



LAKE FOREST
LIBRARY

STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-2027

This Strategic Plan presents the Strategic Priorities and Mission that will guide Lake Forest Library for the next three years. The Strategic Plan is grounded in the findings of the 2023 City of Lake Forest Community-Wide Survey (details in the Appendix) and several internal discussions involving the Library Board of Trustees and all Library Staff.

Photo courtesy of DroNation Video Services.

GUIDING THE LIBRARY'S NEXT 3 YEARS

Mission Statement

We are the cornerstone of literacy in our community where everyone is respected and free to pursue a lifelong love for reading and learning.

Strategic Priorities

1

**Growing Generations
of Avid Readers**

2

**Preserving and Enhancing
a Beloved Community Asset**

3

**Enhancing
Organizational Excellence**

4

**Inspiring All Residents with
Lifelong Learning Opportunities**

5

**Bringing the Library into the
Story of Each Lake Forester**

This Plan is a living document designed to inspire positive growth and change, leading to Library enhancements and other benefits to the Lake Forest community. We plan to engage extensively with the Lake Forest community during the planning and implementation stages of this Plan and will update Library Trustees and other community stakeholders on progress on a regular basis. Library Trustees and Staff will also continually review and update the Plan in response to community priorities and changing trends in the library and information landscape.

Strategic Priority 1

Growing Generations of Avid Readers

Residents indicated overwhelmingly in the 2023 City Survey that Books and Electronic Collections are the most important services that the Library provides to the Lake Forest community. Balanced, diverse, and current library collections are vital to establishing a foundation for early literacy and an ongoing support for lifelong learning. Collections are key to providing open and free access to information and the welcoming atmosphere our patrons can expect to encounter. Our outstanding staff will draw on their talents and professional expertise to encourage reading for pleasure and enrichment for all residents.

Action Plan

1. Provide the best and most relevant collections of library materials in multiple formats for all residents.
2. Analyze library usage data and monitor reading trends to purchase books, eBooks, and other materials in appropriate quantities to deliver popular titles speedily to residents.
3. Review Library spaces and shelving to improve access to and display of library collections. As needed, right-size collections based on meaningful metrics, relocate popular collections to more accessible locations, and find new and creative ways to display and merchandize collections.
4. Expand access to library collections in the state of Illinois and provide an upgraded kiosk with a greater variety of materials at the West Train Station.
5. Strengthen outreach efforts and partnerships with community organizations, expand or refresh ongoing community-wide reading programs, and raise awareness about home delivery services for elderly or other individuals in need.
6. Digitize local historical resources not available elsewhere.

Strategic Priority 2

Preserving and Enhancing a Beloved Community Asset

The Lake Forest Library building is a source of great joy and pride to community residents. In August 2023, we completed the repair and restoration of its dome and interior Rotunda. And in March 2024, we completed the repair, restoration, and cleaning of the Nicolai Remisoff murals that grace the Rotunda, a project funded by a grant from the Friends of Lake Forest Library. We look forward to continuing this positive momentum as we engage with stakeholders to identify additional opportunities to preserve and enhance the building.

Action Plan

1. Collaborate with experts and community stakeholders to develop a Master Plan for the Library to reimagine and repurpose its existing spaces for optimal use in a phased manner, while preserving and enhancing its historical integrity and significance.
2. Improve building operations with reliable, energy-efficient infrastructure and systems that improve use of staff time and enable them to deliver exceptional library services, collections, resources, and programs to all community residents.
3. Enhance Library access by addressing Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) concerns, upgrading the elevator, repairing and restoring the exterior landscaping and courtyards, and also finding creative and cost-effective solutions to parking challenges.
4. Investigate ways to increase flexibility of existing spaces with updated furnishings and movable shelving.
5. Enhance the external appearance and landscaping for a more welcoming approach to the building.
6. Partner with The Lake Forest Library Foundation and the Friends of Lake Forest Library to grow philanthropic support and an endowment for the Library to fund future capital improvements.

