

GROWING TOGETHER
ONE CITY. ONE FUTURE.

nhfpl 
NEW HAVEN FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK 2018-2023

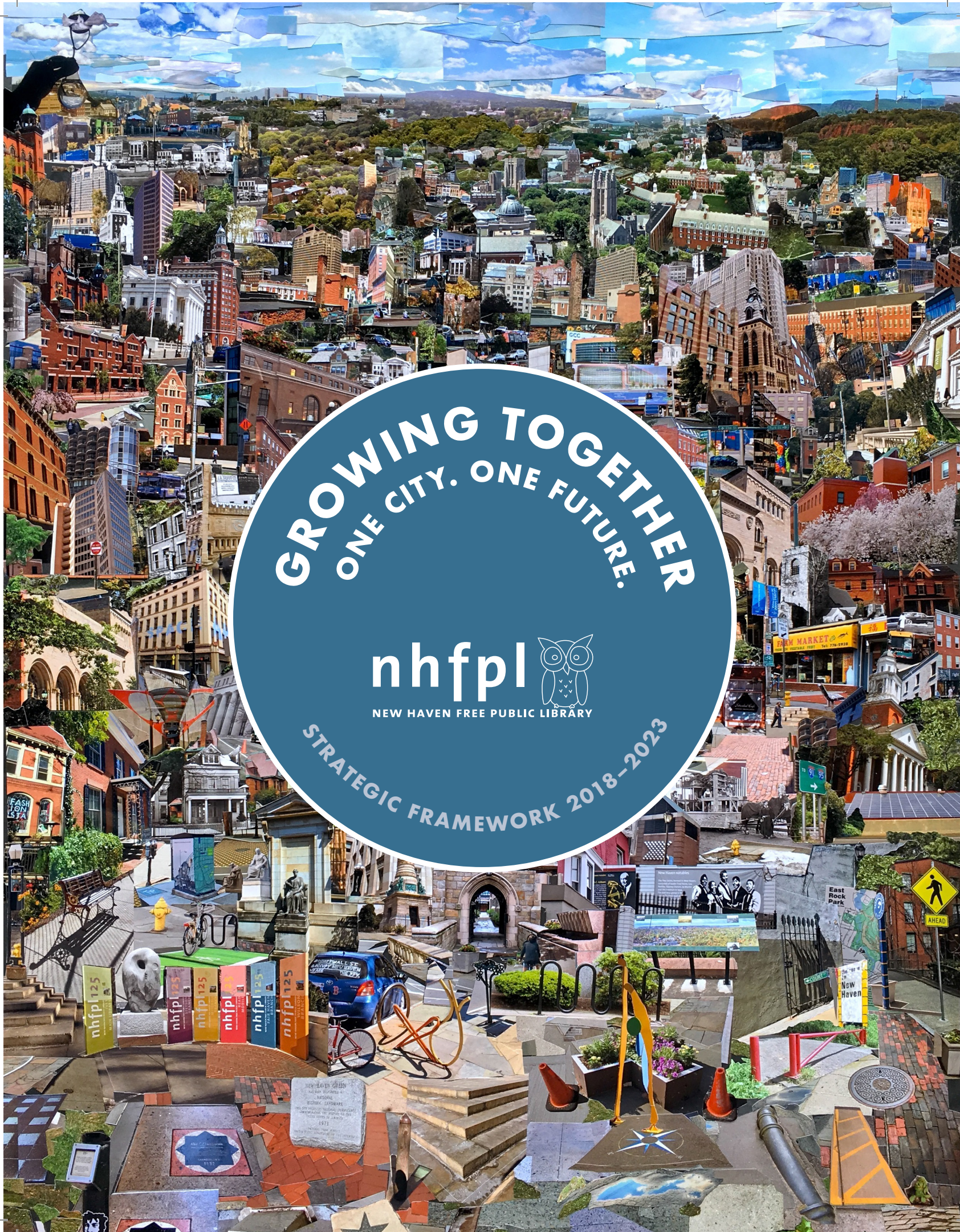




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*Cover photo: detail of a “Celebrate New Haven” collage mural created by artist Rashmi
in partnership with the New Haven Free Public Library*

INTRODUCTION

In 2014, the Board of Directors of the New Haven Free Public Library approved a new strategic plan that set ambitious goals and outlined four key focus areas—cultural connections, economic engagement, lifelong learning, and young minds—that cemented the library’s position as a center of education, empowerment, and exploration. Looking beyond the traditional role of public libraries, this plan re-imagined the ways we could unleash our potential to inspire the community, transform the city, and improve the lives of New Haven residents.

Recognizing the need to develop a new way of thinking for an increasingly complex, interconnected, and fast-paced future, the New Haven Free Public Library began a new planning process in 2017. The final result is this **Strategic Framework**: a flexible, adaptable, and innovative approach to connecting the library with the New Haven community.

The Strategic Framework is informed by the discoveries made while conducting a Community Needs Assessment and during a comprehensive eight-month planning process. The Framework affirms and amplifies the New Haven Free Public Library’s updated mission, vision and core values and identifies seven strategic initiatives that will advance our collective aspirations.

Entitled ***Growing Together. One City. One Future.***, the New Haven Free Public Library’s new Strategic Framework represents an evolution of the library’s role as a cornerstone of our community. Working together—staff, board, partners, and patrons—we will use this Framework as the blueprint for building a dynamic, creative, inclusive, and enlightened library system for years to come.

— *Board of Directors, City Librarian, and staff of the New Haven Free Public Library*



Ives Main Library, a landmark of the historic New Haven Green.

VISION

Now and tomorrow, the New Haven Free Public Library will transform lives and contribute to creating a strong, resilient, and informed community where everyone can thrive.

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.

VALUES

1 ADVANCE LITERACY

Ensure that our community has access to materials, services and training to accelerate literacy, and to promote the joy of reading across generations.

2 FOSTER LEARNING AND ACHIEVEMENT

Teach skills for all customers that are crucial in the 21st century, help to close the digital divide, bridge educational gaps, and navigate the complexities of daily life.

3 PROVIDE ACCESS TO KNOWLEDGE

Curate collections and resources that will allow our customers to gain access to knowledge whenever and wherever they need it.

4 EMPOWER ECONOMIC SUCCESS

Provide access to services, training, resources, and networks that foster economic success for individuals pursuing jobs, career growth, or exploring business development and entrepreneurship.

5 INSPIRE EXPLORATION

Create experiences, present new technology, and build collections that inspire our customers while promoting learning through social connection and cultural enrichment.

6 PROMOTE CONNECTION AND COLLABORATION

Be a catalyst to connect people to people and provide programs, space, and resources to foster creative collaboration across a wide variety of purposes.

7 DELIVER WORLD-CLASS SERVICE

Deliver responsive and effective service through welcoming, knowledgeable, and caring library staff resulting in customer trust, confidence, and satisfaction.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

The New Haven Free Public Library partnered with **Innovation Builders**, a firm experienced in working with Fortune 500 companies and public institutions to foster innovation and collaboration, to design an eight-month process that developed staff leadership skills, engaged the community, and imagined the library's transformation. **The result is this new Strategic Framework.**

Planning began in June 2017 with Innovation Builders' **EXCITE Transformation for Libraries Bootcamp**, an intensive team-based experience that taught library staff across all branch locations the foundational skills to think critically and creatively about how the library serves the community. Staff mastered the language, process, and tools for effective, authentic collaboration and learned how to uncover the community's aspirations and motivations; generate and experiment with new ideas; and use storytelling to build engagement and foster connections.

Innovation Builders worked with the library's EXCITE Core Team to analyze case studies, national trends, and best practices; participate in a **Knowledge Framing Session** to discover new insights and gain a deeper understanding of the library's diverse audience; and create a **Knowledge Plan** outlining what the team hoped to learn from the Community Needs Assessment.

Informed by the Knowledge Plan and tailored to the different motivations and aspirations of library users based on what drives their individual life priorities, Innovation Builders conducted a **Community-Driven Needs Assessment** co-facilitated by library staff. The teams gathered information through exploratory discussions with diverse groups (*Community Collaboratives*), in-depth dialogues with targeted stakeholders and partners (*Conversation Pods*), and online surveys examining community impressions and library usage. Innovation Builders and library staff strived for an inclusive assessment reflective of New Haven's diversity in culture, ethnicity, education level, demographics, and socio-economic background.

Together, this data identified motivations of our community members through group collaborations, in-depth interviews, and by plotting individual priorities on a **Life Map**. Using this insight, the Strategic Framework provides a method to develop resources, programs, and services responsive to our users' needs and initiatives to help reach their goals.

The Strategic Framework draws on the wealth of information uncovered during the Community Needs Assessment to develop innovative and creative solutions to help our users achieve their aspirations. This

Framework both reaffirms the library's essential place in New Haven and re-imagines how we can harness our collection, resources and services to build lasting connections with our community.

OUR GOALS

Developing the Strategic Framework achieved the following goals:

1. Provide community-centric guidance to the library today and in the future
2. Foster ongoing conversation and collaboration among staff and with the larger community
3. Create an ongoing culture of innovation for the New Haven Free Public Library and its users

CORE THEMES

These core themes recurred throughout our conversations with the community:

1. Appetite for information, knowledge, and personalized service
2. Interest in connecting with others and with the community
3. Desire to give back
4. Need for mentorship and collaboration
5. Curiosity about new, interactive ways to learn
6. Importance of developing life skills



Library staff working together during the EXCITE Bootcamp.



GROWING TOGETHER

**ONE CITY.
ONE FUTURE.**

“Engagement of the New Haven [Free Public] Library with entrepreneurs, artists, and creative minds is key to our community development.”

– User feedback from Ives Innovation Commons Community Survey (2016)

THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK



- **HOW**
 Infrastructure
- **WHAT**
 Seven Strategic Initiatives
- **WHY**
 NHFPL Values
- **WHO**
 Community Motivations

The **Strategic Framework**, developed collaboratively by the EXCITE Core Team, was constructed after taking a deeper dive into understanding community needs and aspirations. Our Seven Strategic Initiatives emerged at the intersection of community needs and the library’s values— what we stand for and where we can make a difference in your life.

This Framework offers the organizing principles and sets a bold direction for the future of the New Haven Free Public Library. It is rooted in our community’s aspirations (the “Who”) while reflecting and honoring our values (the “Why”). It provides the library with the agility to implement the seven strategic initiatives (the “What”) and explains “How” to achieve our goals through annual operational plans and ongoing assessment.

WHO: THE CORE

Understanding Community Needs and Motivations

To gain a deeper understanding of how our users interact with our collection and resources, we looked beyond the traditional “life phases” model that separates groups by age: children, youth, adults. Instead, we studied the reasons why different users come to the library—the motivation behind their engagement—and learned what they hoped to get out of their library experience. These “motivational segments” span diverse age groups, income levels, education and cultural background and answer these fundamental questions:

- Why am I going to the library?
- What do I want to gain from my experience at the library?
- What information, resources, and services do I need to thrive?

MOTIVATIONAL SEGMENTS: OUR COMMUNITY’S DRIVERS



Understanding each motivational segment gives us deeper insight into how people use our services, and what they expect to learn or acquire at the library. Specific programs or collections offerings will still target different ages and populations, but the overall Strategic Framework focuses on understanding the motivations of our users and providing the best tools to meet their needs.

This deep dive into the needs and input of our partners and community allowed us to learn more about their lives, about what is important to them and what they need to achieve their goals. This new understanding of our users—the “who” we serve—is at the heart of our Framework and the core of the Lens; it is the foundation of our ongoing strategy.



