

Regents Advisory Council on Libraries

# VISION 2022

New York State  
**Library**

Adopted by the Regents Advisory Council on Libraries  
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# INTRODUCTION

When the pandemic halted many in-person services, we were inspired to see how libraries across the state demonstrated their ingenuity and dedication by shifting to virtual services and making difficult decisions about how to best protect the safety of staff and patrons in the face of unprecedented challenges and change.

As the pandemic continues to disrupt daily life, we've seen how the disruption in library services disproportionately affects traditionally marginalized communities, compounding the impact of reduced services in other sectors, including schools and public transportation, which exacerbates existing inequities.

The way out of this crisis is to seize the opportunity to reaffirm the vital role libraries play in community restoration and building. We firmly believe that the future of libraries and equity depends on what we do now as a profession. Libraries are experiencing a paradigm shift, from a focus on sharing materials to prioritizing building relationships and collaborating with stakeholders to work toward shared outcomes. We can maximize this critical moment to rebuild connections, center the community, and embody the public's imagination.

The following document provides a road map for the future of New York libraries, reflecting our shared value and vision of the future. Let the journey begin!

**Regents Advisory Council on Libraries**

# Our Values

As part of the Regents Advisory Council on Libraries Vision 2022 process, multiple interviews were held with stakeholders, focus groups, and surveys collecting data from hundreds of libraries around the state.

Academic, public, school, and special libraries took part in the process, revealing the shared values of New York's library community, which inform our vision of the future. These values are the basis for the strategic priorities in our Vision framework, guiding both internal and external decision-making.

Our shared values include:

- Universal Access
- Equity for All
- Resilient Communities
- Passionate Advocates
- Innovation Engines

## Universal Access

All New Yorkers have a right to excellent library service. Libraries play an essential role in ensuring all New Yorkers have the information they need to participate in public life fully. New York libraries believe the public's right to freely access a wide range of resources and services is essential for informed decision-making, lifelong learning, and self-actualization. To support universal access, we champion intellectual freedom and the right for people of all ages to read freely. Information literacy requires critical thinking skills, honed by reading and interacting with multiple viewpoints, evaluating and identifying authoritative sources, and encouraging lively debate and conversation.

The 21st century requires navigating the digital terrain, and digital equity is critical for an informed populace. New York libraries play an active role in ensuring people can connect to the Internet, are comfortable using technology in their everyday lives, and understand how to evaluate and contribute content. Many people affected by the digital divide face other structural obstacles, limiting their ability to participate in civic life, enjoy remote work and learning, or access content. The library is the sole point of connection for some communities -- allowing people to work remotely, develop content representing diverse views, take classes, be active citizens, and communicate with loved ones.

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## Equity for All

New York benefits from having one of the most diverse populations in the country. Multiple languages and ethnicities contribute to a vibrant, dynamic population that requires flexible, innovative libraries able to meet the needs of patrons from around the globe. Our libraries champion equity, diversity, and inclusion and model how to incorporate it by having collections, staffing, programming, and leadership reflect our communities. We foster brave environments where community members may convene authentic conversations around racial and social justice and advocate for the needs of our communities.

Libraries serve their communities in many ways. Students are connected to resources to ensure their success, and first-generation college students benefit from personalized reference services. People experiencing unemployment or underemployment or returning to the workforce benefit from workforce development services, including assistance in finding, preparing for, and securing jobs or embarking on a new career. Adult learners can become better readers and obtain high-school equivalency certification through adult literacy classes, enabling them to apply for more competitive jobs. Recent arrivals attend English Language Learning classes to acclimate to their new home, make friends, build new networks, and navigate daily life. Incarcerated patrons benefit from library services at their facilities. For those returning from incarceration, libraries may be the first step to connecting with resources to facilitate the transition to life outside of an institution.

## Resilient Communities

The success of libraries is inextricably bound to the success and growth of our communities. Libraries are part of a sustainable ecosystem, requiring active participation in and with their communities. Libraries embrace respectful, collaborative partnerships. We work with other stakeholders and community members to maximize our impact and leverage economies of scale to benefit the public good. We understand the link between community health, social wellbeing, and resilient communities and strive to create spaces for people of all walks of life to converge, exchange ideas, and become informed. Our libraries' mission, vision, and strategic directions align with our communities' goals and aspirations.

