



WHITEHALL PUBLIC LIBRARY

2023 – 2026 STRATEGIC PLAN

100 BOROUGH PARK DRIVE
PITTSBURGH, PA 15236
WWW.WHITEHALLPUBLICLIBRARY.ORG





A Brief History

On September 6, 1961, the Whitehall Borough Council appointed a Board of Library Trustees, and funds were provided for shelving and furniture. The Friends of the Whitehall Public Library, organized in 1961, began to conduct a fund drive for new books. They raised \$20,000 for the purchase of approximately 4,000 new books.

On December 5, 1962, Beatrice Mulholland was hired as the first librarian. The Whitehall Public Library was dedicated on May 5, 1963.

Since then, the library, a member of the Allegheny County Library Association, has expanded twice.

With 50,000 items cataloged in the collection, the library also has access to thousands of electronic books as well as other digital content. We annually welcome thousands through our doors and host hundreds of programs for all ages.

In 2019, WPL was one of two finalists for Library Journal's esteemed **Best Small Library in America** award, noted primarily for its progressive work around building bridges between newly resettled refugees and long-term resident patrons.

And in 2022, WPL officially became a fine free library in response to addressing mitigating potential barriers to library use.



Our Mission

Whitehall Public Library is the community resource for education, exploration, enrichment, and enjoyment.







Our Vision

The Whitehall Public Library will be an invaluable resource for every community member.



Our Beliefs and Values



Accessibility

We believe that our library facilities, resources, and programs must be physically accessible to all, as well as accessible to library users in the virtual environment (whenever possible).



Accountability

We believe that we must be accountable to the Whitehall community for the services that we provide.



Creativity & Innovation

We value excellence and support creative ideas and innovative solutions in our services, programs, and collections.



Inclusivity & Welcome

We recognize that diversity involves including, understanding, and valuing differences in individual and group characteristics such as race, religion, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, socioeconomic status, age, disability status, and sexual orientation.



Information & Literacy

We believe in providing resources and services that contribute to life-long learning and nurture intellectual curiosity for people of all ages.

Our Beliefs and Values



Intellectual Freedom

We believe in the basic principles of intellectual freedom, the open exchange of information, and the importance of an informed and literate community.



Life-Long Learning

We believe that a free public library promotes education and is essential to the public good.



Partnerships

We believe in the power of collaboration and pledge to be good community partners, particularly with respect to the Borough, the Baldwin-Whitehall School District, and Allegheny County Library Association member libraries.



Respect & Dignity

We believe that all of our library patrons have the right to privacy, confidentiality, and intellectual freedom and pledge to treat everyone equally.



Safe Environment

We believe in providing a safe and positive environment that provides our patrons and staff with opportunities to continue to grow and develop.

Our Strategic Direction: 2023–2026

In developing this strategic plan which serves as the framework and guide for the library's areas of focus, the Library Board of Directors and its Strategic Planning Committee prioritized the inclusion of diverse stakeholder voices throughout the entire process. The WPL Board, along with Library Staff and Friends, held conversations beginning in 2021 in order to derive community-driven areas of focus and their associated goals to direct the library's future. We then designed a data collection strategy that included the following initiatives:

WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT LIVING IN WHITEHALL?



INTERNAL SWOT ANALYSES

Two detailed and separate SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analyses were conducted with both library staff members as well as the WPL Board. We felt that starting with these internal exercises would provide necessary structure and direction to much of the remaining data collection efforts.

COMMUNITY SURVEY

Next, we designed a community survey open to Whitehall residents as well as WPL patrons from neighboring communities. Beginning with the key themes generated from the SWOT analyses as a framework for our approach, the survey was iteratively designed in committee and then pilot-tested and revised before distribution. There were three sections of the survey:

- Living in Whitehall;
- Whitehall Public Library;
- Key Demographics.

905

Survey Takers

77%

Whitehall Residents

23%

Non-Residents

LIVING IN WHITEHALL

We asked questions to learn more about how people live, what services they utilize, and what they like about living in the Borough as well as what they wish were different. As the library is situated within our community, we felt that we first had to know a bit more about our neighbors before we could effectively plan a strategic direction for our institution.