WHY: OUR VALUES

The Focus of Our Impact

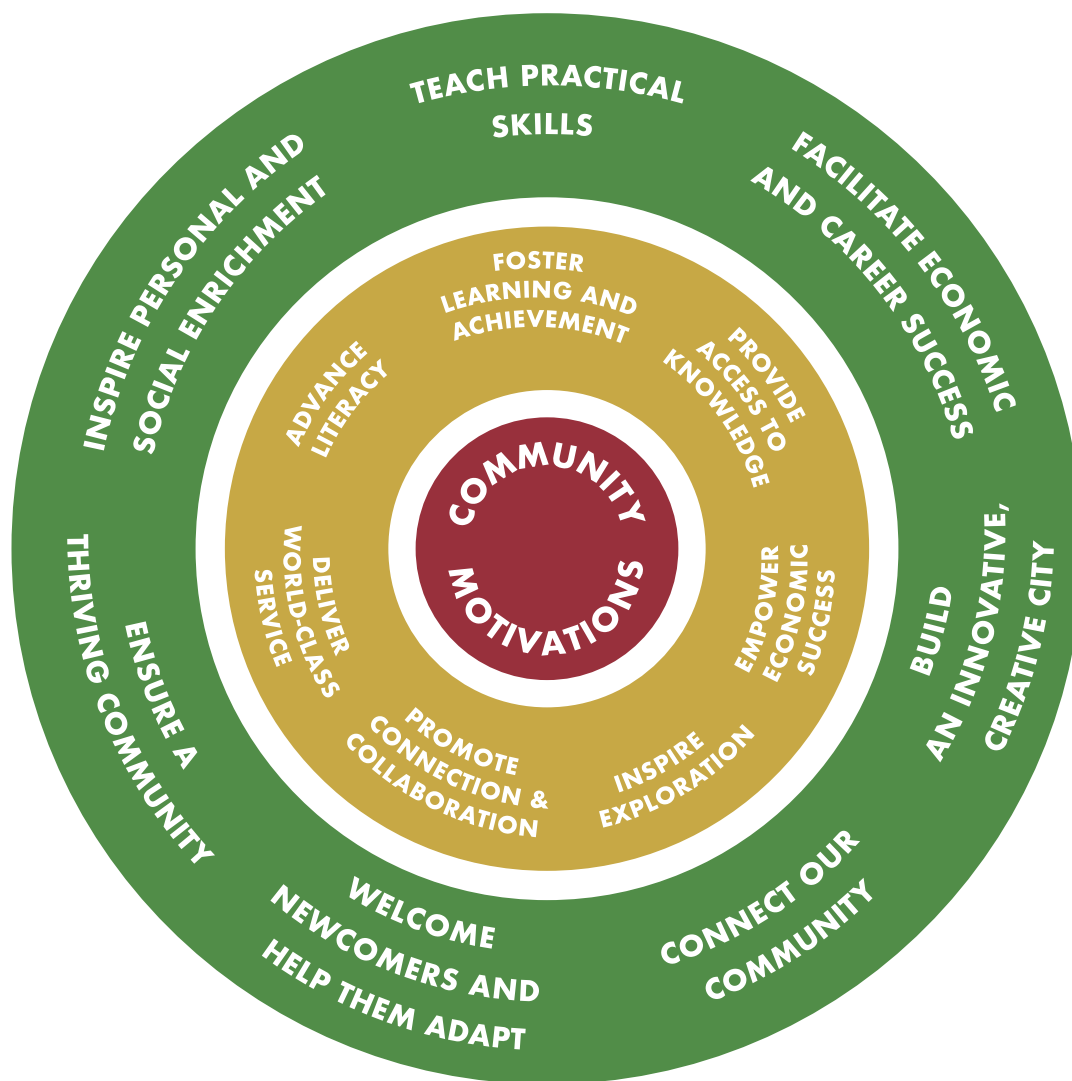
Our values reflect the core of what we stand for and the role of the New Haven Free Public Library in the community. Our values guide us in choosing which community needs to address and how to approach the implementation of our Seven Strategic Initiatives. The intersection of community needs (the “Who”) and our values (the “Why”) allows us to focus on strategic initiatives (the “What”) that are important to our community and tackle those needs and challenges where we can contribute most effectively. This in turn guides the infrastructure we need to build (the “How”).



WHAT: SEVEN STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Responding to Community Aspirations

This new understanding of our users and their motivations to connect with the library led to the development of Seven Strategic Initiatives that respond to the community’s functional and emotional needs. These Strategic Initiatives leverage the New Haven Free Public Library’s unique assets and remain consistent with our core values. They represent the “What” of the Framework.



● **WHAT**

Seven Strategic Initiatives

● **WHY**

NHFPL Values

● **WHO**

Community Motivations

These initiatives are intentionally expansive, comprehensive and ambitious: they require innovative new solutions, a culture of collaboration and curiosity, and a strong system-wide infrastructure to succeed. Adopting each initiative will challenge us to think about how our collections, resources, programs, services and partnerships are working to meet the needs of individual library users and the larger New Haven community.

SEVEN STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

- 1. Teach Practical Skills**
- 2. Facilitate Economic and Career Success**
- 3. Build an Innovative, Creative City**
- 4. Connect our Community**
- 5. Welcome Newcomers and Help Them Adapt**
- 6. Ensure a Thriving Community**
- 7. Inspire Personal and Social Enrichment**

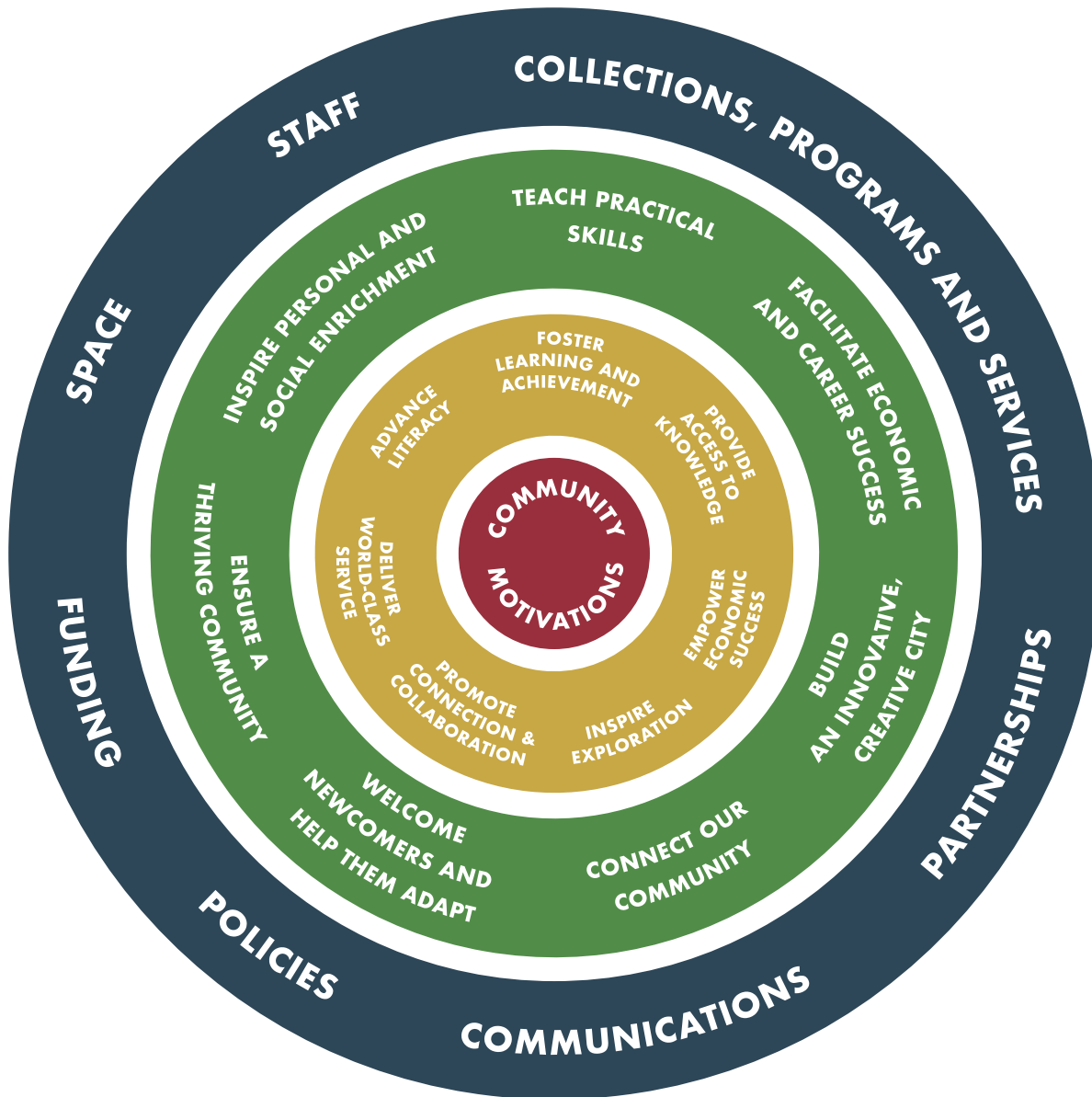
For a detailed explanation of each strategic initiative, see page 19.

HOW: OUR INFRASTRUCTURE

Resources to Achieve Our Objectives

In order to deliver on our strategic initiatives and play a vital role in helping our community achieve its aspirations, the New Haven Free Public Library requires a strong, reliable infrastructure of interconnected services and solutions. Our infrastructure provides the foundation of our work; it grounds our services and deploys them effectively and creatively to meet the evolving needs of our customers. A strong and supported infrastructure is essential to the library's ability to achieve these objectives.

Enhancements to infrastructure will help eliminate the barriers to usage discovered during the Community Needs Assessment and will help us achieve the goals outlined in the Strategic Framework. The infrastructure must serve today's needs while focusing on the future—anticipating and advancing the skills, services, equipment, and technology responsive to an evolving, shifting 21st-century landscape.



● **HOW**

Infrastructure

● **WHAT**

Seven Strategic Initiatives

● **WHY**

NHFPL Values

● **WHO**

Community Motivations

NHFPL INFRASTRUCTURE

1. **Space** that is adaptable to accommodate quiet reflection or active collaboration, invites and encourages exploration and experimentation, and remains safe and accessible for all
2. **Staff** who are trained to understand community needs and motivations, deliver exceptional customer service, and promote a welcoming, encouraging environment
3. **Collections, Programs, and Services** that meet the needs of our customers and enrich, inspire, and delight them
4. **Partnerships** with groups and organizations that help the library deliver programs and services grounded in our community's needs
5. **Communications** that create awareness and build engagement while encouraging people to visit the library to learn, connect, and be inspired
6. **Policies** that make it easier for our customers to access all our offerings and create the best possible experience
7. **Funding** and grassroots advocacy to enhance resources and enable the library to deliver its Seven Strategic Initiatives

For a more information on library infrastructure, see page 27.



The Readmobile during the International Festival of Arts & Ideas.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK IN ACTION

Think of the **Strategic Framework** as the New Haven Free Public Library’s “guiding force” over the next five years and beyond—a tool for understanding our users’ needs and aspirations, aligning library programs, resources, services, and infrastructure to community goals, and linking the library’s values to the impact of our work.

Staff, leadership and board members will use this Framework to magnify the library’s crucial role in transforming our city. When used collectively, the Strategic Framework, Staff Handbook and annual operations plans will ensure successful and effective implementation of the Seven Strategic Initiatives and build a roadmap to enhance library infrastructure to serve an evolving, growing community.

The **Strategic Framework Staff Handbook** provides a deeper understanding of user data and explores, in detail, current and future operations that align with each of the Seven Strategic Initiatives. The Handbook empowers staff to create annual operational plans and objectives that reflect the library’s values and begin to tackle the needs identified in our assessment. A planning template assists with developing new programs and services responsive to the Framework and provides a scoring tool to improve and assess current and future activities.

