

**CORNWALL
PUBLIC LIBRARY**



**BIBLIOTHÈQUE
PUBLIQUE DE
CORNWALL**

2021 - 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN

CORNWALL PUBLIC LIBRARY

OCTOBER 2021

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MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR AND CEO

Strategic planning provides an opportunity to reflect on the past, celebrate successes, and look ahead to the future. In 2020, after a period of organizational growth and change, including navigation of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Cornwall Public Library's Board of Directors began the process of developing a new strategic plan.

Cornwall Public Library's Board consists of a passionate, community-driven group of volunteers, with a diverse set of talents and abilities. Appointed by the City of Cornwall, it is our responsibility to ensure strong governance and stewardship of the library.

From the outset, our Board believed it was essential to gather input directly from our stakeholders. It was important that our new strategic plan respond to the current environment and reflect the needs of our patrons and community. To ensure that we had a comprehensive understanding of our stakeholders' views, we engaged patrons, staff, partners, and community members from across the region. We asked difficult questions and listened deeply. Our goal was to develop a five-year strategic plan that was based on meaningful engagement, setting the foundation for a visionary and sustainable future.

As part of the process, we undertook an analysis of the environment in which we operate. We assessed the Cornwall Public Library's current capacities, opportunities, and aspirations for growth. From this, we came together to map out four new strategic directions for the next five years.

We are deeply proud of our organization's successes and look forward to a future full of potential—where Cornwall Public Library continues to provide residents with reliable access to collections, resources, and programs in a welcoming and inclusive space. By doing so, our organization will continue to build on its reputable and strong profile within the community.

We extend our gratitude to everyone who took the time to share their ideas with us. Together, we will continue in our mission to provide residents with excellent collections, spaces and experiences to support their reading, learning and leisure needs and be a leader in developing essential literacy skills and providing lifelong learning opportunities for the community in a variety of contemporary physical and digital environments that are welcoming, dynamic and inclusive.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Jarvis, Board Chair

Helen McCutcheon, CEO

OUR FOUNDATION

Mission

To empower our community with access to knowledge, to unique experiences, and to welcoming and inclusive spaces.

Vision

Our vision is to provide Cornwall residents with a vibrant space that inspires community engagement, social interaction, and cultural expression as part of a lifelong journey of discovery, learning and belonging.



A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As a gateway to learning, information, and connection, serving the residents of Cornwall since 1895, the Cornwall Public Library plays a fundamental role in the community. In addition to its excellent collection and selection of resources, the library offers an average of 600 programs per year for children, youth, teens, adults and educators, and seniors. With the support of creative partnerships, collaboration, and a team of knowledgeable and helpful staff, these programs and services are uniquely developed and delivered to respond to community need.

With significant growth and improvement in technological infrastructure, the development of new virtual program offerings, and continued enhancements to the library's well-recognized and valued facility, Cornwall Public Library's future is bright and full of exciting potential.

From January 2021 to May 2021, Cornwall Public Library engaged Laridae, a leading management consulting firm, to guide the Board of Directors through a strategic planning process, resulting in the development of a five-year strategic plan.

The strategic planning approach, based on best practice for non-profit organizations, supported the Board of Directors as they championed the planning and provided oversight into the development of the final strategy.

A.1. Planning Process

The planning process involved a thoughtful and thorough approach to stakeholder engagement. Before making any decisions, the Board of Directors created a plan to ensure Cornwall Public Library's community of stakeholders would be heard. In doing so, Cornwall Public Library established a strategic plan with a solid base, informed by experience, evidence, and the broadest-held perceptions of the individuals who interact with the organization on a regular basis—as patrons, partner and community organizations, and as members of the communities Cornwall Public Library serves.