WHITEHALL PUBLIC LIBRARY

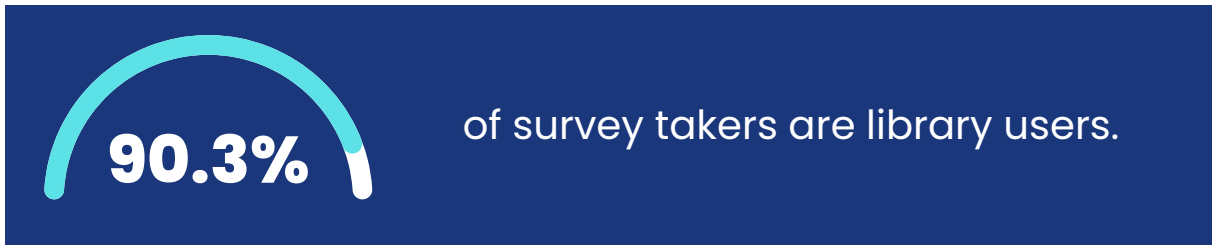
We then asked respondents about their experiences with library programs and services; for those who have not visited the library, we explored the reasons why.

KEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Lastly, we collected demographic information including age, gender, race/ethnicity, how long they have lived in Whitehall (if applicable), level of education, and household size.

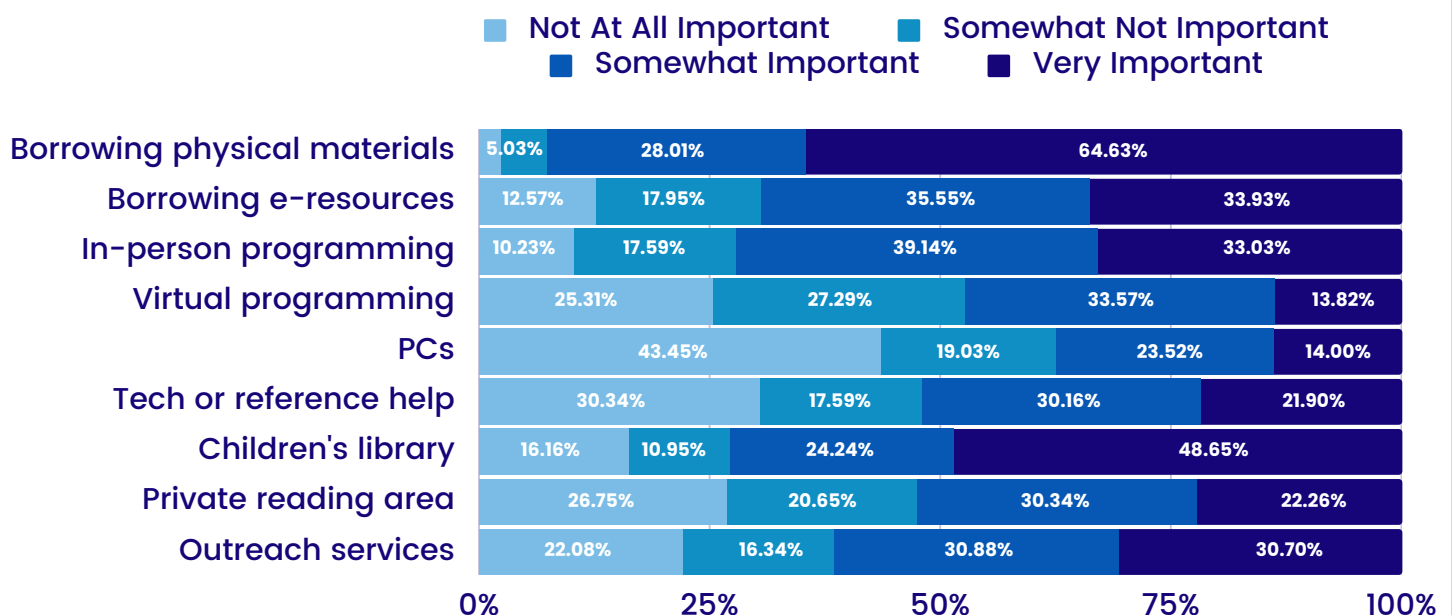
Our Strategic Direction: 2023–2026

Upon administering the survey in February 2022, 905 individuals responded either via the online survey or the paper version provided both in the library and distributed to local senior residences.