Leadership, managers and staff will work collaboratively to develop **Annual Operational Plans**. These plans contain specific goals, methods and metrics for evaluating success. Operational Plans are focused on turning strategy into action—making real progress toward satisfying user needs and helping our residents improve their lives. Key to long-term success is coordinating specific programs between locations and across departments to provide a holistic experience for library users.

Staff steering committees will revisit the Strategic Framework every six months, tracking progress toward objectives, evaluating impact, analyzing challenges, and celebrating successes.



SEVEN STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

- 1. TEACH PRACTICAL SKILLS**
- 2. FACILITATE ECONOMIC AND CAREER SUCCESS**
- 3. BUILD AN INNOVATIVE, CREATIVE CITY**
- 4. CONNECT OUR COMMUNITY**
- 5. WELCOME NEWCOMERS AND HELP THEM ADAPT**
- 6. ENSURE A THRIVING COMMUNITY**
- 7. INSPIRE PERSONAL AND SOCIAL ENRICHMENT**

TEACH PRACTICAL SKILLS



Staff work with users to learn new technology.

Our community wants help developing the practical core skills necessary to advance and achieve their life goals. The focus of this strategy is providing essential information, tools and experiences to enhance career prospects; bridging gaps in education; improving school performance; building multiple literacies; and creating a 21st century-ready community.

“Life Skills” are crucial to learn but are not often formally taught. Users of all ages—from teens to adults—and across different segments express a deep need for learning how to cope with difficult situations or significant life transitions, manage personal finances and budgeting, use wellness and nutrition information to lead a healthier life, and receive helpful guidance and advice about parenting.

Access to this knowledge empowers our learners, increases confidence, provides a sense of self-worth and satisfaction with life, and creates a stronger connection to the community. **In order to meet our users’ ever-evolving needs, the New Haven Free Public Library will:**

- Launch a series of immersive and interactive lessons to teach core life skills that leverage partnerships with local social service organizations and community groups for a richer, more comprehensive experience
- Adapt our spaces and teaching methods to provide 21st century learning experiences: immersive, hands-on, interactive learning; one-on-one coaching from experts; group learning and mentorship
- Offer new intermediate and advanced technology classes and provide access to cutting-edge tools and equipment in the Ives Squared innovation space
- Explore and expand opportunities to promote a foundational understanding of core skills, especially in computer and technology use
- Expand classes in multiple literacies
- Add more interactive and all-family learning opportunities to develop real-world skills and strengthen family bonds
- Continue to create partnerships that improve our impact on skill development

FACILITATE ECONOMIC AND CAREER SUCCESS

New Haven was recently named one of Connecticut's Innovation Places, enhancing our city's reputation as a hub for innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic growth. The New Haven Free Public Library is a crucial asset that serves as an entry point to the innovation ecosystem and provides community-wide access to resources, knowledge, skills, space, and collaboration.

Today, New Haven workers pursue diverse paths to economic success. The library will continue to offer services tailored to individual needs and provide the support and encouragement to give our users confidence to reach their goals.



Entrepreneur pitch night at Ives.

Key to this strategy is continuing our instruction in job search and computer skills, financial literacy, career planning, and best practices for running a small business. New initiatives include resources for individuals looking to forge new careers; information on how to start and register a business; workshops to develop legal, marketing, and financial know-how; and help establishing patents and copyrights. **The library will prepare our users to succeed in the workplace of the future:**

- Create more flexible and variable spaces for different work styles: areas for quiet focus, spontaneous meetings, interactive collaborations and co-working
- Build a network of mentors and role models to “match” with entrepreneurs and emerging leaders
- Host networking events, job fairs, meet-ups, funding forums, pitch nights, and entrepreneurial exchanges
- Provide opportunities for networking, knowledge-sharing, and idea exchange
- Offer workshops on effective job searching, starting a business, marketing and social media use, and encouraging collaboration and innovation
- Promote a collaborative community by harnessing the strength of our diverse user groups across New Haven's innovation ecosystem
- Continue developing productive partnerships with relevant organizations and industry leaders to provide ongoing services, training, and resources

BUILD AN INNOVATIVE, CREATIVE CITY



*Musician performing at the Fair Haven Library
100th anniversary celebration.*

New Haven is undoubtedly Connecticut’s “Creative Capital.” The National Endowment of the Arts estimates that creative industries employ more than 5,600 people—7.3% of the workforce—at more than 400 different firms. Our artists and creative entrepreneurs look for opportunities to collaborate with people across the community. These “Creative Experimenters” prefer to learn while doing, enjoy exploring new ideas and trends, and use new technologies to create.

The New Haven Free Public Library endeavors to inspire and support this growing population of innovators by providing access to cutting-edge technology, offering hands-on experiences and immersive workshops, and stimulating communal learning and creative engagement.

Creativity, innovation and collaboration are at the core of current and future programming at the New Haven Free Public Library:

- Pilot a creatives-in-residence program supplemented by workshops from partner organizations and industry experts to provide the training and tools for experimentation
- Support “Creative Experimenters” with ongoing programming for adults and young minds
- Host classes and hands-on workshops at the Ives Squared Tinker Lab
- Provide access to emerging tools and equipment at the Ives Squared.
- Serve as a hub for community engagement by hosting events such as open-mic nights, speaker series and art exhibits in the Café at Ives Squared
- Create series of artist workshops, design challenges, coding clubs and software instruction for young minds and adults
- Leverage the library’s mentorship program for guidance, co-creating, and peer-to-peer skills transfer

CONNECT OUR COMMUNITY

New Haven is a diverse city: according to Data Haven, 16% of the population is foreign-born and 70% are non-white. In our assessment and planning process, we discovered a clear desire for building cultural awareness and fostering a feeling of connectedness. Increasingly, the community turns to the library to help create a sense of unity in New Haven by expanding our trusted role as a public space open to all.

Our users expressed an interest in showcasing the city’s rich cultural diversity by celebrating the range of histories, traditions, and customs that make New Haven unique. Parents want the opportunity to explore diversity with their families and give their children the tools to operate successfully in an increasingly diverse world. Community members have a powerful desire to engage with neighbors, both within and outside their ethnic and cultural groups, to develop mutual understanding and respect.



Community Gardening at Mitchell Library.

New Haven is a city of people who want to make a difference. Everyone—from families to retirees to individuals who are struggling—conveyed a strong desire to give back to those in need and help make their communities a better place. **As a cornerstone of the community, the New Haven Free Public Library is well-positioned to help promote cross-cultural understanding:**

- Provide experiences for individuals to socialize and learn alongside others with whom they do not usually interact
- Capitalize on long-standing relationships with community service and cultural organizations around the city to share knowledge and build understanding
- Create a service-matching program to connect individuals to meaningful volunteer, mentorship, and tutoring opportunities that reflect their skills and interests
- Grow our role as host for celebrations of cultural holidays and traditions and invite the community to lead showcases and events that involve multicultural sharing of music, dance, food, traditions, literature, and film
- Expand multicultural arts programming and ongoing partnerships with arts nonprofits to identify new ways for our community to use the arts to express differences, facilitate understanding, find common ground, and build mutual respect

WELCOME NEWCOMERS AND HELP THEM ADAPT



Preschoolers with their books at the Readmobile.

Our city often serves as the doorway to Connecticut, and nearly one-third of the region’s immigrants reside in New Haven. Both newcomers to the city and recent immigrants are growing; very often, these groups suffer from a lack of basic resources and few social and family connections. Immigrants may also feel stereotyped, ignored, and powerless. Both groups feel isolated and displaced and want to adapt, build confidence, and find their place in the community.

For immigrants and newcomers, learning was at the top of their list of needs. Newcomers need to orient themselves, learn about the community, and understand how our city functions. Immigrants may have additional needs—building English language proficiency or developing computer skills, for example. Immigrants want to remain connected to their traditions and establish ties to others from their root culture for support and advice. **We will strive to introduce these new arrivals to their new home:**

- Expand current ESL, literacy and skill-building programs by adding all-family, interactive, and real-world situational learning opportunities
- Deepen our partnerships with community organizations like IRIS and JUNTA to build a network of newcomers that remain connected to library programs and services
- Design a “Welcome Platform” of integrated programs and services that educate, acculturate, and build lasting community connections
- Recruit mentors to help others with establishing their lives and meaningful connections in a new community
- Implement bilingual outreach and marketing for library programs and offer multi-language services, including on-site translation of government documents, school assignments, and job applications
- Grow our collection to include more materials on citizenship, ESL instruction, multi-language and original language books, movies, ebooks and audio books
- Host ongoing community-led social discussion groups to connect newcomers to each other and introduce immigrants to others from their root culture

ENSURE A THRIVING COMMUNITY

New Haven's most vulnerable populations are struggling with basic well-being: 45% of New Haven County households earn less than what they need to pay for food, housing, transportation, childcare, healthcare, and other necessary expenses; 25% percent of children in New Haven are born to mothers who did not receive adequate prenatal care and 20% face a social-emotional or behavioral challenge; 61% of children do not achieve reading proficiency by the end of third grade.

We serve many individuals and families who deal with mental and physical health issues, isolation, and lack of safety and independence. The library is a safe refuge and source of information, knowledge, community, and learning.

These challenges often result in higher levels of anxiety, depression, feelings of disconnection, and mental health crises. Engulfed by concerns about safety and security in school, in neighborhoods, and at home, these individuals need outlets to transcend their difficult circumstances and assistance to help contribute to our community.

Some of the library's most frequent users are New Haven's most vulnerable residents.

The New Haven Free Public Library aims to support and encourage these users:

- Provide a safe haven to learn, read, and find peace of mind
- Develop programs and referral services with partner agencies and help users understand how to access available social services
- Deliver information, resources and skills instruction while serving as a sounding board for support
- Organize a cohort of mentors from the community who have successfully navigated significant challenges to provide encouragement, give guidance, and act as role models
- Build a network of individuals and families to come together to share knowledge, socialize and discuss life challenges, and provide individual and formal support group counseling when desired



Top: summer reading program at Wilson Library.



Bottom: book club at Stetson Library.

INSPIRE PERSONAL AND SOCIAL ENRICHMENT



S.P.O.R.T. Academy Chess Club at Stetson Library.

Our community has a long-held tradition of looking to the library to learn new things and provide intellectually enriching experiences. Those searching for personal and social enrichment include individuals and families—most notably empty nesters, retirees, and families with young children—who want to have fun, get inspired, and be enlightened.

Enrichment learning is driven by a desire to satisfy curiosity, develop new interests, and seek intellectual stimulation. These users are the library's most frequent visitors and borrowers, enthusiastic readers and avid consumers of books, movies, and other materials. They expect easy and fast transactions and access to a wide range of up-to-date resources.

This group enjoys attending library lectures and discussions, after-school programs, author talks, film screenings, arts events, and technology workshops. They attend primarily to satisfy their own thirst for knowledge, yet are also eager to meet others with similar interests. With the rise of digital experiences, users increasingly appreciate more interactive opportunities to learn in-person. The library serves as a trusted source for people to come together to share similar hobbies—such as the Chess Club or Teen Games Club—or to learn more about a common cause or civic issue of importance to the community. **The New Haven Free Public Library must:**

- Understand user interests and needs to build a compelling collection
- Supplement our programs with resources to create a multi-dimensional experience
- Pair our collections with community engagement events, such as book and film discussion series, on topical issues
- Create ways for parents, grandparents and caregivers to come to the library with children to learn and explore together
- Adapt our space to host meetings, launch new affinity clubs, and encourage gatherings to share mutual hobbies, interests and passions
- Explore opportunities to lead excursions outside the library by partnering with other civic and cultural institutions to learn about New Haven's history, neighborhoods and public places



NHFPL INFRASTRUCTURE

SPACE

STAFF

COLLECTIONS, PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

PARTNERSHIPS

COMMUNICATIONS

POLICIES

FUNDING

SPACE

The New Haven Free Public Library remains one of the few community resources that is truly open and available to everyone. Our space must accommodate the many reasons that our customers come to the library—while remaining comfortable, flexible, safe and relaxing. We will continue to review and enforce our policies to ensure the safety and accessibility for all and work to maintain high standards for cleanliness in all our locations.