Strategic Priority 3

Enhancing Organizational Excellence

The Lake Forest Library staff is among its most prized assets. We continually receive compliments from residents on the outstanding service they receive from our dedicated and innovative staff. We will empower our employees to deliver the best physical and virtual Library experience for all our patrons through exceptional personalized customer service. Staff will continually monitor trends in the library and retail landscape and evaluate and cautiously adopt industry and technological innovations to deliver top-notch customer service to patrons.

Action Plan

1. Develop a staffing structure to effectively match program and service needs. Ensure that staff salaries and benefits are competitive in order to attract and retain excellent employees.
2. Provide meaningful staff learning and development opportunities through formal coursework or attendance at local and national conferences.
3. Reduce departmental boundaries and empower staff with broad knowledge and skills to work across functional areas.
4. Create a work environment where staff are reflective, use data-driven approaches to report on results, and remain accountable to the community and ourselves.
5. Foster employee engagement through authentic conversations and recognition. Increase job satisfaction among staff, ultimately resulting in better service to the community.
6. Encourage staff to innovate and conduct pilot projects to test new ideas without fear of failure.
7. Formalize and implement a succession plan for key roles in the organization.

Strategic Priority 4

Inspiring All Residents with Lifelong Learning Opportunities

Lake Forest Library hosts hundreds of programs and other enrichment opportunities for community residents throughout all ages and phases of their life. These include book discussions, author visits, story times, take-home kits and other self-directed activities. We will reflect on what we have provided in the past and look for ways to enhance it going forward. We will provide enlightening and entertaining learning experiences for residents of all ages and abilities that open doors to a world of learning and discovery.

Action Plan

1. Provide diverse and high-quality Library programming for all residents - from support for new parents, to recent graduates, to re-engaging young adults in the Library, to services for retirees and those Aging in Place.
2. Continue to tap into existing community interests on literary, environmental, and historical topics as well as other subjects desired by residents in the Community Survey. Leverage and complement the offerings of our community partners.
3. Consider ways to provide meaningful and accessible programming for individuals with different needs and abilities (neurodiversity, dementia, etc).
4. Pilot additional family programs in the evenings and on weekends to meet needs of working parents.
5. Provide expanded and reimagined Media Lab learning opportunities.
6. Explore ways to encourage residents to try and experiment with new interests and ideas.

Strategic Priority 5

Bringing the Library into the Story of Each Lake Forester

We are excited to adopt a new communications philosophy during the upcoming three years. Based on the StoryBrand approach by Donald Miller, we will reframe communications with the Lake Forest resident as the hero and the Library as the guide in their life story and along their journey to success.

Action Plan

1. Coordinate across Library departments to develop larger, overarching marketing campaigns and themes. Identify and implement other effective ways to connect people with the Library.
2. Use community engagement tools to identify and engage with new residents and unserved/underserved areas of the community.
3. Identify and reduce any barriers to library card access and Library use. Launch a Get a Library Card campaign.
4. Redesign and reorganize the Library website to improve clarity and ease of use.
5. Strengthen partnerships with community organizations by learning about their goals and determining how the Library can be part of their story. Identify and connect with other potential Library ambassadors and advocates.
6. Effectively communicate an inspiring vision and the Library's story of impact.
7. Find innovative ways to help residents become aware of and effectively use library resources to find newer/better opportunities for themselves.

APPENDIX

Community Profile and Environmental Scan

Community Profile

Founded in 1861, the City of Lake Forest is a closely knit community of 19,436 residents in the North Shore of Chicago. It is one of the most scenic, historical, and architecturally significant suburbs of Chicago where the median value of a home is \$894,000 and the median household income is over \$202,000. It is a predominantly white (83%) community with Asian and Hispanic populations being the next largest ethnic groups. Residents over 65 comprise over 24% of its population while 11% of residents were born outside the United States. The median age of Lake Forest residents is 44.9 and 80% of residents have a bachelor's degree or higher. Nearly 87% of residents speak English only at home, while the number of residents speaking Spanish, Chinese, and other Asian languages have shown a gradual increase over the past 15 years. (Source: 2020 Decennial Census and American Community Survey 2022) Since the COVID-19 pandemic, many new residents have moved into the community from other parts of the Chicagoland area and elsewhere. Some estimates report that nearly 1,600 new households have moved to the Lake Forest community in the past four years.

