



2025

STRATEGIC PLAN

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INTRODUCTION

In 2021, the Chattanooga Public Library completed its Fiscal Years 2017-2019 Strategic Plan.

Accomplishments from this plan included a new HVAC system, a new roof, energy-efficient lighting, new wheelchair-accessible bathrooms, and automatic doors for the Downtown Library, as well as ceiling repairs for the Northgate and Eastgate Libraries. It also included strengthening the Library's partnership with HCDE through outreach and reading lists, introducing food literacy programs, developing a tool library and seed exchange, a new library branch in the Avondale Community Center, and building new partnerships with local businesses and nonprofits.

Since 2021 CPL navigated changes in services and offerings, organizational restructuring and the introduction of Executive Director, Will O'Hearn. With new leadership and new services, CPL is now looking to the future.





To best serve Chattanooga, we have aligned our initiatives with the One Chattanooga Plan.

By doing so, we ensure that we're working together to make Chattanooga a great place for everyone. This Strategic Plan is designed to help achieve the following goals:

Build a universal path to early learning

Catalyze economic vitality in the Black community

Build a competitive regional economy

Improve local infrastructure & public transit

Provide responsive and effective local government

VISION + MISSION



Our Vision:

AN INSPIRED, CONNECTED, AND ENGAGED CHATTANOOGA.



Our Mission:

TO BE THE COMMUNITY'S CATALYST FOR LIFELONG LEARNING.

OUR FIVE AREAS OF FOCUS



Our Five Areas of Focus

01: LOWER BARRIERS TO LIBRARY ACCESS

This is more important than ever. The easier the library is to use, the more people will love to use it. It shouldn't feel like you're going out of the way to get to the library—the library should permeate your life. Simple, easy, and intuitive.

The people most affected by life's challenges are often the most vulnerable, and that's exactly who the library is here for. We aim to be a natural, intuitive part of your life—a place that never feels intimidating or closed off. The library isn't about gatekeeping; it's about sharing, supporting, and showing you that you're valued and loved. As a welcoming “third space,” we offer more than just books—we offer a sense of belonging. When everyone feels comfortable being here and using what we offer, that's what makes us not just unique, but essential—a vital, often missing part of community life.

What's Next?

In Fiscal Year 2026, we are showing our commitment to a community we love with the following goals:

- Eliminate fines on all adult materials.
- Expand digital access by adding at least one new database or eMaterial resource.



Our Five Areas of Focus

02: NEW & IMPROVED FACILITIES

Fifty years ago, Chattanooga made a significant investment in its libraries through the creation of the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Bicentennial Library. Since then, our community has grown, and the role of the library has expanded dramatically.

Today, we're facing new challenges: many of our locations no longer have the space to serve all residents equitably, and two of our busiest branches—Eastgate and Northgate—are approaching the end of their service life. As the needs of our community continue to evolve, so must our spaces. To meet these changing demands and maintain the high quality of service Chattanooga deserves, we need modern, accessible libraries designed for today and the future.

Our newest facility is the Avondale Library, which opened alongside the Community Center in 2019. Major accessibility and cost-saving upgrades were made to our Downtown Library from 2017 - 2020, and we have made a number of repairs at Northgate and Eastgate.

What's Planned for 2026?

In tandem with our Strategic Plan, we are putting a new 10-Year Facilities Plan into action that will ultimately result in a new East Brainerd Library, a new or significantly renovated Northgate Library, and upgrades throughout our library system. The following goals are what we plan to accomplish over Fiscal Year 2026:

- Select a site location for a large East Brainerd Library that offers the wide range of services and resources currently found at our Downtown Library.
- Add a meeting room space to the Downtown Library.



Our Five Areas of Focus

03: OUTREACH

The “Field of Dreams” days of “if you build it, they will come” are no longer. There are so many other mediums competing for your attention these days that it’s more important than ever to get out in our community and meet people where they are.