The 21st Century is bringing new ways of learning and collaboration that require libraries to adapt for multiple purposes; we will design adaptable, multi-use areas while protecting spaces for quiet contemplation, work and study. Along with an increase in the variety of spaces, we recognize the value of making food available to refuel or encourage conversation—the launch of the café at Ives inspires us to explore how food can become integral to the library experience at all our locations.



Children on tablets in the Young Minds and Family Learning Center.

STAFF

We will continue to train staff to offer a high level of service to all library users by providing a welcoming, open environment; being accessible and approachable; addressing their specific needs in an effective and knowledgeable way; and offering an encouraging and respectful relationship. We aim to increase interactions between staff and library users as we know that the more people interact with our staff, the more positive their experience.

We will continue to provide our staff with opportunities to improve leadership skills and enhanced training in how to listen closely to our customers and understand their needs and motivations with the ability to translate them into engaging programs and useful services. Staff will



New Haven Free Public Library staff.

understand new, interactive ways to teach skills, develop initiatives in partnership with community organizations and neighborhood groups, and learn how to measure the impact of programs to improve our services through user feedback.

COLLECTIONS, PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Borrowing books, movies, music, and other resources is still the main activity through which our users engage with the library. It is becoming more important to “merchandise” collections with compelling displays and easy-to-locate resources that improve our users’ ability to browse and select relevant materials. The library can draw inspiration from retail environments, group collections materials by theme and subject areas and curate related resources to encourage exploration.

When expanding our collection, staff will draw on user needs and interests to guide investments in new media and materials. Collections need to be matched with core programs outlined in the Strategic Framework and support ongoing community partnerships and expanded learning opportunities. For example, more foreign language books and citizenship-related resources would better serve the city’s growing population of newcomers. Providing continually updated, interactive resources and tools will enhance the library’s role in empowering the community with 21st-century skills.

Users are increasingly interested in opportunities to learn from each other: our assessment identified a desire for mentors, role models, collaboration and one-on-one coaching to share information and ideas. The library’s traditional collection must evolve to include community-



Users look through solar eclipse glasses at Mitchell Library.



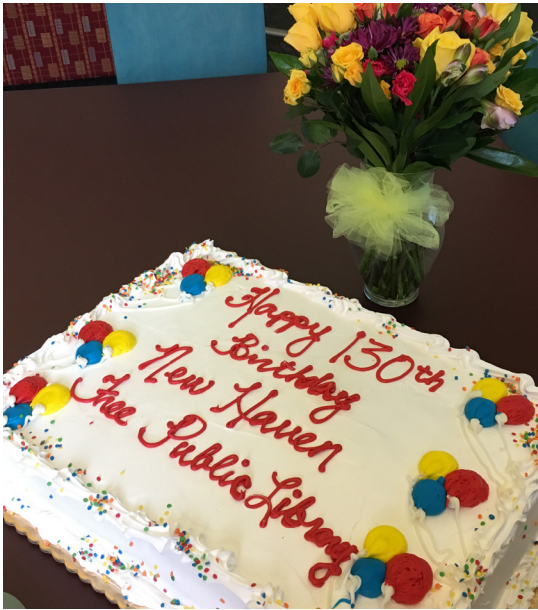
Children playing together at Ives Main Library.

based experts, artists, and activists who are willing to share, teach, and collaborate. Partnerships with community organizations will increase the library's ability to offer programs and better connect our users with resources available across New Haven. To better serve our community, staff will identify new programs and services that deepen engagement with the collection, provide diverse opportunities to learn in different ways, and achieve our strategic goals.

PARTNERSHIPS

Our partnerships take many forms, from deeply rooted and co-created collaborations to those that offer a vital resources and crucial services to the community. Partnerships with arts and cultural organizations, educational institutions, social service agencies, the business community, and neighborhood groups dramatically expand the library's reach and create opportunities to serve a diverse range of needs. Leveraging partnerships with key organizations will also help make resources available and accessible to everyone.

Cementing our role as a cornerstone of the New Haven community, the library will act as a "hub" to connect our users to the services and information they need with partner agencies and organizations that can provide assistance. We will deepen our ties to academic institutions that have resources including technology, students, and faculty who have valuable skills they are interested in sharing; develop partnerships with non-profit and for-profit entities that provide learning, cultural exploration, and personal enrichment; and work with social services to help our new arrivals and most vulnerable users thrive and succeed.



New Haven Free Public Library celebrates its 130th Birthday.



"Story Slam" in partnership with Long Wharf Theatre.

COMMUNICATIONS

Our Community Needs Assessment highlights the different ways our users access information about library services and programs: through the website or social media, monthly e-mail newsletters, in-person library visits and word of mouth. Although users indicate a mostly positive experience accessing the website or receiving e-communications, the library continues to look for ways to improve the online experience to increase engagement. Listening to users is a top priority and staff will work to design more effective, ongoing strategies to dialogue with library cardholders.

Lack of awareness about programs, resources and services remains a barrier to participation. The library will seek to strengthen communications through targeted outreach, marketing campaigns and focused, interest-driven emails. Front line staff will increase communications about upcoming events in daily interactions with customers, and a new focus on multi-lingual communications will enhance the library's ability to serve non-English speaking users.

CUSTOMER-CENTRIC POLICIES

Our users overwhelmingly list “limited hours of operation” as the number-one barrier for using the library. We need to work toward more consistent hours across all locations and extended evening and weekend hours to better serve our visitors. Regular review of our policies will ensure a safe and accessible environment for everyone, minimizing any disruptive impact on our customers while continuing to serve the most vulnerable members of our community.



Learning together at Stetson Library.



Knitting group meets at the library.

Understanding modern expectations of customer service, we will examine our policies, procedures, and use of technology to streamline transactions for searching, accessing, and borrowing resources from our collection. We will continue to put the needs of our users and customers first to make it easier for everyone in New Haven to use the library.

FUNDING

Funding is a crucial resource that will strengthen the library's infrastructure and help us tackle our Seven Strategic Initiatives. As a truly public place—open to all regardless of socioeconomic status—the library is a crucial component of the city's Transformation Plan and an important resource in improving education, driving economic activity, and enhancing quality of life. We strive to increase our funding to 1% of the General Fund budget to more closely align with the state-wide average of 1.2%.

Strong relationships and ongoing dialogue with the mayor, board of alders, and our community of users will demonstrate the library's impact; advocacy initiatives will continue to focus on increasing public investment in the library's success.

The New Haven Free Public Library Foundation will continue efforts to generate philanthropic support for key initiatives. Elements of the Strategic Framework will help guide and sharpen our fundraising and inspire donors, advocates and supporters with the vision of what the library can achieve. We need to grow the number of individual donors who take pride in supporting the library's mission and increase the percentage of unrestricted revenue from contributions, grants and the endowment.



The library's annual Mardi Gras fundraising event.



Ives Main Library Children's Room, circa 1934.



Ives Main Library Young Minds and Family Learning Center, 2016.



LEARNING TOGETHER

LISTENING TO OUR COMMUNITY

“Democracy itself is built on faith that people themselves know better than anyone else. Not perfectly—and often with insights provided by experts and others—but ultimately the people themselves know better than anyone else how to make their lives better and, through an iterative process, they will get there.”

- Dennis Whittle, “The Biggest Challenge Is That There’s No Recipe Book or Playbook for Co-Creation”

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN NEEDS ASSESSMENT

PEOPLE INVOLVED	1,048
# Community Members Consulted	1,003
Community Survey (New Haven Residents)	556
Ives Squared (IS) Survey	311
Community Collaboratives	136
Community Partners Consulted	15
# NHFPL Core Staff Engaged	30

DATA POINTS & INSIGHTS	44,802
Total Individual Insights	9,490
Community Collaboratives Participant Answers	5,437
Community Collaboratives Facilitator Insights: Implications, Surprises, Concerns, etc.	1,576
Community Survey Answers	1,523
IS Survey Participant Answers	575
Conversation Pods Insights	376
Additional Data Points	35,312
Community Survey	27,015
Community Collaboratives	6,800
Ives Squared (IS) Survey	1,497

At the end of 2017, the New Haven Free Public Library completed a **Community Needs Assessment** complemented by board, staff and community surveys. An online survey provided information about how current users use the library today and their interest in exploring new ways of experiencing the library in the future. Fresh insights were gained that continue to point to the library as a key provider of crucial learning and skill development to all members in our community. Information discovered during the Community Needs Assessment formed the foundation of the Strategic Framework to ensure new initiatives meet today's needs and help our users achieve success in the future.

Central to our assessment was the **Life Map**: a tool which allowed participants to identify their individual priorities in five "life occasions": *Community Connection, Learning Skills, Social Enrichment, Well-Being, and Work and Career*. Within each life occasion, participants ranked each "1" (most important to you now and



Life Map Tool

where you want help in your life), “2” (is important to you but you are not looking for help), and “x” (not important to you—or not seeking any help) to identify where our community members need support.

Staff worked with Innovation Builders to host “Community Collaboratives” (exploratory discussions with community members) across all branches to gather insights from individuals across various motivational segments. We explored all areas of their lives by and asking questions to build empathy, get at deeper underlying motivations, and understand how the library could help them reach their goals.

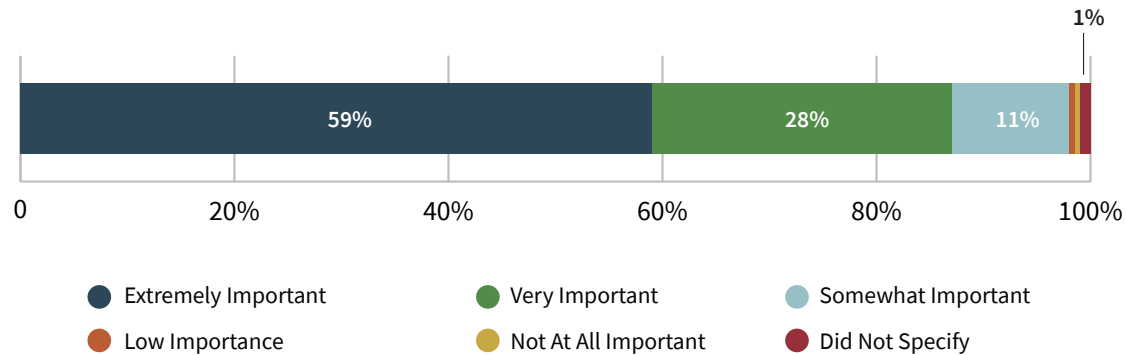
Facilitated conversations with 15 existing and potential community partner organizations examined mutual missions and shared opportunities to gain further insights about certain audiences. Online surveys provided additional feedback from more than 500 library users, staff, and the Boards of Directors of the New Haven Free Public Library and the New Haven Free Public Library Foundation to further inform our findings.