The community is very fortunate to have extremely active and well supported civic organizations that all work cooperatively in providing substantial enrichment opportunities on topics including historic preservation, arts and humanities, the environment, gardening, and other interests. These include Committee Representing Our Young Adults (CROYA), Dickinson Hall, Elawa Farm Foundation, the Gorton Center, History Center of Lake Forest/Lake Bluff, The Lake Forest Open Lands Association, Lake Forest Preservation Foundation, Lake Forest College, Lake Forest/Lake Bluff Chamber of Commerce and the Lake Forest Schools. Several departments of the City of Lake Forest are also active partners in providing educational, recreational, and enhancement programs for residents. Founded in 1935, the Lake Forest Caucus is a volunteer organization that identifies qualified Lake Forest residents to serve as volunteers on City of Lake Forest boards and commissions. Numerous book clubs, special interest groups, and service clubs present additional opportunities for engagement with the community. The community also features the independent Lake Forest Book Store that has been in operation for nearly 75 years and provides wonderful retail and programming partnership possibilities for Lake Forest Library.

Lake Forest Library

Lake Forest Library occupies a very special place in the hearts of community members. Beginning on the second floor of the City Hall building in 1898, it moved to its current location in 1931 and celebrated its 125th anniversary on July 8, 2023. The present building, designed as a library by architect Edwin H. Clark, was given to the City of Lake Forest by Mrs. Charles H. Schweppe and Mrs. Stanley Keith in memory of Mrs. Keith's first husband, Kersey Coates Reed, and was dedicated on June 7, 1931. It is a contributing building in the Lake Forest Historic District, a predominantly residential district generally consisting of large homes in a park-like setting.

The Library is fortunate to have an active Friends of Lake Forest Library group that has organized very successful book sales and provided nearly \$2.6 million in support to the Library since its inception in 1976. Over the four past decades, the Friends have been very supportive of numerous Library programs for children and adults and also recently funded the repair, restoration, and cleaning of the Nicolai Remisoff murals that grace the Library's Rotunda. In 2020, the Lake Forest Library Foundation was established in preparation for a future capital campaign to build an endowment to preserve and enhance the historic Lake Forest Library. Lake Forest residents have a special love for the Library, its historical elements, and its wonderful collection of art. Several generations of library users have passed through its doors and it is a beloved place to interact with neighbors and friends, some of whom work in the Library. It is also customary for us to see younger generations of library users returning to the Library along with their children to revive nostalgic memories of the building, particularly the Children's Library.

At Lake Forest Library, we notice significant use of our spaces by nearby high school and college students who congregate here after classes for group study and discussion. During the high school's finals week in the spring and winter, every available seat and nook and corner of the Library is occupied by groups of students studying and collaborating. Several tutors use the Library to coach their young wards. Enrichment programs organized by the Youth Services Staff attract large numbers of young children and their parents or caregivers. We see a particularly high usage of our activity room for storytimes, hands-on crafts and activities, and unstructured play time.

Adults continue to use the Library's computers for research and information and the Media Lab in increasing numbers for its digital media conversion and 3D printing capabilities. The Library supports the activities of more than 25 patron-led book discussion groups by providing multiple copies of books and discussion guides. Library Staff deliver books and other materials to Lake Forest Place and homes of residents who are not able to physically come to the Library. Especially popular are programs on the arts, business, travel, local history, genealogy research,

and book talks by our talented librarians. Hundreds of residents descended on the front lawn of the Library to celebrate its 125th anniversary on July 8, 2023. In November 2023, more than 100 residents gathered to celebrate A Night at the Library gala hosted by the Friends.