This effort is also about breaking the library poverty cycle—the idea that the best predictor of future library use is past use. While we know libraries can positively impact lives in countless ways, those who need us most often don’t walk through our doors. That’s why we’re committed to meeting people where they are, reaching out to show them all that the library has to offer. Our goal is to interrupt the cycle of non-use and ensure everyone knows that the library is for them—a place where they belong, are welcomed, and are loved.

In Fiscal Year 2024, we hired a Library Outreach Coordinator and met our goal to ensure at least one outreach event in every district. Since then, we have doubled that goal and launched the Pop-Up Library, aka “Poppy”, a new outreach van that acts as a mobile library with books, technology, and fun, educational activities.

What new outreach initiatives are in store for Fiscal Year 2026?

The best way for us to convey our love for the community is to build upon what we’ve already done, so our 2026 goals are:

- Offer at least 3 outreaches in each district.
- Increase outreach to seniors by 15%



Our Five Areas of Focus

04: COLLABORATIONS & PARTNERSHIPS

We think Chattanooga works best when we all work together toward shared goals. We all have different strengths and expertise, so when we collaborate, we get better outcomes than if we were to work in silos. The outcome is worth more than its parts.

Our main goal here at CPL is to have the most positive impact on the community, whether that means directly providing services, working in tandem with other organizations, or supporting the good work of others.

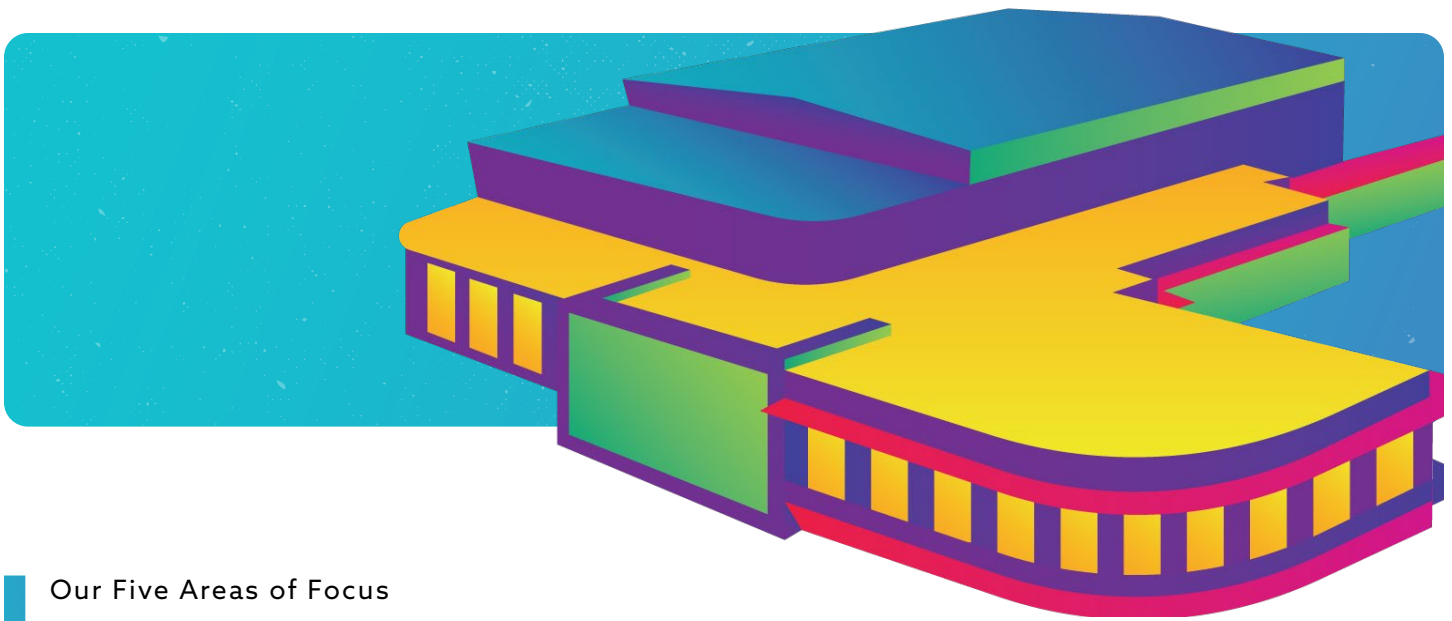
One of the most impactful developments in recent years has been the growth of our Family Pass program. We've tripled the number of available passes, giving up to two adults and four to five children free access to local attractions like the Chattanooga Zoo and Tennessee Aquarium, as well as tickets to Chattanooga Football Club and Lookouts games. It's one of our favorite parts of the job—seeing the joy on families' faces when they pick up a pass that enriches their lives without adding financial strain.