IMPORTANCE OF THE LIBRARY

Overall, respondents overwhelmingly recognized the importance of the New Haven Free Public Library and its service to the community. The Library is regarded as “extremely important” or “very important” by the majority (87%) of patrons—and ratings were strong across all age ranges (from 81% among 18-44 year olds

IMPORTANCE OF THE LIBRARY

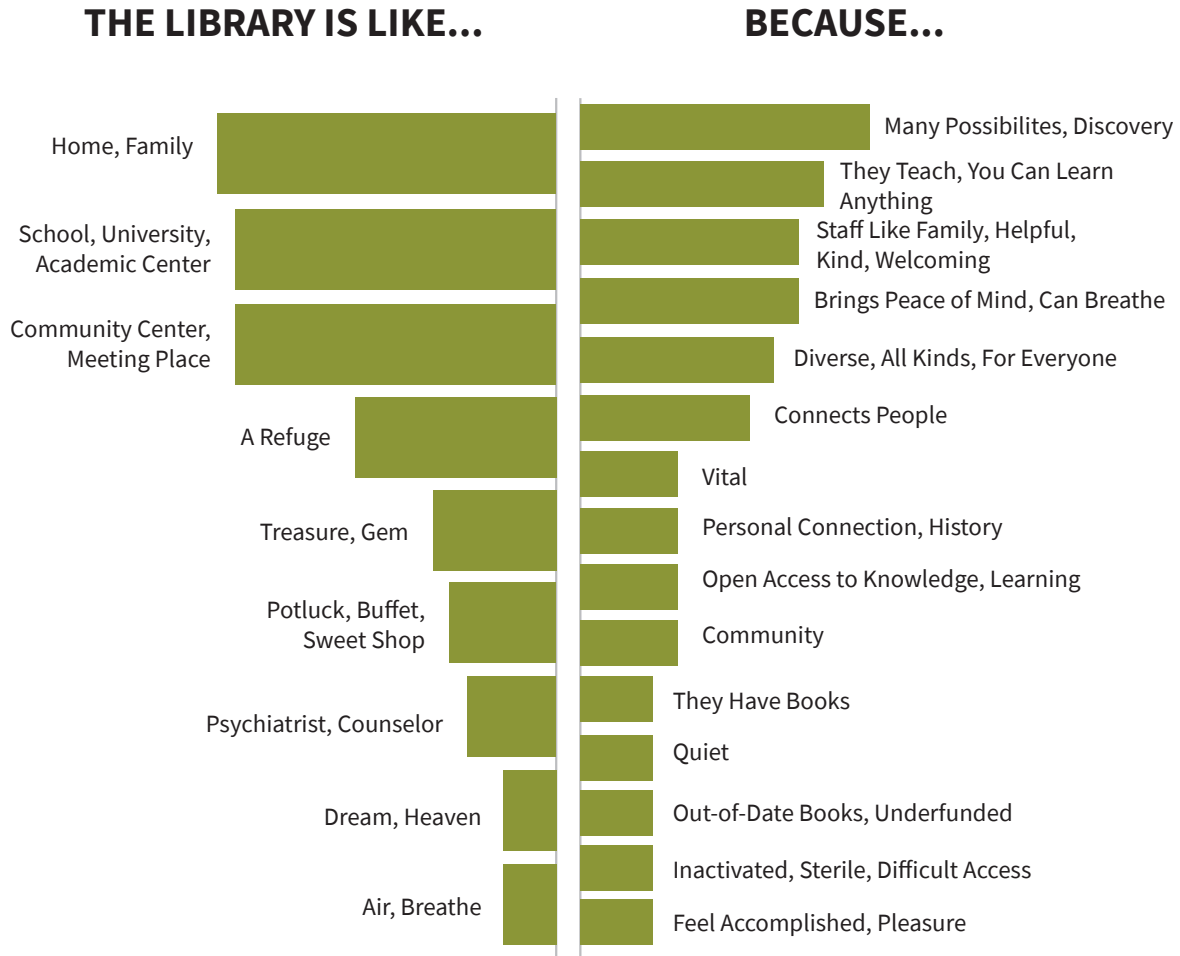
all online survey respondents



to 89% among 36-55 year olds). Importance is especially high among households consisting of “Teens and Older Families” (95% rate the library extremely/very important to them).

Word association exercises asked community members “**the library is like _____ because _____**” to identify the New Haven Free Public Library’s functional and emotional roles in members’ lives. Responses show the library is not only a place to learn and gather, but also a place of comfort and caring.

THE LIBRARY IS LIKE...	BECAUSE...
“The United Nations”	“Of the diversity of cultures”
“A Psychiatrist”	“They listen to all my problems”
“Air”	“It is vital”
“Church for the Community” (or Secular Church)	“It has the potential to bring people together to reflect and share”
“Home”	“Staff and community feel like family”
“A very good but lazy Teacher”	“They can teach you anything you want but you need to take the initiative”
“A Treasure Chest” (said six times!)	“It is filled with valuable resources but it’s hidden and many don’t know of its value”
“A Sweet Shop”	“It has so many goodies”
“My Aunt Anna”	“It is welcoming”
“A Second Home”	“I’ve been coming since I was six”



Bar chart shows the recurrence of certain themes and ideas relative to other responses.

Functionally, many users hold a traditional view of the library: words such as “classes, learning; books, stacks; knowledge, information; movies, periodicals” ranked at the top of the list. Emotionally, however, participants are open to changing these perceptions. Emotional association is extremely positive, and users identified “peaceful, calm; surprises, discovery; meet people, social, connect; enriched” to describe their association with the library.

LIBRARY USAGE

During our comprehensive Community Needs Assessment, we learned how our community uses the library and what additional services, resources, and programs they need to achieve success. In an online survey of current library users, respondents were asked to indicate the importance of these five “occasions” as reasons

How I Use the Library TODAY

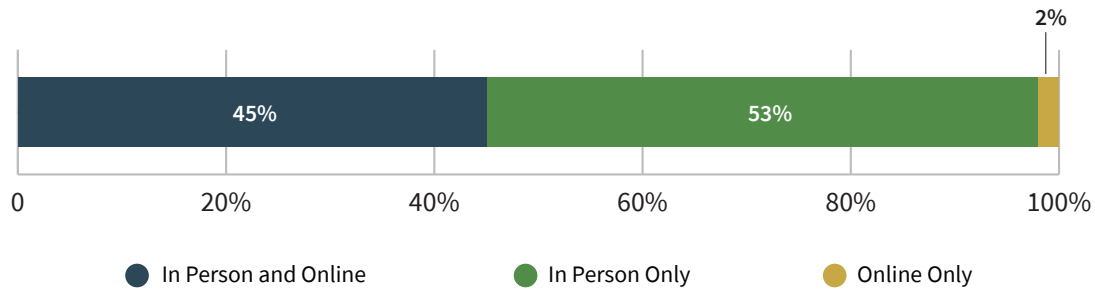
How I WANT to Use the Library



Bar chart shows the importance of each use relative to other responses.

LIBRARY USAGE, IN PERSON VS. ONLINE

all online survey respondents



for using the library and rate the quality of each of the services and resources they use. In the online survey of current users, most respondents reported using the library for **accessing books, film and media (55%)**; **arts, culture and events (36%)**; **personal enrichment learning (33%)**; **knowing the community (26%)**; and **child and teen learning (26%)**.

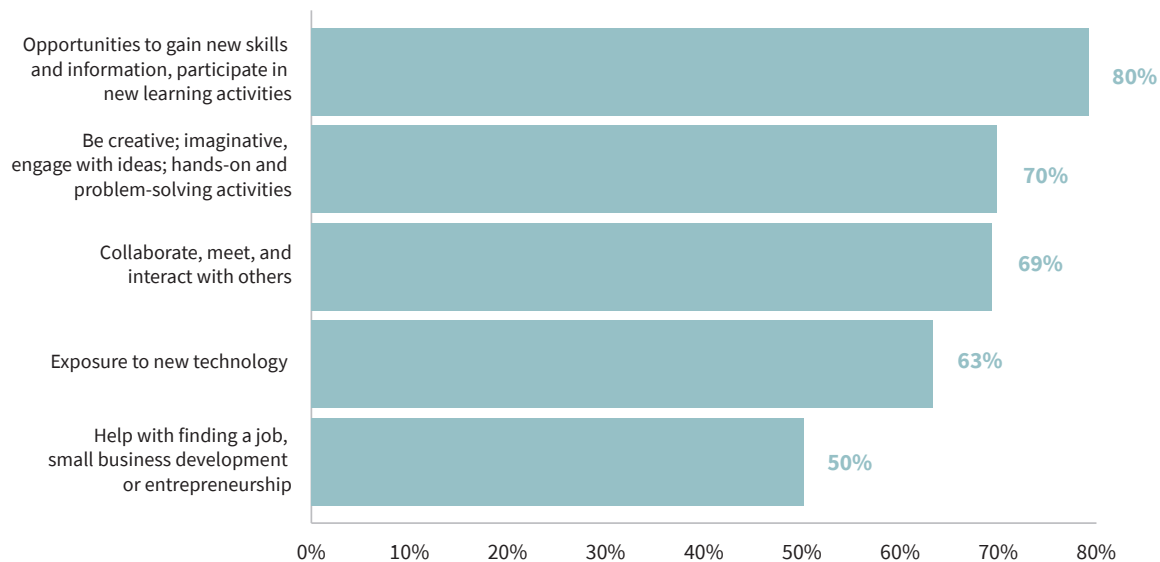
Many library users take advantage of both the in-person services at our library locations and the resources available 24/7 online at *nhfpl.org*. A majority of users still prefer to visit the library in-person only; few users access materials exclusively online.

EVOLVING LIBRARY USAGE

The library conducted an online survey during the planning phases of the new innovation space at Ives Main Library—now titled Ives Squared—which will open in June 2018. When asked about the benefits of an innovation space at the library, respondents overwhelmingly agreed with the findings of our Community Needs Assessment: new learning opportunities and skill development (80%) ranked at the top of the list; users also expressed a desire to collaborate, meet and interact with others (69%).

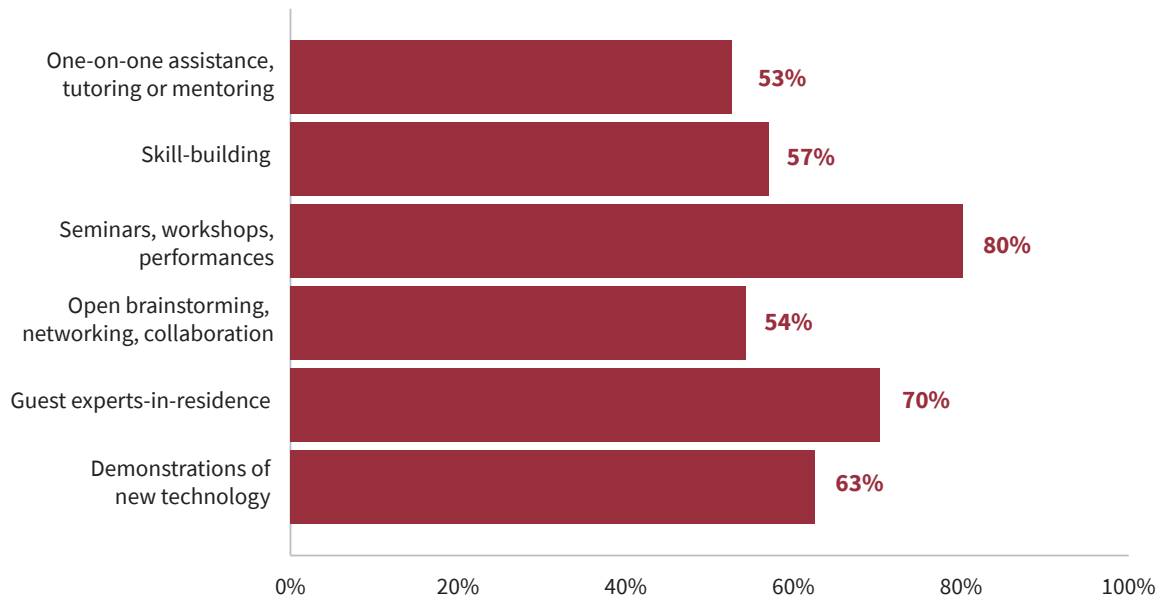
BENEFITS OF AN INNOVATION SPACE AT THE LIBRARY