## Passionate Advocates

As trusted institutions, libraries advocate for the public good through intellectual freedom, transparency, net neutrality, digital justice and inclusion, and creating equitable, inclusive organizations that welcome all experiences, talents, and perspectives. Our profession emphasizes data-informed decision making. Library workers use their expertise in aggregating and analyzing data to benefit our patrons, organizations, communities, and stakeholders. We hold ourselves accountable by operating with transparency. We appreciate the investment and value the trust communities place in libraries.

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## Innovation Engines

Libraries spark curiosity, excite learners, and cross-pollinate innovation across sectors and industries. By strategically collaborating with stakeholders, libraries continuously evolve -- learning, growing, and recalibrating services to support their communities

We're courageous. We take risks and learn from our mistakes. We leverage our expertise to help people compete in a global marketplace by providing space, tools, and resources to help them innovate and succeed, ensuring our communities have a vibrant economic base.



# Our Vision

How can libraries help communities navigate a landscape where the social, environmental, and political tectonic plates are constantly shifting?

That's the conundrum the Regents Advisory Council on Libraries has been exploring. To help chart a way forward, the RAC gathered information from hundreds of stakeholders.

After distilling multiple conversations, surveys, and written feedback, we created the following framework.



# Libraries Advance the Public Good

New York's libraries are part of the state's critical infrastructure. They ensure every New Yorker has reliable, equitable access to crucial information, services, and lifelong learning and connection opportunities. As disinvestment in critical social infrastructure has weakened faith in institutions and government, libraries have stepped up to meet the needs of New Yorkers.

The stress of responding to these needs without additional funding for services places libraries in a precarious environment. It creates a substantial obstacle to successfully and effectively serving and supporting communities.

In response to this challenge, the Regents Advisory Council on Libraries has established the following framework identifying strategic priorities and collaborative action to help libraries devote necessary resources to ensure community resilience during an uncertain and tumultuous time.

## Strategic Priorities

- Libraries Ensure All New Yorkers Have Access to Information & the Internet
- Libraries Advance Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging
- Libraries Are Essential to the Social Wellbeing of Communities

# Strategic Priority 1: Libraries Ensure All New Yorkers Have Access to Information & the Internet

New York libraries are dedicated to universal access, based on the idea that society benefits when everyone has an equal opportunity to leverage the power of the Internet. By focusing on solutions and working in intentional partnership with our communities, libraries can help New York achieve its vision of digital equity. Closing digital equity gaps in New York will require the coordination, cooperation, and intentional capacity-building of the many organizations working to support digital inclusion.

To support statewide digital equity efforts, libraries may employ the following strategies:

- Promoting information fluency for all New Yorkers by providing services that address information literacy challenges.
- Protecting the privacy and digital security of library users and community members, by providing secure networks and devices for public use within library spaces and by educating the public about digital security threats and ways to protect individual privacy online, both in the library and at home or work.
- Ensuring digital tools are fully accessible and usable for all users, and that vendor contracts ensure and protect the privacy of library users.
- Identifying and developing solutions to digital inequity at a societal level to ensure ubiquitous, high-speed, wired, and wireless internet access for all New Yorkers.
- Building, maintaining, and supporting digital equity ecosystems across community sectors.
- Developing and employing digital inclusion strategies that address the intersectional conditions contributing to digital inequity.

# Strategic Priority 2: Libraries Advance Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging

Libraries work toward equity for all by making a material difference in the lives of people who have been denied power and opportunity based on race, gender, sexuality, national origin, spoken language, or disability. We advance and model socioeconomic and racial equity policies and practices.

New York libraries may advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging using the following strategies:

- Advancing the State Education Department's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Framework.
- Promoting intellectual freedom by curating diverse library collections and public programs and preserving access to extensive community repositories.
- Recognizing, acknowledging, and eliminating systemic barriers to library services, including those within the library profession and governance structure.
- Centering justice by identifying, sharing, and promoting resources and opportunities that restore dignity, acknowledge past harm, and celebrate diversity.
- Resisting surveillance technologies and corporate control of core library services to protect the interests of the public.
- Prioritizing diversity in the library profession, ensuring that library staff, administration, trustees, Friends, and volunteers reflect their communities.
- Investing in scholarships to attract diverse students to the profession.
- Eliminating systemic barriers to hiring and retaining talented staff with a variety of lived experiences.
- Working with vendors committed to upholding diversity, equity, and inclusion principles.