In 2024, we also launched a new partnership with 423 Chain Breakers and Chattanooga United to Reduce Violence, offering concurrent programming during Nightfall events. The goal is to give youth a safe, engaging space to gather, helping them stay active and out of harm's way.

What new collaborations will CPL look for in Fiscal Year 2026?

We plan to continue the work we've done so far with the following goals:

- Establish two new partnerships.
- Expand programming to support nontraditional learners.



Our Five Areas of Focus

05: NEW & UNIQUE OFFERINGS

Sharing has always been at the heart of what we do.

The library has always been about sharing—traditionally, that meant sharing information to meet a critical community need. But the way we consume information has changed dramatically in the last 20, 10, even 5 years. With information more accessible than ever, we’re evolving too—honoring our time-tested role by reimagining the kinds of resources and services we share to make the biggest positive impact in people’s lives. That means finding new ways to surprise and delight, offering opportunities for people to explore, discover, and grow. We aim to provide low-risk, high-reward experiences where anyone can learn more about themselves and pursue their passions—without having to break the bank.

CPL has historically been on the forefront of the changing landscape in the library world. We made national and international headlines in 2014 for dedicating an entire floor to maker technology. We were an early adopter of the “library of things” concept, debuting a Seed Exchange in 2018 and a Tool Library in 2019. In recent years, we’ve redefined what libraries checked out by offering more unique library collections, which we’ve branded “Beyond Books.” New Beyond Books offerings include the Adventure Library, a camping and hiking collection; the Discovery Collection, educational tools and special books for adult literacy; MindSpark Memory Kits for people caring for others with dementia; Library Telescopes, a collection of high-powered, user-friendly telescopes; and the Toy Library, a collection of high quality, educational toys.

What new offerings does CPL have planned for Fiscal Year 2026?

- Expand two Beyond Books collections.
- Improve access by making two Beyond Books collections available at all locations.

~~CONCLUSION~~

**OUR SUPER SECRET
SIXTH AREA OF FOCUS**



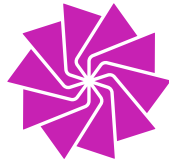
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Our ~~Five~~ Areas of Focus

06: COMMUNITY

Did you notice all the love for our community throughout this report? Here's why:

At the heart of all we do is our love for our community. We are called the Chattanooga Public Library intentionally as we put Chattanoogaans before anything else. At all times we strive to be responsive and caring towards all the needs of our community. In every action we take, we are constantly thinking of you, our patron. Our collections, our services, our customer service, is all designed with YOU in mind and ensuring that when you're with us, you feel valued and seen, in a place that you belong.

We want you to always enter our libraries as your authentic self. For over a century, libraries have been a sanctuary for so many people, and we continue to take that role to heart. We create safe, inclusive spaces with intention; we create programs that celebrate different people, cultures, and perspectives. CPL has something for everyone, and we encourage everyone to come explore our spaces and offerings in a caring, supportive and loving environment.



Chattanooga Public Library

We appreciate you taking the time to learn more about the Chattanooga Public Library and the work we're doing in the community.