Ives Innovation Commons community survey, 2016



DESIRED ACTIVITIES AT NEW INNOVATION SPACE

Ives Innovation Commons community survey, 2016

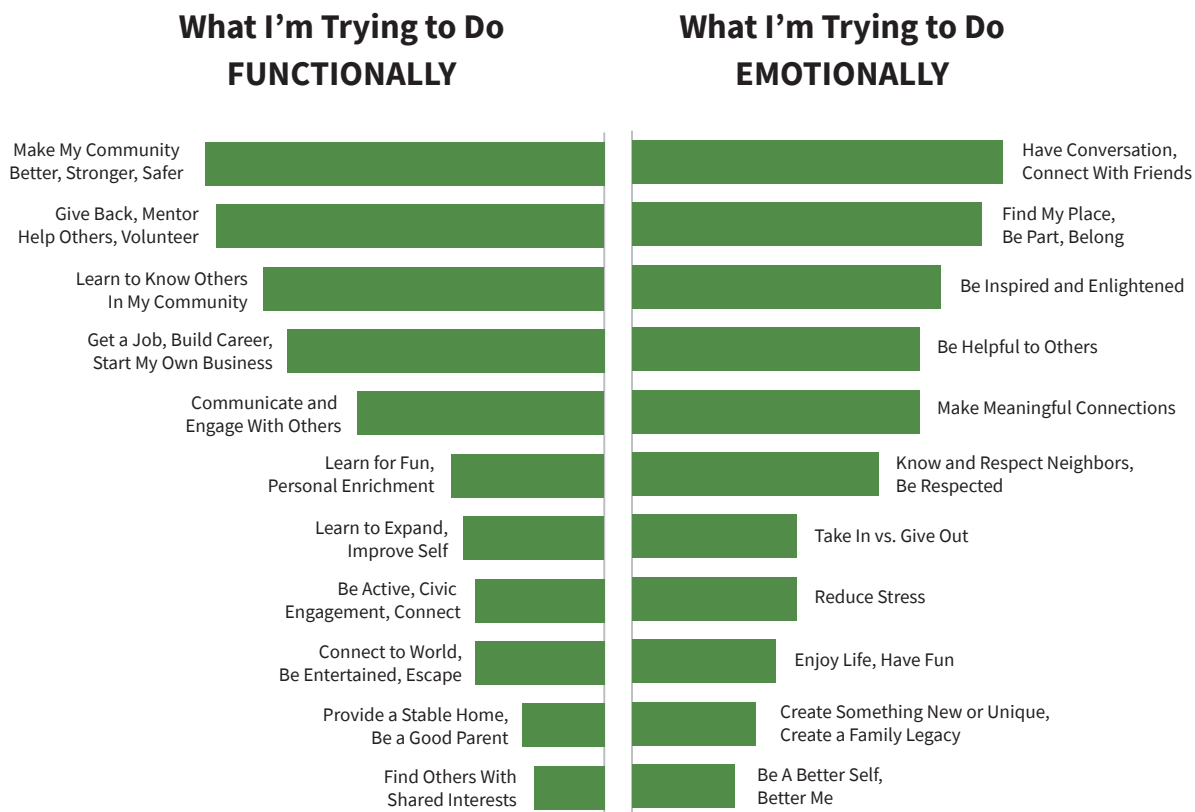


When we challenged users to envision themselves interacting in the space, respondents expressed a preference for attending seminars, workshops and performances (80%) and a desire to collaborate with guest experts-in-residence (70%). Users also recognized the importance of skill-building opportunities, demonstrations of new technology, and one-on-one assistance and mentoring. While the new innovation space will be anchored at Ives, new resources and programming will be leveraged at all locations and across the library system.

USER NEEDS

Conversations with the community demonstrated both **functional** and **emotional** needs that the library can serve: functional needs describe “what” community members are looking to do and emotional needs describe the “feelings” these members want to experience.

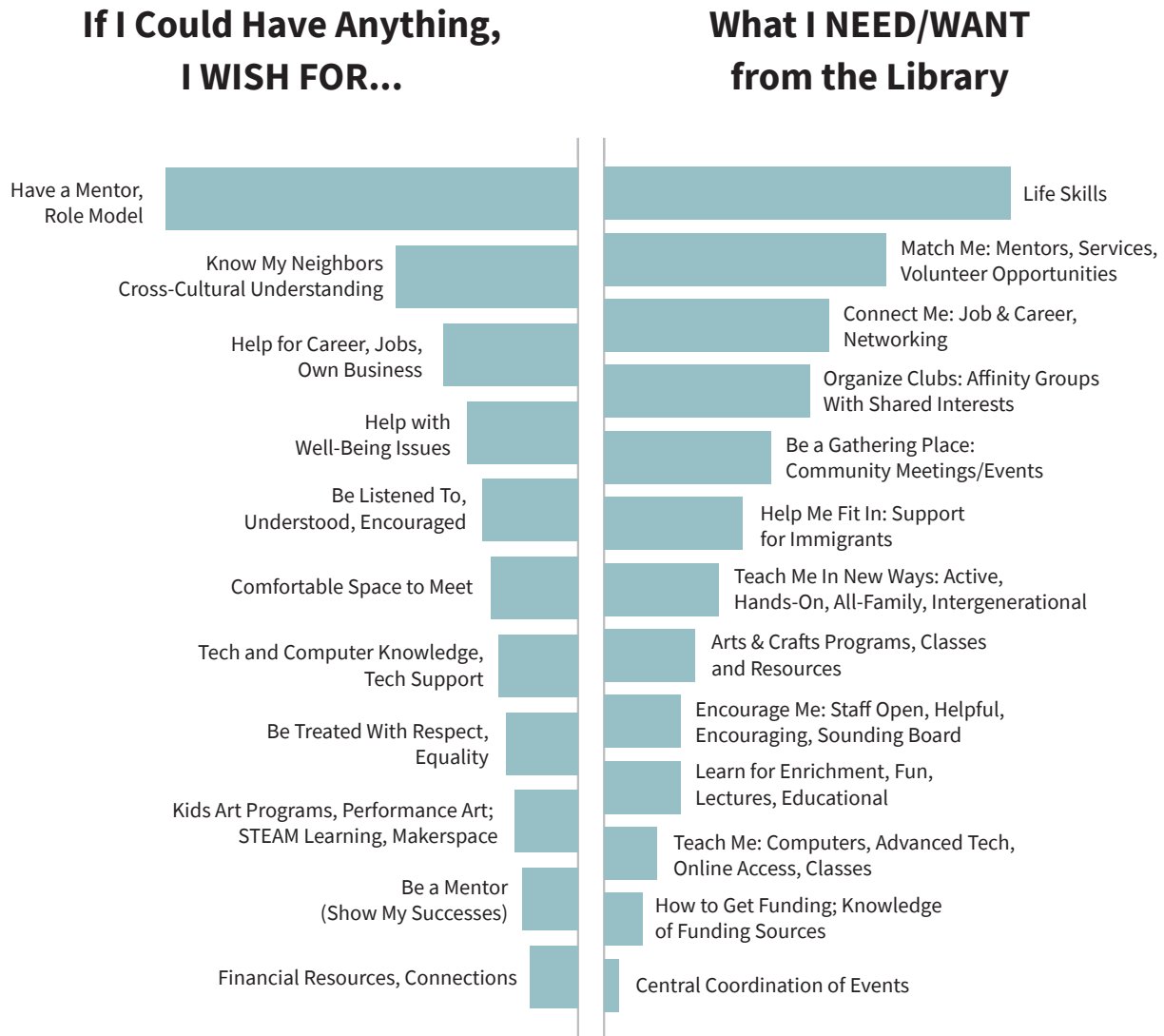
Defining these functional and emotional needs helped us understand the motivational drivers of our community—what urges people to take action? What are they looking to accomplish? We grouped these different drivers into **motivational segments** that spanned ages, ethnicity, cultural and socio-economic background to describe how different users look to interact with the New Haven Free Public Library.



Bar chart shows the recurrence of each functional and emotional need relative to other responses.

Community members were given a **Life Map** and asked to rank the priority of these five “life occasions” and associated activities. The ranking of the five Life Map Occasions varies from each motivational segment, but **Community Connection** is the clear winner: seven of the 10 motivational segments rank it #1.

LIFE MAP OCCASIONS	WEIGHTED RANK	% RANKING IN TOP 2
Community Connection	1	57%
Learning Skills	2	40%
Social Enrichment	3	46%
Well-Being	4	34%
Work & Career	5	26%



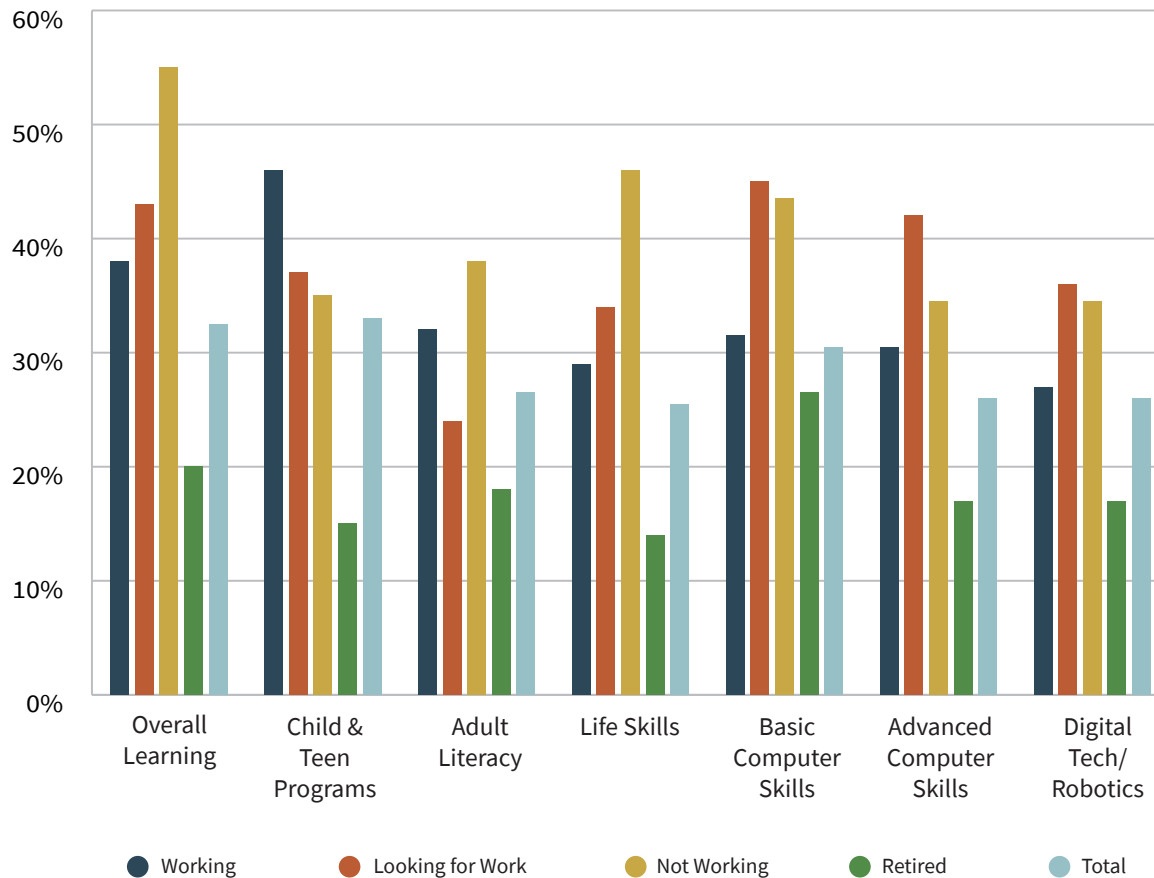
Bar chart shows the number of wishes and wants relative to other responses.