# Strategic Priority 3: Libraries Are Essential to the Social Wellbeing of Communities

As community anchors, libraries strengthen civic relationships and build social cohesion by creating a shared space, convening and hosting critical conversations, and providing resources and programs to inform, create, entertain, and weave broad social networks. We will continue to build collaborative relationships to develop thriving, resilient, and responsive communities.

To achieve this vision, libraries may use the following strategies:

- Incorporating historically marginalized perspectives into planning, processes, narratives, and decision-making about what is best for a community.
- Building community relationships and taking deliberate action to achieve shared or co-created objectives.
- Mapping the connections of knowledge, talents, resources, and aspirations among residents or groups by utilizing Asset Based Community Development.
- Securing sustainable funding for libraries to adapt and grow with their communities.
- Advocating for all New Yorkers to have access to certified librarians in their communities and schools.
- Providing library trustees with education and resources to help them best serve the interests of their institutions and communities, now and into the future.
- Planning for and responding to disasters and crises, including climate change, mass incarceration, public health emergencies, and widespread disinformation, and ensuring the continuity of library services when communities most need them.
- Preserving library materials and the cultural history of communities.
- Constructing, renovating, and maintaining sustainable, accessible library buildings that welcome the entire community.

# New York's Libraries

When it comes to libraries, New York is a treasure trove. More than 7,000 libraries provide New Yorkers with educational, informational, and recreational resources. There are three types of library systems that coordinate to meet the needs of New Yorkers: public library systems, reference and research library resources systems, and school library systems. Each system serves specific types of libraries, as outlined below:

Public Library Systems support the 757 public libraries, with 1,070 outlets throughout the state. Each of the 23 public library systems serves a specific geographic region, coordinating interlibrary loan, professional development, and outreach services –including support for libraries in correctional facilities throughout the state. Each system has a central (or co-central) library to provide reference and information services to patrons throughout the state.

The nine regional Reference and Research Library Resources Systems include libraries in public and private colleges and universities, special libraries, public libraries, public library systems, and school library systems. These systems support 286 degree-granting higher education institutions. They provide a range of professional development and serve as a bridge between the different types of libraries in New York.

New York has 40 School Library Systems that work with 4,236 school libraries in 731 school districts and 1,656 nonpublic schools to provide professional development, share resources, and provide exemplary services to students throughout the state. As liaisons to the State Education Department, school library systems support school librarians as co-educational partners with teachers to ensure that all students develop the information literacy skills needed to be active, informed citizens and lead successful lives.

Each system supports different types of libraries throughout the state:

- **Academic Libraries** support the instructional and research needs of students, faculty, and administration at colleges and universities. While access to these libraries requires attendance at the attached institution, the collections include government documents that the public may access. Academic libraries often have archives, which collect, preserve, organize, describe, and share original material and special collections for research. Archives conserve history while providing transparency and accessibility to significant collections.
- **Public Libraries** provide programs, services, and resources for the public. Designated “the people’s university” in 1938 by Alvin Johnson, public libraries are usually funded by and support the communities they serve through taxes, grants, and donations. Residents can obtain a library card at no additional cost, gaining access to a wide range of materials, programs, meeting space, professional reference and research services, workforce development support, and bridging the digital divide through the internet and computers.
- **School Libraries** provide access to resources for public or private school students, teachers, school administrators, and parents. These resources include materials supporting the educational curriculum, computers, and access to the internet to support digital equity, train students in information and digital literacy, spark curiosity, develop a love of lifelong learning, and prepare students for college and careers.

- **Special Libraries** curate collections and materials to support specific interests or fields of study and may support institutions such as hospitals, museums, the military, law practices, professional associations, and historical sites. These libraries provide materials and resources to support a specific focus of the organization. Special libraries may have archives, which include a wide range of material, including but not limited to governmental records, maps, audio recordings, electronic documents, art, films, and photographs.

## Moving Forward

The Regents Advisory Council shares this framework as a springboard for the future. We hope everyone in the library community sees themselves in this document and uses their creativity and imagination to act on the strategic priorities which resonate with their communities. We look forward to watching New York's libraries breathe life into the Vision 2022 plan.