 AWE Platinum workstations with educational software.
- **Teen Reading Room:** a 1,670 sq. ft. space including 9,000 physical items geared to the interests of tweens and teens, individual and group study spaces and a display monitor for showcasing teen-generated digital work.
- **Teen Creation Space:** Within the Teen Reading Room, a space for teens to work together on a collaborative computing workstation and explore their creativity using arts and crafts tools and materials.

The Superintendent responded enthusiastically to the Library Director's presentation of the programmatic design of the 2025 Sawyer Free Library. He suggested a number of key school staff members that the Library should contact to collaborate with on programming.

In terms of transportation, which the teen focus group had suggested, the Superintendent confirmed that transportation to the Library after school would be possible, but that transportation from the Library in the early evening would not be within the realm of possibility due to budget constraints.

Plan Alignment

Gloucester Public Schools has a Three-Year Plan for Ongoing Improvement with four strategic priorities:

Priority #1 – Deepen Student Belonging and Engagement in School

Priority #2 – Strengthen Instruction and Better Connect General and Special Education

Priority #3 – Strengthen Social Emotional Learning and Mental Health Support

Priority #4 – Strengthen Special Education Through Improved Coordination of Services and Specialized Instruction

Each priority has enumerated goals. Sawyer Free Library is a natural partner to Gloucester Public Schools for the following:

Priority #1, Goal #2—Reduce chronic absenteeism across all schools by supporting families early and often

c. Communicate regularly and consistently using numerous vehicles to help families and students understand that coming to school every day matters.

Priority #1, Goal #3—All Gloucester High students will explore a variety of pathways while in high school, identify their first step after graduation, and be prepared for that step.

Priority #3, Goal #1 – Social Emotional Learning Skill Development –Develop and Implement a Multi-Tiered System of Instruction and Support for Social Emotional Learning and Mental Health

Priority #3, Goal #4 – Provide Intensive Student Support by Leveraging Community Partnerships
b. Address identified gaps in student support through the development of services and programs with community partner organizations.

Priority #4, Goal #3—Strengthening our Specialized Instructional Practices & Consultation

TRENDS RESEARCH

Trends that have an anticipated impact for Sawyer Free Library over the next five years include ones specific to our sector and others that have broader implications to our community, region and nation.

Public Libraries

Public libraries are committed to upholding the freedom to read by providing a broad range of information sources to people of all ages. Over the past several years, public and school libraries have faced an unprecedented number of challenges. The vast majority of these targeted titles written by or about members of the LGBTQIA+ community or by and about Black people, Indigenous people and people of color. Most often, these challenges demanded removal or restriction of multiple titles. Even more concerning is that Library Directors and staff have been the subject of direct threats to their safety, their employment and their liberty.

In the 2025-2029 Sawyer Free Library Strategic Plan, it is imperative that our purpose and our values are firmly rooted in principles of intellectual freedom, and equal and open access to information and opportunities.

As the State of America's Libraries 2023 Report illustrates, each year, our sector celebrates the accomplishments of public libraries that make significant and exceptional contributions to their communities. We recognize our peers who excel in identifying critical community needs and aspirations, and providing innovative library services to meet them. In order for Sawyer Free Library to remain relevant in a rapidly changing environment, our organization needs to be future-focused and collaborate with our key stakeholders, community organizations and elected officials. Above all, our services must demonstrate observable differences and offer meaningful experiences.

Selected Readings:

The State of America's Libraries 2023 Report

<https://www.ala.org/news/sites/ala.org.news/files/content/state-of-americas-libraries-report-2023-web-version.pdf>

Technology

The Essex County Community Foundation assessed the digital divide in Gloucester in 2020. The report highlighted that 24% of residents lack broadband and 18% do not own a laptop or desktop computer. This deficiency prevents low-income, minority, immigrant, non-English speakers, seniors, youth and vulnerable populations from accessing critical resources and opportunities for personal and economic advancement.

Meanwhile, technology has moved into a new paradigm. Technological change is exponential, fast, continuous, global in scale, accelerating in speed and enormous in scope. Generative

artificial intelligence and machine learning have far greater significance than a new wave of popular consumer technology. They open up new possibilities for content creation, customer service and support, sales and marketing, and software and product development. In addition, virtual reality is demonstrating potential for all sorts of applications, including workforce development training.