Engagement strategies to solicit input included focus groups and an online survey. Throughout the engagement phase, from Feb. 16 – Mar. 5, 2021, feedback was gathered from **290 stakeholders**, including:

- **255** respondents to the online survey
- **28** focus group participants
- **7** key informant interview participants

The online survey, focus groups, and key informant interviews had two main purposes:

- **To engage** internal and external stakeholders by gathering input, ideas, and suggestions; and by including them in the strategic planning process directly and in a meaningful way.
- **To educate** stakeholders about the work of Cornwall Public Library and generally promote the work of the organization, as a positive legacy of the planning process.

The feedback shared by stakeholders demonstrated their commitment to seeing Cornwall Public Library grow and improve, and their dedication to and appreciation for the services and programs provided. The themes that emerged throughout the stakeholder engagement process helped guide the Board of Directors’ thinking leading up to and during the strategic planning retreat on April 20 and 22, 2021.

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- “Un endroit formidable et bien connue. Elle est belle notre bibliothèque!” – Focus Group Participant
 - “It feels like a professional space that gives us all confidence as a community.” – Key Informant Interview Participant
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Cornwall Public Library identified and considered the strategic issues, data, financial picture, and overall external environmental landscape through a series of facilitated discussions. They mapped the key issues, opportunities, and challenges. The retreat culminated in unanimous agreement on four strategic directions.

B. OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

The Cornwall Public Library is focused on continuing to serve the community and provide access to valuable resources and a welcoming space. At the core of these strategic directions is our commitment to strengthen the community of Cornwall and provide residents with inclusive spaces for the enjoyment of learning and education, social interaction, and community engagement.

Cornwall Public Library is committing to a five-year strategic plan. As such, the directions are broad and oriented to the future. This allows the organization to respond and adapt as circumstances change over the years. The directions offer a framework for the development of internal, annual operational plans with measurable goals and objectives. These operational plans, developed by the Cornwall Public Library on an annual basis, will action the strategic directions.

In direct response to what we heard from our community of stakeholders, in addition to the internal and external considerations that shaped the planning process, the following are our four directions:

- 1. Meaningful Partnerships**
- 2. Exceptional Service, Space and Experience**
- 3. Strong Communications and Visibility**
- 4. Operational Excellence**

Context for Planning

The Cornwall Public Library has a long and fruitful history of serving the community. The library's strong reputation and profile has been shaped by many successful partnerships, events, programs, and services that have led to meaningful community impact over the years. Partnerships with the Canadian Mental Health Association, Transition Cornwall, Eastern Ontario Health Unit (EOHU), Tri-County Literacy and the Alzheimer Society of Cornwall and District and the joint creation of Memory Activity Kits (MAK) are some examples that provide a glimpse into our collaborative undertakings.

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic led to a restructuring of services and programs at the Cornwall Public Library to ensure the safety of patrons, staff, and the community. Our team of dedicated staff demonstrated flexibility and adaptability in the face of this uncertainty. The impacts of the pandemic have provided an additional dimension that is important to recognize within the context of strategic planning. In particular, social distancing and isolation have influenced the needs and service requirements of the community, and revealed a heightened need for social connection and interaction moving forward.

The library's well-established foundation and the recent experience of the pandemic both naturally shaped the strategic discussions and decisions regarding the Cornwall Public Library's future. The following directions and commitments were developed based on the agreement that the current environment—though challenging—presents an opportunity for the library to leverage its long-standing history of diverse partnerships to support the community through its post-pandemic recovery.

1. Meaningful Partnerships

We believe that, as an organization, we must have strong, mutually beneficial partnerships to make a meaningful impact in our community. In the coming years, we will approach relationship building with intention, while opening the door to new relationships that may support us in addressing gaps in service delivery and in responding to the evolving needs across our community. We will actively

engage in conversations with our partners with the goal of developing creative solutions, reaching broader audiences, and fostering community engagement.

The library has a history of forming many diverse and unique partnerships, and we appreciate that it is our community that makes us strong. As we pursue new partnerships and develop joint programs, resources, and learning opportunities for the residents of Cornwall, our approach will focus on leveraging each other's strengths and taking steps to avoid duplication of existing work. Through collaboration, we will ensure the diverse and evolving needs of our community are met.