When asked “if I could have anything, I wish for ____” most users identified role models and mentors; to learn about neighbors and gain cross-cultural understanding; and receive career help. **Overwhelmingly, users want the library to help them develop life skills.**

Interest ratings for the library’s learning services vary widely based on employment status. Those who are out of work rely heavily on accessing general learning materials and look for information on literacy and life skills;

IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING SERVICES

all online survey respondents, by work status



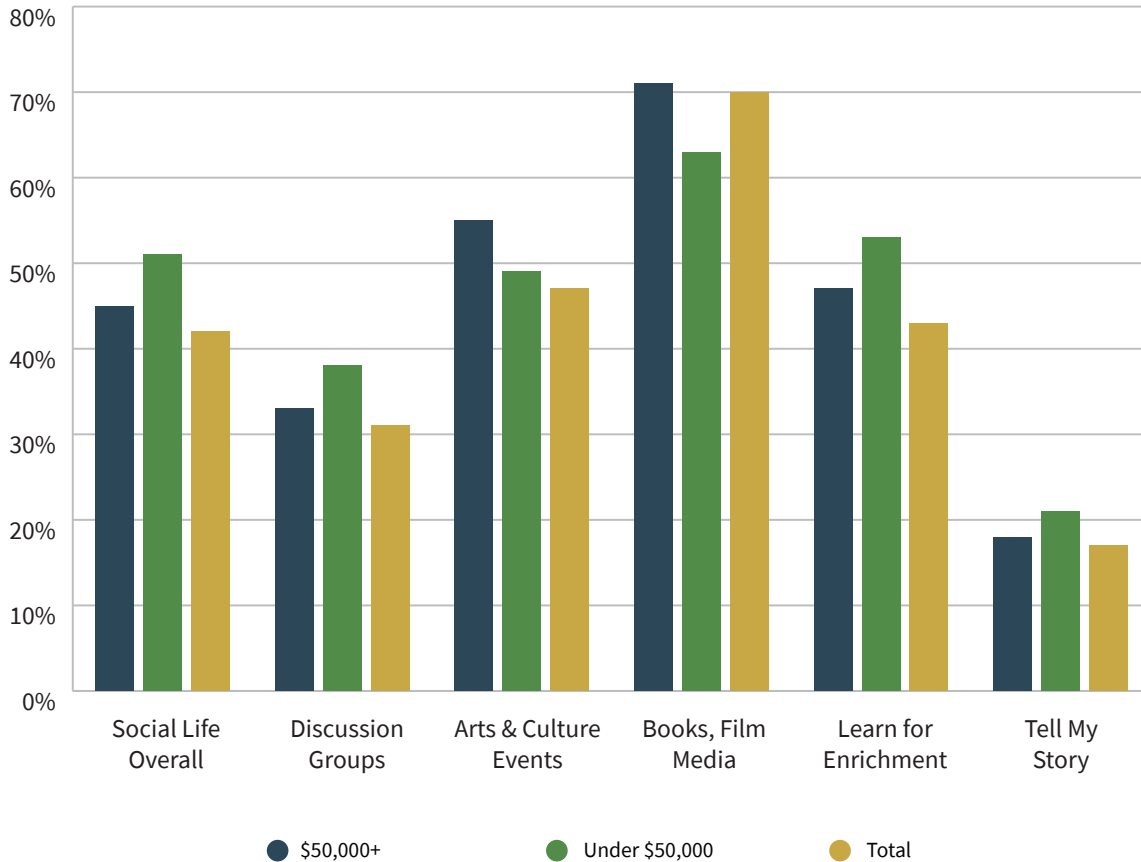
users looking for work are seeking basic and advanced computer skill development; those who are working emphasize child, teen and family learning programs.

The library also serves as a hub for community and social activities. Beyond accessing collections materials, respondents highlighted discussion groups, arts and cultural events, and learning for personal enrichment as important social life services.

New Haven's most vulnerable populations — those struggling with many of the key aspects of well-being such as housing, food and economic instability, mental and physical health issues, safety, isolation and lack of independence — are some of the most frequent and heavy users of library space, programs and services.

IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL LIFE SERVICES

all online survey respondents, by income



Immigrant and newcomer populations in New Haven are growing (16% and rising) and newcomers often turn to the New Haven Free Public Library as a resource to learn about their new home and adapt to the community. They indicated a desire for the Library to expand on existing services (more ESL locations, hours and number of classes, and on-site translation services), to provide assistance with both their logistical challenges and emotional need to feel welcome.

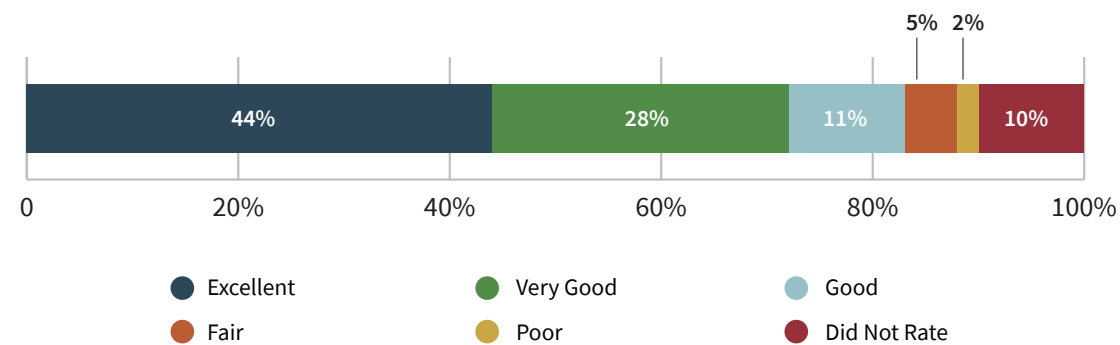
Feedback from users during the Community Needs Assessment highlight the desire to use the library as a resource for ongoing education and social connection. Users commented: **“I wish the library could help me further my education and life skills,”** **“please help me find a mentor,”** and **“I wish I had someone to talk to, listen to me, encourage me, just hear me.”**

LIBRARY STAFF & SPACES

Overall, community members have positive emotional connections with library staff. Our staff consistently received ratings of “excellent” or “very good” in providing a welcoming environment and for being knowledgeable in answering questions and providing information.

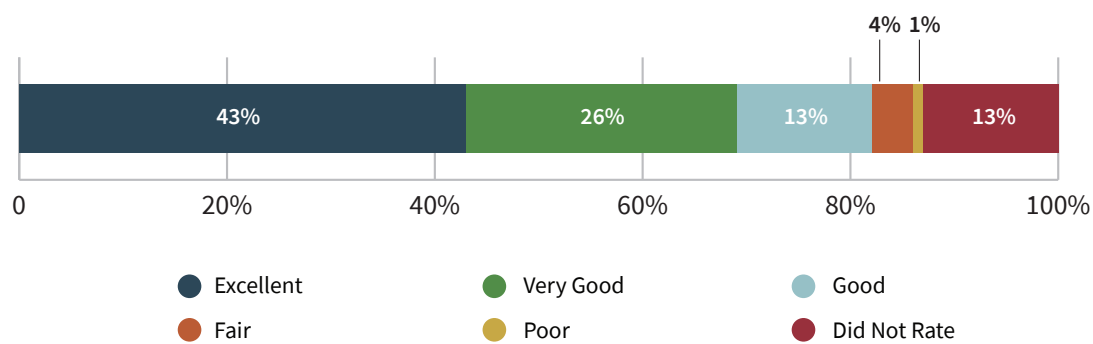
RATING OF THE STAFF AS WELCOMING

all online survey respondents



RATING OF THE STAFF AS KNOWLEDGEABLE

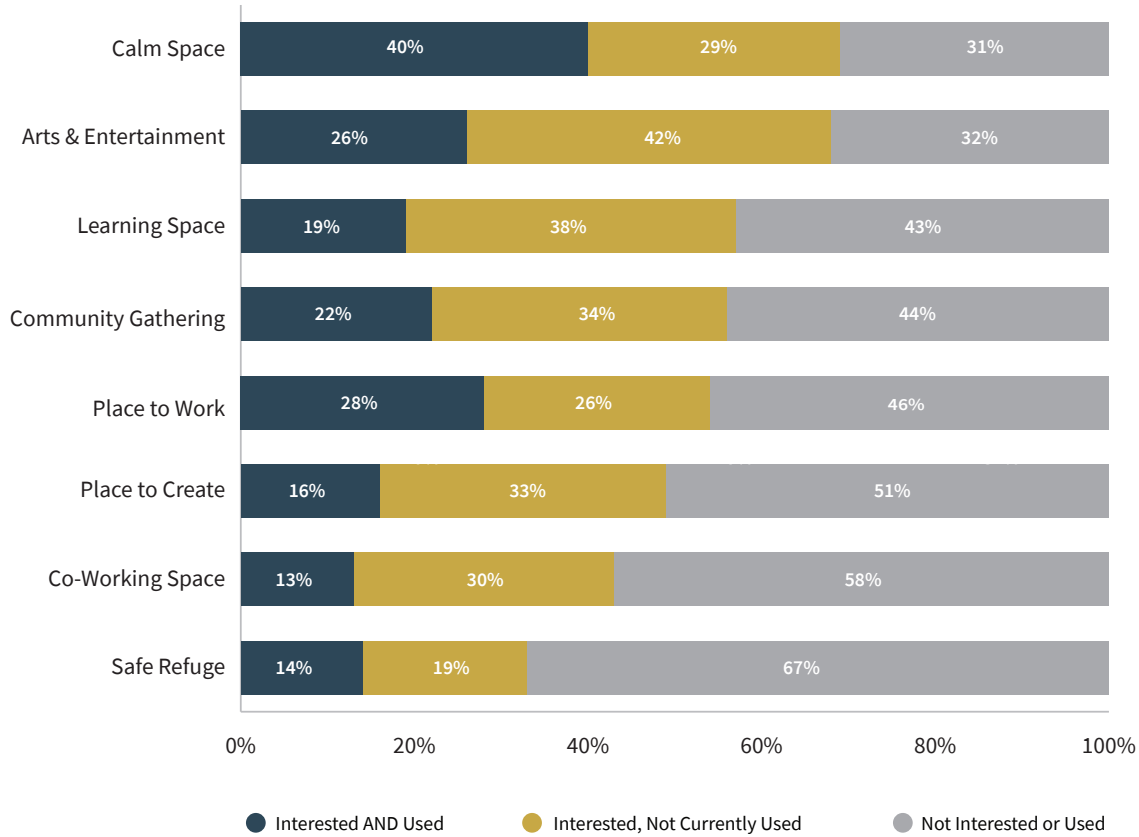
all online survey respondents



Our research demonstrates that the **more patrons engage with staff, the higher their satisfaction ratings.** However, patrons can see staff as “overworked,” “too busy,” “unhelpful,” and prone to “disappear.” Staff echo customers on the need for more training to boost their customer service delivery.

INTEREST AND USE OF SPACE TYPES/PURPOSE

ordered from most to least interest overall



The community relies on the library to provide accessible and flexible spaces for a variety of activities—from quiet reading to collaboration, exploration and creation. While users still come to the library to take advantage of traditional services—resources, computer access, borrowing materials, community programs—many also expressed an interest in exploring new and innovative ways to experience the New Haven Free Public Library. Providing a “calm space” ranks at the top of the list; users also emphasize the library’s role in hosting community gatherings, arts and entertainment events, and offering places to work and create.