Public Libraries Today

Public Libraries are feeling their way through a new normal after the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. While several new, innovative services such as curbside delivery, enhanced investments in digital materials, and virtual programming using Zoom and other platforms expanded during the pandemic, residents have welcomed the opportunity to return to their familiar, physical grounds of the library and use the physical spaces “alone” and “together.” In a recent survey completed by the Urban Libraries Council, ninety-eight member libraries shared data from 2019 and 2022 on in-person visits, program attendance, digital and physical circulation, and computer usage. The survey revealed a 44% decline in library visits from 2019 to 2022, with preliminary 2023 data indicating a gradual upswing from pandemic lows. Program attendance also declined between 2019 and 2022 by 58%, driven in part by a 71% reduction in the number of programs offered during that time. Decreases in computer usage (26%) and wireless sessions (37%) from 2019 to 2022 have some member libraries assessing on-site computer lab and Wi-Fi investments and considering more laptop, mobile device, and hotspot lending. While the data show fewer library visitors coming into library buildings compared to pre-pandemic times, demand for digital content has surged since 2019. Survey respondents reported an average 30% increase in digital books, magazines, and streaming video circulation from 2019 to 2022.

Lake Forest Library Usage Trends

Lake Forest Library is still adjusting collections, programming, outreach, and communications in response to changes in patron demand and expectations after the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic was a huge catalyst for change in libraries, and we are still affected in nearly everything we do. We are sensitive to patron requests and expectations and work to meet them where they are, whether that is in the Library, in their homes, or at community events. We are encouraged by the gradual uptick we have noticed in several key metrics and will work vigorously to continue that trend and adjust our service models as needed. Lake Forest Library has typically enjoyed a significant level of support and use from our patrons, a pattern that we strive to continue into the future. To quote from a recent article in [Library Journal](#):

Libraries are emerging from the pandemic stronger, more resilient, and more indispensable to their communities than ever before. Now, they must continue to demonstrate additional value to patrons. With the right tools and resources, librarians will be well prepared to face both new and ongoing challenges.

As libraries have done countless times over the past hundred years, we will continually evaluate what we do and follow a process of continuous feedback and adaptability to make appropriate adjustments to library programs and services to serve our residents in the most cost effective and efficient manner.

Input from Lake Forest Residents

Following the completion of the 2020–2023 Strategic Plan and the appointment of new leadership, the Library’s Board of Trustees determined that it was an opportune time to begin the next cycle of strategic planning. As a first step in this process, all Lake Forest residents were invited to respond to a Community Survey that included questions about residents’ perception of and satisfaction with library services. Nearly 1,450 households responded to a Community-Wide Survey distributed by the City of Lake Forest in the summer of 2023. Key findings from the survey follow.

- ***High Satisfaction with Library Services:*** Residents ranked the Library very highly in overall satisfaction, with 91% of respondents responding that they were Very Satisfied (61%) and (30%) Satisfied. When compared with other high-performing communities in the United States with a median income over \$100,000, Lake Forest residents reported a higher level of satisfaction with library services.
- ***Library Services most important to households:*** Books and Other Materials ranked first in importance, followed by E-Books or Downloadable Materials and Library Sponsored Events and Programs.
- ***Unmet Needs for Library Services:*** Based on survey responses, the consulting firm administering the survey determined that Parking/Accessibility, Spaces for Group Study and Community Meetings, and Technology Access and Classes were the top 3 areas where residents’ need were not met.
- ***Top Priorities for Investment in Library Services:*** Residents identified Parking/Accessibility, Books and Other Materials, and Library Sponsored Events and Programs as the highest priorities for investment by the library.
- ***Suggestions for Programs/Services:*** Residents provided several hundred open-ended comments on the quality of collections, programs, and services offered by the Library and offered numerous suggestions for improvement. A sampling of their comments is included later in the Appendix.

Major Challenges and Opportunities

Our hardworking and talented Library Staff are at the frontlines, interacting daily with patrons and recording valuable nuggets of information in internal databases for follow-up and action. Several of them have served the Lake Forest community for many years and have a keen knowledge of current library user trends and behaviors. Following the publication of the Community-Wide Survey results, Library Staff held spirited discussions on its findings and identified the following major challenges and opportunities for the library in the short and long term:

- Growing and sustaining the interest in and love for reading among the community, especially among its youngest residents. Determine the right mix of digital and physical resources to best serve our community.
- Create vibrant, flexible spaces that meet the modern needs of library users while preserving and enhancing the historical integrity and charm of the original building.
- Make outstanding customer service, top notch collections and creative use of state-of-the-art technology the hallmarks of this library. Support staff with upgraded workspaces and first-rate training, technology, and other resources to be successful in their roles.
- Provide high quality enrichment programs for all segments of the population in a manner that is intentional and well thought out and provides the foundation for residents to pursue more in-depth opportunities with other community institutions.
- Enhance awareness by communicating the unique breadth and depth of everything the library does in a community that is served by numerous organizations. Identify unserved and underserved residents of the community and motivate them to become active library users.