The Strategic Planning Committee conducted the initial quantitative analysis and presentation of the quantitative data from the survey. The Board also partnered with doctoral students in Duquesne University's School of Education to perform the qualitative analysis on the open-ended survey results. This approach allowed not only for an outsider's perspective thus minimizing potential bias in the analysis, but also for skilled support for the time-consuming undertaking of thematic analysis.

HOW IMPORTANT ARE THE FOLLOWING LIBRARY SERVICES TO YOU AND YOUR FAMILY?

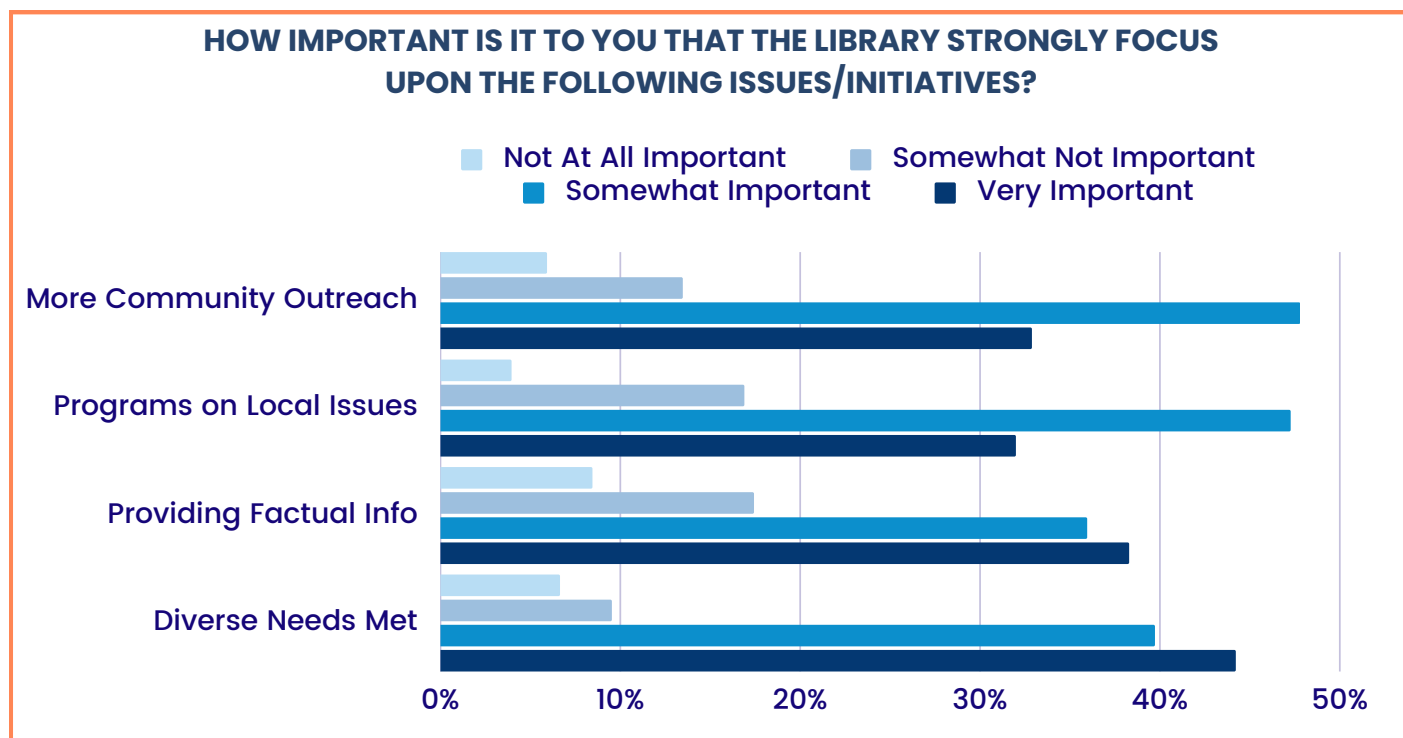


Our Strategic Direction: 2023–2026



FOCUS GROUPS

Lastly, to expand upon the data collected via the survey, we conducted a variety of focus groups at the library as well as in the community in order to have meaningful conversations with our stakeholders. We held focus groups with parents and caregivers, immigrant/refugee youth and adults, and a general community focus group. Feedback collected during these focus groups served as additional context and deeper understanding of both the SWOT analyses and survey results.