The library is a trusted resource for job seekers, small business owners and entrepreneurs. Between **51-67% of community members surveyed indicated that they are interested in having space to work**, but only half of that number currently use the library for this purpose.

Frequent users who spend the most time at the library may not have access to larger home spaces or access to “paid” spaces (co-working, gyms, cafés). These users feel energized and inspired by the library, by the potential for learning, for meeting people, and often have an emotional connection to the space and the staff.

Users expressed interest in using the library as a place to enjoy arts and entertainment, engage in personal learning opportunities, connect with the community and get to know neighbors—**yet only 35% of these interested users use the library for these purposes today** due to lack of appropriate and available spaces.

BARRIERS TO USAGE

For the New Haven Free Public Library overall, addressing the following top seven barriers would resolve over half (60%) of all the comments the community made about improvements and could increase use of the library. Suggested improvements to the library's infrastructure are meant to limit these barriers, expand access and increase usage.

- 1. Being open more hours and days**
2. Communicating programs & services more effectively
3. Having better programs that customers want
4. Having more updated collections
5. Parking and convenient transportation
6. Increasing staff and improving staff skills in being welcoming, friendly & open
7. Patron safety and hygiene

45% of online survey respondents indicated that they wanted the library open longer.

Users continue to demand increased hours of operation. Requests around service access ranged from more hours during the week to more consistent hours across all locations to having programs earlier in the day (seniors), staying open later and adding weekend hours (working people and future Ives Squared users). Covering the wide range of needs of our diverse community would require extending hours across branches and across days.

CLOSING THE “SKILLS GAP”

During the **Knoweldge Framing Session**, the library’s EXCITE core team surveyed a range of case studies, articles, knowledgebases, resources, and best practices to put the findings of the Community Needs Assessment into context. This learning reinforced the library’s instrumental role in preparing our users for the 21st century and providing essential training and instruction in the skills increasingly valued by employers.

WATCH THE GAPS: U.S. EXECUTIVES SEE SKILLS GAPS IN THE AMERICAN WORKFORCE

92% of business leaders think Americans aren’t as skilled as they need to be.

44% of 500 senior executives surveyed think Americans lack soft skills such as communication, creativity, critical thinking and collaboration.

89% think training programs or job-related apprenticeships can alleviate the skills gap.

State of the Economy, April 2018, Adecco USA, Infographic available at <http://www.adeccousa.com/employers/resources/skills-gap-in-the-american-workforce/>

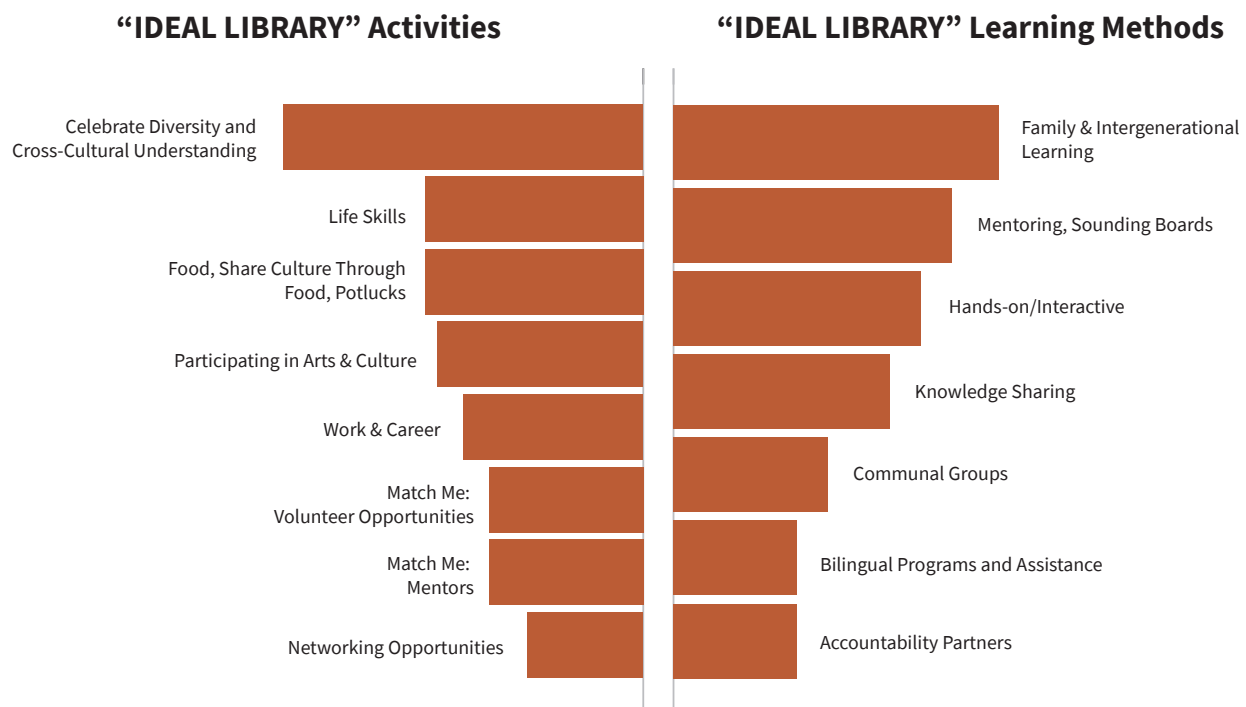
Connecting our users with job opportunities today and preparing our community for the industries of the future are fundamental functions of the New Haven Free Public Library. According to the *National Association of Colleges and Employers*, **78% of employers look for candidates who know how to work in teams; 77% want demonstrated problem solving skills; 75% look for strong writing and 71% for strong verbal communication skills.** Our community needs programs and services to meet these needs.

The library’s role in providing our students with educational opportunities in and out of school correlates to their ability to succeed as adults. According to a study of workforce readiness published by *Afterschool Alliance*: “**a strong and vibrant economy is reliant on a strong and vibrant workforce equipped with the necessary skills, competencies, and knowledge. Afterschool and summer learning programs play an integral role readying students for their career pathways.**”

THE IDEAL LIBRARY

Those who participated in our Community Collaboratives and Conversation Pods were challenged to envision the “ideal library” to help us understand how to enhance our offerings and experiences.

Respondents indicated a strong desire to understand diversity and build cross-cultural awareness. The ideal library focuses on intergenerational and family learning; mentoring and sharing; and hands-on opportunities to learn by doing.



Bar chart shows the relative value of each “ideal” activity and learning method.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

“Whenever I feel blue or lonely, I go to the library... the library is a warm, welcoming, comfortable, safe and friendly place. Almost like a church; a collective comfort zone. I like supporting the library.”

- Library user quote from the 2017 “Share Your Story” Campaign

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ONLINE COMMUNITY NEEDS SURVEY

Farnam Associates LLC

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**member of the Strategic Framework Development Team*

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Chinese-speaking Community
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Collab New Haven
Columbus House
Community Foundation for Greater New Haven
Connecticut Mental Health Center
Community Action Agency
Cornell Scott Hill Health Clinic
Early Childhood Caregivers
Edgewood Montessori School
Elmseed
Fair Haven Community Health Center
Formata
IRIS: Integrated Refugee and Immigration Service
Ives Squared Project Manager, Elm City Innovation Collaborative
JUNTA for Progressive Action
Liberty Community Services
Literacy Volunteers of Greater New Haven
Long Wharf Theatre
Make Haven
Marrakech
New Haven Public Schools
Readmobile Community
SCORE New Haven
Spanish-speaking Community
Westville Community Nursery School
Yale School of Management Social Impact Consulting Club

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Shana Schneider

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Roxanne Coady

Dr. Sheila Jewell

NHFPL Foundation Board Liaison

Elsie B. Chapman, *Ex-Officio*

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Michael Morand

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Martha L. Brogan

LIBRARY ADMINISTRATION

City Librarian and Director

Martha L. Brogan

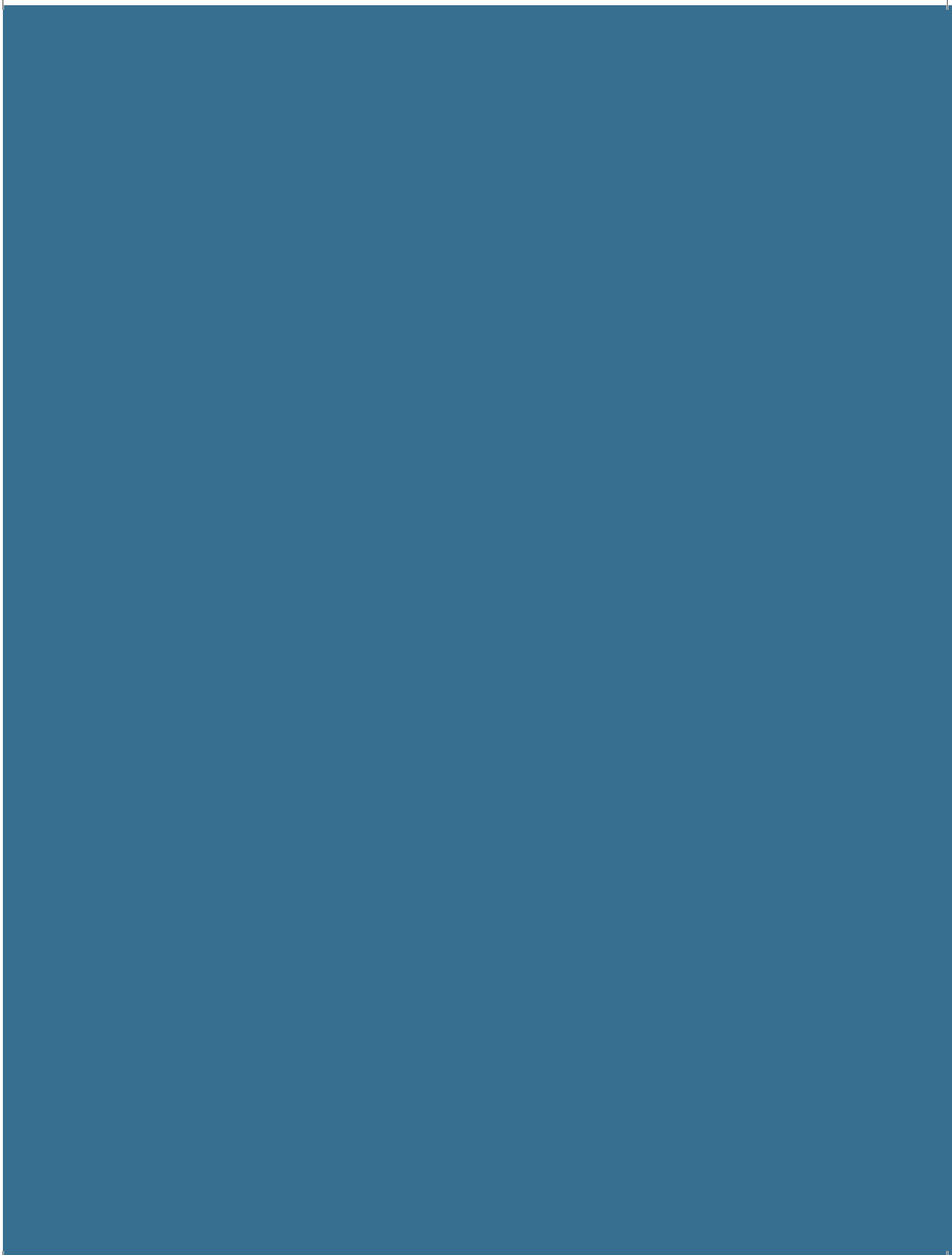
Deputy Director

John Jessen

Public Services Administrators

Bradley Bullis, *Adult Services*

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