2023 City of Lake Forest Community-Wide Survey

Selected Library Comments

Collections

“Please continue or improve availability of most current travel books and new release movies, and TV series.”

“Expand Audiobook selection for downloading.”

“Library should focus on the basics. Books. Do not try to be all things to all people.”

“More current best sellers through Libby.”

Some libraries offer other rental programs (tools etc.). I am curious if those make sense in our community.”

“Expand Audiobook selection for downloading.”

“More Kindle e-books! The offering seems much smaller than neighboring libraries.”

“The library’s collection of computer programming and software texts is very limited as compared to Highland Park.”

Programs and Events

“Adult and family activities, so much is focused on children, and that’s a good thing, once families are empty nesters, the town seems to lose interest...”

“Library programs need to include multi-culture.”

“Drive up check out/pick up, more children’s programming...”

“The kid programming is great – would love to see more weekend and later weekday options. Not all of us are done working at 4 pm.”

“More programs for adults (ages 20-40) without children to get to know others in the community.”

“We love it! The Library is the only place that offers free programs for babies/toddlers. We would love more! There are so many people who would benefit. Thanks for all you do!”

“Book clubs that aren’t in the middle of the day.”

“More nighttime or weekend children’s programming for working parents.”

“More informational talks and programs for adults.”

“Book group for older adults.”

“Deerfield Library offers a lot more programming. I recommend looking to them as a model.”

“Robotic Competition.”

“Programs for Caregivers.”

Building Concerns/Parking/Accessibility

“It could be more physically accessible. A new building/expansion is badly needed.”

“Library could benefit from private study/meeting rooms that can be reserved in advance.”

“More open space in the kids library; more books at kids eye level; less claustrophobic space.”

“Please make the parking more efficient. My elderly father has a hard time parking even using the handicapped parking.”

“The interior of the children’s section is overwhelming. The library as a whole is hard to navigate.”

“Other communities have enhanced their libraries to provide for diversity of meeting spaces.”

“Encourage ADA Accessibility discussions for Central Business District and Lake Forest Library outside and inside buildings.”

“Larger children’s area for open, sensory play.”

“Work space for small business owners and entrepreneurs.”

“Drive up check out/pick up....”

“Newer, technology spaces.”

Operational

“Expanded technology classes with more hours.”

“Longer hours for students during finals weeks.”

“Continue to upgrade media lab, more hours available at nights/weekends.”

“Can you add an experience (Innovation) center like the Glenview Library has?”

“Check out the Northbrook Library events/programs. Free concerts on Sundays. Exclusive technology help.”

“More diverse book clubs, such as sci-fi, women’s etc.”

“Wish they could get a laser cutter...”

“Look at the Lake Zurich Library and let’s try to do some of that! Play areas for kids, toys to borrow. Puzzles for kids to borrow.”

“There should be greater enforcement of quiet/no phone areas.”

“More makerlab initiatives and opportunity to borrow equipment or use on site.”

“Longer hours. Get kids to study there – entice them!”

Marketing and Outreach

“We LOVE the Library. It is a tremendous resource. I do not know as much as I would like about downloadable online resource options and other services available in my home through the library. I would like more information to be able to take full advantage.”

“Better communication about what you do...”

“There are few resources/activities west of 41.”

“New resident orientation/resource event.”

“Need better marketing of events.”

General

“Services are great. The building is not. We need a fully-functional, up-to-date library not an historic shell. The parking situation is dangerous at all times of the year.”

“Amazing library and staff.”

“Library is our greatest asset.”

“Library is amazing! Thank the staff for being so good as well.”