In terms of translating the data and analyses into a meaningful and forward-thinking strategic plan, the Board grounded our approach in the idea that this was our opportunity to really dream and reimagine what the public library is or might be for our patrons and community-at-large. We allowed ourselves space to think of the library as something more than a collection of books, and what resulted from those conversations and planning efforts was an articulation of what the library represents to our patrons and neighbors. In this sense, the following plan outlines how we envision and benchmark the WPL as **People**, **Physical Space**, **Community Connector**, and **Champion of Literacy and Reading**.



We Envision...

1

the Library as
People

2

the Library as
Physical Space

3

the Library as
Community Connector

4

the Library as
Champion of Reading & Literacy



1

the Library as People.

We recognize that our treasured institution exists to serve our patrons – through a well-curated collection, engaging programming, modern and relevant support services, and safe, inclusive spaces. The decisions surrounding those factors are all guided by the input and efforts of our staff and volunteers.

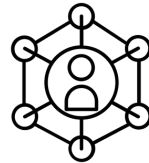
We are rethinking how we engage with our stakeholders. To that end, our staff and volunteers must be knowledgeable of the local demographic make-up and unique needs of our neighbors. They must also have the necessary tools and support to tackle the associated challenges of reimagining what a public library can and should be.

The WPL is committed to intentional engagement with our stakeholders as it is people– patrons, staff, and volunteers – that make us the community resource for education, exploration, enrichment and enjoyment.

Objectives



Seek opportunities to solicit feedback from stakeholders through a variety of formats and channels.



Develop a plan to guide outreach and communication with key constituent groups as well as the community at large.



Evaluate the knowledge and skill gaps in the Board of Directors and staff in order to identify potential training or other professional development opportunities.



Explore best practices to develop recruitment processes for staff and volunteers that diversify the applicant pool in order to more closely reflect that community in which we operate.



Design an internal process to assess employee satisfaction and create a culture in which staff feel encouraged to share ideas for better library service and workplace environment.

Survey Says...

Staff is fantastic! When my borough built a library closer to my home, I still go to WPL.

The library staff is wonderful. They go out of their way to assist, whether it be on phone, zoom, or in person.

Staff members are always pleasant, helpful and efficient.



We Envision...

2

the Library as Physical Space.

We envision the public library as a place in which all who walk through our doors are met with opportunities for education, exploration, enrichment, and enjoyment. We provide free access to information, resources, and experiences to our patrons in a respectful, safe, and welcoming environment.

The WPL is committed to maintaining an inclusive facility through its diverse collections and programming. We also strive to position ourselves in the community as a “third-place destination” for all ages and abilities.

Objectives



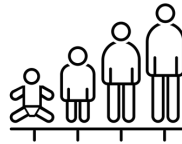
Continue to examine barriers to library access, whether real or perceived, and provide mitigations when possible.



Ensure that WPL collections, programs, technology, and services are available, relevant, and welcoming.



Audit and refine WPL collections to reflect the varied needs and interests of patrons.



Offer a variety of programs designed to appeal to a wide range of participants.



Assess the library's physical footprint to identify ways that it might be designed and organized to better meet patron needs.

Survey Says...

Our library is outstanding and offers so many services for people of all ages!

The library and its innovative programming is one of my favorite things about living in Whitehall.

We ABSOLUTELY love the children's library and ALL the programs they offer!!



We Envision...

3

the Library as Community Connector.

The WPL strives to create opportunities to connect community members to information and each other, both within the library and beyond our physical walls, acting as a liaison through hosting programs, classes, social engagement, and other opportunities to come together in new and creative ways.

The WPL is committed to serve as a community connector and a resource hub by partnering with local schools, non-profits, businesses, and other organizations. We aspire to foster creative approaches to invest in new programs, facilities, and initiatives that best meet the ever-changing needs of the community.