In the 2025 Sawyer Free Library, services will be needed to support both of these trends with goals of improving digital equity and supporting our community in the adoption of new technologies.

Selected Readings:

Nick Tanzi Library Tech Trends for 2023

<https://the-digital-librarian.com/2022/12/01/library-tech-trends-for-2023/>

[Striving for Digital Equity](#), Essex County Community Foundation

Climate Change

The window for effective climate action is closing. Rapid and far-reaching transitions across all sectors and systems are necessary to achieve deep and sustained emissions reductions and secure a livable and sustainable future for all. Recognizing the scale and urgency of the climate crisis, in 2020, the Baker-Polito Administration established a 2050 statewide emissions limit of net zero GHG emissions.

Like many coastal communities across the Commonwealth, the City of Gloucester is experiencing climate change conditions such as sea level rise, coastal flooding, increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events, as well as increased temperatures and fire threats.

The 2025 Sawyer Free Library will address climate change with a holistic approach to sustainability. The combination of the building's sustainability features, its educational programming, and its capacity as a physical and social climate response center present a powerful demonstration of how we can mitigate and adapt to climate change. Adopting sustainability as an institutional value imbeds the Library's commitment to sustainability into our foundational principles.

Selected Readings:

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Climate Change 2023 Synthesis Report

Headline Statements <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/resources/spm-headline-statements>

2025 SFL Sustainability Brochure and Fact Sheet

https://www.sawyerfreelibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/SLF_Sustainable.pdf

STAFF SOAR EXERCISE

On Tuesday, July 25th 2023, permanent Sawyer Free Library staff members participated in a Staff Development Day: What Matters Most. The afternoon workshop, an appreciative inquiry SOAR exercise, was designed to record staff perceptions of our current strengths and opportunities in order to build shared aspirations and measurable results for our future.

Strengths:

Staff quickly generated a long list of aspects of the Library that they appreciate. While their comments spanned community impact, space and public services, the greatest number and most meaningful comments focused on the relationship of staff with each other, as a team and with the community.

<i>Community impact</i>	Helping to close the digital divide by getting people connected to the Internet Providing an accessible venue for people to discover local authors, musicians and artists
<i>Space amenities</i>	Adapting to and making the most of the temporary space Planning improvements in our new building Sustainability features of the 2025 Sawyer Free Library building
<i>Public services</i> Programming	Young Gloucester Scientists Club; breadth of programming
Promotion	Great signage; good social media presence
Collections	Gloucester history section; Central Grammar deposit collection; collection management during move and storage; Museum passes; Digitization of the Gloucester Daily Times; NOBLE network
Technology	Wi-Fi Internet access, public computers and hotpots all heavily used
Staff assistance	Customer service; excellent ILL service; device advice; adept at finding alternatives for requested items
Outreach	Home delivery; Veteran's Memorial School class visits
<i>Staff</i>	Staff works great as a team, collaborative Staff support each other in handling people with difficult behaviors Staff are productive, keep innovating and match what larger libraries do Staff are attuned to community needs Staff have a good rapport with community members Staff have built strong relationships with community organizations and leaders

Opportunities:

The opportunities that staff identified are a combination of:

- new needs and ideas made possible by the 2025 Sawyer Free Library
- public services that we used to offer but no longer do due to the temporary location and/or changes in staffing
- public services that the Library does well and could be expanded
- gaps revealed by strategic plan research activities.

<i>New</i>	Small study rooms for telehealth appointments Assessment and implementation of emerging technologies Devices to Go featuring video streaming services Digital display showcasing energy and water consumption and storage Staff training on emergency procedures and emerging technologies Updated website
<i>Resume</i>	Self-checkout stations Wellspring ESOL classes and tutoring Lyceum programming Book clubs with a recurring theme Multilingual story times More research volunteers for local history
<i>Expand</i>	Programming: community discussions on difficult and current topics Staff assistance: initiate more reader's advisory Collections: more digitization of local materials; preservation of local history Promotion of virtual author talks Staff continuous learning opportunities, especially for technology
<i>Gaps</i>	Staffing complement reflects the diversity in the community Marketing of online databases

Aspirations:

The aspirations of staff reflect new ideas for community outreach, new amenities for spaces and new public services that align with trends and community needs.