Objectives



Provide creative and engaging social events, classes, and programs that connect patrons with their community and each other.



Regularly engage with stakeholders, both formally and informally, to assess and review needs and concerns in order to better understand the community.



Seek ways to respond to community concerns and trends by growing and expanding partnerships with local organizations and nonprofits.



Adapt to the changing needs of the residents/patrons and work towards providing resources to help with those needs.



Remain vigilant in promoting access to trusted information, as well as work to combat misinformation.



Champion visionary thinking by welcoming and encouraging the sharing of novel ideas.

Survey Says...

“ Although I don't live in Whitehall Borough anymore, I love coming to the library to look for jobs. ”

“ Outstanding job in outreach services and with developing new programs/offerings for a wide range of residents and community classrooms. ”

“ I enjoy that the library focuses on our community and keeps up with the changing needs. ”



4

the Library as Champion of Reading & Literacy.

We promote and celebrate the number one reason people use libraries as well as the first article in the American Library Association's Bill of Rights, namely that "Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves."

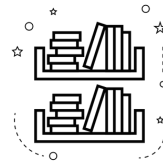
Research reflects that children who use libraries achieve higher early reading success. However, there is a concerning trend that children are reading less for pleasure; a concern that is exacerbated by pandemic-related losses. Children and youth experienced significant learning loss over the course of the pandemic.

The WPL is committed to champion reading and literacy for patrons of all ages through its collections, programming, and partnerships.

Objectives



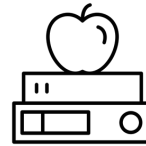
Promote a culture of literacy and the benefits of reading for all ages through a variety of library programs that celebrate books, authors, and reading initiatives.



Connect books and readers in creative and unexpected ways.



Support emerging readers in order to enhance school readiness and cultivate a life-long love of reading.



Maintain and grow efforts to connect library services to students and educators.



Enhance marketing efforts to improve discoverability to print and electronic collections.

Survey Says...

“ With the help of the librarians, I can always find something interesting to read. ”

“ Love the method of book requests and notification of availability. The weekly rundown is wonderful. ”

“ I appreciate free children's books that I have shared in the little libraries at a local school. ”



The WPL understands that the way communities utilize their libraries is ever-changing, and that libraries in turn must remain responsive to those needs and changes. We are committed and excited as we progress towards realizing the vision and associated goals laid out in this plan. And we look forward to further solidifying our mission as the community resource for education, exploration, enrichment and enjoyment.

Acknowledgements

We extend our sincere thanks and acknowledgment to so many for their collective leadership, guidance and feedback throughout this plan's development process. We especially thank the Library Board of Directors, the Library Director and Staff, the Friends of the Library, members of Whitehall Borough Council and our contributing community partners.

WPL BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Marilyn Kail (*President*)
- Jason Holliday (*Vice President*)
- Elizabeth Tuttle* (*Secretary*)
- Sandyha Adikari* (*Treasurer*)
- Mary Rose Chasler
- Christy Kuehn,* Ph. D.
- Allison Brooks, Ph. D.

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- Paula Kelly (*Library Director*)
- Tara Abbott, Ph. D. (*Strategic Planning Committee President*)
- Sarah Scott (*Digital Communications & Reference Librarian*)
- Board Members Denoted Above (*)

FRIENDS OF THE WPL

- Barbara Duff (*President*)
- Judy Grattan (*Vice President*)
- Donna Goedert (*Secretary*)
- Robert McKown (*Treasurer*)
- Susan Cooley
- Jan Christensen

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

- Baldwin-Whitehall School District
- Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh
- Doctoral students from Duquesne University School of Education
- Himalayan Foundation
- South Hills Interfaith Movement

To learn more about the Whitehall Public Library, please visit our website: www.whitehallpubliclibrary.org



100 Borough Park Drive

Whitehall
Public Library

Whitehall
Community
Room

LOVE YOUR LIBRARY
Celebration
Day!
September 21, 2023
10am - 4pm

Save the date!

Join us as we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Library Love Day Support!

• Family Literacy

• Lifelong Learning

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