<i>Community outreach</i>	Book vending machine Book bike – bookmobile Transportation to the Library
<i>Space amenities</i>	Café in the library Rooftop garden Art gallery for children Outdoor space for families Children's toys/manipulatives

<i>Public services</i>	
Programming	More Gloucester history lectures Health & wellness Cross generational tech buddies Day long festivals Collaborative programming with schools & libraries on emerging technologies Passive book club activities
Technology	Device petting zoo Expanded library of things Health monitoring devices Catalog stations with mapping feature
Staff assistance	Welcome newcomers in ways that service their language/cultural needs
Collections	Build collections of local knowledge e.g. ecosystem changes; community services
Volunteers	Develop a well-organized and active volunteer program

Results:

When asked what success looked like for the library and the staff, staff's responses centered on increasing community impact and working in a high-quality environment.

<i>Community impact</i>	Providing higher impact programming focused on current trends that draw more participation and fill a need for the whole community. Deepening relationships with community organizations to leverage impact. Attracting more people, different people, more diversity and more school aged kids to the Library. Building a greater sense of community both inside and outside of the Library. Improving the community's understanding of the Library's value and impact. Developing collections that are of higher relevance and circulate well.
<i>Working environment</i>	Sufficient staff to achieve aspirations Staff feel supported and safe A healthy work environment Increased financial support

LIBRARY USAGE

State Aid to Public Libraries: Annual Report Information Survey (ARIS)

The MBLC administers the Annual Report Information Survey (ARIS) and Financial Report in compliance with Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 78. Each fiscal year, public libraries are required to submit this data in order to receive State Aid to Public Libraries and to meet the [Minimum Standards of Public Library Service](#).

The following charts show a comparative year-over-year snapshot of four key area: visits, collection circulation, programming, and technology.

Statistical Highlights

The primary variation in usage from FY 2021, FY 2022 and FY 2023 is due to the number of open hours of the physical Library. In FY 2021, the Library was open 35 weeks due to the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in a reduction to in person visit, physical circulation, programs and onsite public computer use and an increase in use of electronic materials and recorded programs.

In FY 2022, the Library was open 52 weeks with full in person services. In person visits, circulation of physical materials and in person programs rebounded with many people relieved to return to their previous usage patterns. Use of electronic materials continued to increase for children, remained static for teens and decreased for adults.

In FY 2023, the Library was open 49 weeks compared to 52 weeks the previous year due to a three-week closure when the Library moved to temporary space at 21 Main Street. While the new space is a fourth of the size, in person visits and physical circulation are remarkably strong. Even though there are fewer public computers at the temporary location, use of them is higher than the previous two years. Use of electronic materials continued the trends observed the previous year.

Visits	FY 2023	FY 2022	FY 2021
In person	72,438	111,206	34,985
Website	108,813	116,357	113,420

Collection circulation*	FY 2023	FY 2022	FY 2021
Adult			
Books & print	48,560	64,596	50,360
A/V—DVD, CDs, Audiobooks	17,227	26,458	20,658
Electronic (ebooks, downloadable audio and video)	14,181	17,445	20,336
Misc. (museum passes, kits, devices)	2,069	1,975	2,496
Young Adult			
Books & print	4,851	5,433	3,736
A/V—DVD, CDs, Audiobooks	27	57	90
Electronic (ebooks, downloadable audio and video)	1,541	1,428	1,446
Misc. (museum passes, kits, devices)	0	0	140

Children			
Books & print	48,671	66,297	44,898
A/V—DVD, CDs, Audiobooks	2,597	4,925	2,900
Electronic (Ebooks, downloadable audio and video)	14,482	7,708	2,655
Misc. (museum passes, kits, devices)	147	109	356
Total direct circulation	154,353	196,431	150,071
Physical item circulation	124,149	169,850	125,875
Use of electronic materials	30,204	26,581	24,196
<i>Additional Circulation</i>			
ILL items received from other libraries	22,975	23,026	27,362
ILL loans to other libraries	11,222	16,220	21,409
Programs	FY 2023	FY 2022	FY 2021
Adult			
# programs	112	285	70
attendance	908	1,804	2,011
Young Adult			
# programs	27	9	3
attendance	379	211	44
Children's			
# programs	213	301	87
attendance	4,637	6,384	836
General Audience			
# programs	7	15	0
attendance	432	350	0
Totals			
# programs	359	610	160
attendance	6,356	8,749	2,891
# recorded program presentations	42	3	59
# views of recorded programs/week	1,536	87	5,826

Technology	FY 2023	FY 2022	FY 2021
# Public Internet computers	4	13	3
Public Internet computer users/week	77	52	46
Uses of Public Internet computers	4,004	2,704	2,392

- 53% of the book collection moved to offsite storage in mid-October 2022, consisting of 20,540 adult books, 6,495 children's books and 1,724 young adult books.

COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS

Summary

Sawyer Free Library (SFL) carried out a community survey from May 17 to July 27, 2023 as part of the community research for the 2025-2029 Strategic Plan. The community survey was promoted through social and print media, the Library's website and e-newsletter, and in the Library. 458 people completed the survey, providing insights into their usage of in-person and online library services, as well as demographic information. The margin of error for a sample of this size is $\pm 4.5\%$, with 95% confidence.

As a community research activity, the community survey is a good tool for capturing the perspectives of frequent Library users who are familiar with such surveys and have the time and the education level to complete it. Other research tools, such as focus groups and interviews, are better for capturing the perspectives of other demographics.

Overall Observations

- The Library's traditional services of connecting readers to physical collections and authors are highly valued.
- Library staff are recognized for the broad range of assistance they provide.
- The Library's public technology and digital learning opportunities are instrumental to bridging the digital divide in Gloucester.

Demographics

- The majority of respondents are female (75%), 55 and older (77%) and retired (50%). Compared to the 2020 Census, older age groups are overrepresented, and those under 55 are underrepresented.
- Most respondents are full-time Gloucester residents (84%) residing in downtown, East Gloucester and West Gloucester (49%).
- The majority of respondents (77%) have a college degree with 50% holding a Masters or Doctorate.
- 19 languages other than English are either spoken at home, in public or work, and/or read by the respondents.

In Person Use

- Over half of respondents (61%) visit at least once a month in person and 30% visit a few times a year.
- Staff: 73% of respondents selected locating an item as the most important assistance that staff provide. The results show that staff are also important for using library resources, technology, history and personal research, referrals to services, and recommendations.

- Collections: Collectively, respondents rated recently published books (56%), a broad selection of print materials (53%), and adult print materials (47%) as highest in importance. When segmented by age range, results reveal mostly expected preferences. Across all adult age ranges, borrowing from other libraries (ILL) ranked highly.
- Services: Of the services SFL offers, museum passes are overwhelmingly the most popular (71%) followed by community meeting space and support (50%). When cross referenced to employment status, people who work part-time, have multiple jobs, and are independent contractors value technology assistance and training the most.
- Events and Classes: Of the many types of events SFL offers, author and literary events rated the highest (65%) with educational lectures (49%), community issues, art and local history also drawing a considerable number of responses. More than a quarter of the respondents value sustainability and climate change (32%), music concerts (31%) and book clubs (26%).
- Technology: 15% of respondents indicated that they do not have access to high-speed internet. Of the technology that SFL offers, two-thirds reported that Wi-Fi and public computers were important to them. The respondents identifying that adobe and graphics software, digitization tools, and video and audio recording and editing are important indicate community readiness for these technologies in the 2025 Sawyer Free Library. The most common use for digital devices among those surveyed is to search for information or products (75%) and to communicate with friends and family (75%). About half of the respondents use their digital devices to stream videos, listen to music, attend online meetings or classes, and read eBooks.

Online Use

- The three top uses of the SFL website by the respondents are to register for library events, check the calendar, and reserve museum passes.
- 44% of respondents use SFL online collections and resources a few times a year and once a year or less, while 39% use them at least once a month or more.
- Events and Classes: The ranking of online events closely resembles that of in-person ones.
- The E-newsletter and the website are the dominant ways respondents learn about the Library's events and activities.

Use of other libraries

- A quarter of those surveyed responded that they used other libraries. The top other libraries visited are Beverly and Rockport with respondents saying that these have a better children's area, more variety and availability of materials, and are more convenient for them to visit.
- A fifth responded that they used other online libraries with the Boston Public Library the most frequently visited for their greater selection of databases and eBooks.
- The primary reasons for not visiting SFL are limited parking (30%) and being too busy (29%). While some reasons are out of the library's control, such as the preference to buy

media and the location being inconvenient, others can potentially be addressed, such as wait times for materials and lack of knowing what's offered. Safety and not feeling welcomed are a concern for a small percentage.