Over the next five years, we commit to *Meaningful Partnerships* through:

- **Thoughtful Planning:** Investing time and resources to identify new partners, and regularly evaluating current collaborative partnerships that will support the Cornwall Public Library in addressing service and program gaps.
- **Diverse Representation:** Ensuring that the groups, businesses, industry partners, and community agencies we partner with are representative of our community and its diverse backgrounds and perspectives, and that they will support us in delivering equal and accessible services to our patrons.
- **Reciprocal Relationships:** Seeking partnerships that not only benefit the library and our patrons, but that also offer mutual benefit and support our partners in achieving their missions and mandates.
- **Program Development:** Creating joint programs, resources, and opportunities that foster community engagement and the development of a vibrant and active centre for connectivity and collaboration.
- **Social, Financial and Environmental Responsibility:** Intentionally pursuing partnerships that align with the City of Cornwall's strategic directions and support solutions to broader issues that impact our environment (i.e., climate change) and contribute to a healthier community and planet.

Community Connection: Fostering opportunities through partnership that facilitate community connection and create space for people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds to interact socially and professionally.

2. Exceptional Service, Space and Experience

We take pride in delivering knowledgeable and supportive customer service to each person that comes through our doors. As we move forward, we intend to not only maintain but also enhance our customer service, with a focus on ensuring professionalism, building research capacity, and supporting accessibility, while remaining responsive to the needs of our community. We commit to developing new processes and resources that will improve the orientation and navigation of the library, enhance the overall experience for patrons, and foster interest in learning, research, and skills development.

By seeking opportunities to elevate our service offerings and expand our resources and technology, we will be better positioned to empower individuals on their learning journey and to offer valuable

guidance as they seek out information. In addition to supporting the learning and research needs of our patrons, we see an opportunity for Cornwall Public Library to further define its service offerings for local businesses, **business** professionals, service organizations, newcomers of all ages, and the broader community. We will leverage our space and resources to create a professional, collaborative environment, contributing towards a stronger and more vibrant community.

Over the next five years, we commit to *Exceptional Service, Space and Experience* through:

- **Library Ambassadors:** Developing in-person and virtual orientation processes to support current and new patrons as they navigate the space, collection, resources, and programs available to them.
- **Resource Expansion:** Focusing on environmental sustainability and leveraging an increased interest in a sharing economy by exploring opportunities to expand the “Library of Things.”
- **Academic and Business Focus:** Providing enhanced services, additional equipment, and access to technology, co-working space, and resources to help local business professionals and Cornwall’s student population meet their academic and business goals.
- **Accessibility:** Increasing our understanding of the barriers and challenges that exist for visitors to the library and exploring ways to improve accessibility, inclusion, and patron satisfaction, such as re-locating resources and creating more accessible areas for browsing the collection, outside of the stacks.
- **Skills Development:** Pursuing opportunities to develop complimentary online resource platforms that address skills gaps and support career advancement and professional development for the residents of Cornwall.
- **Database Research:** Establishing new ways of supporting patrons with their research needs, while ensuring library staff are equipped with the training and knowledge to teach and offer assistance to patrons with database research.

3. Strong Communications and Visibility

At Cornwall Public Library, we provide access to a broad range of collections, resources, programs, technology, and tools—challenging the perception that libraries exist only as a book repository. Recognizing the importance of clear, consistent communication to keep the community aware and up to date on everything we have to offer, we commit to effectively promoting each of our unique services and programs. By exploring opportunities for cross promotion and leveraging our website, virtual front door, and social media channels, we will increase our visibility in the community, build on our strong reputation, and enhance our profile as the go-to place for individuals of all ages.

We understand that our responsibility goes well beyond providing access to traditional books. A public library plays an important role in the community—we foster togetherness, create a sense of belonging, and build connection among the residents of Cornwall. Keeping this role in mind, our approach to stakeholder communications will be rooted in these foundational values and principles.

Over the next five years, we commit to *Strong Communications and Visibility* through:

- **Public Engagement:** Designing and implementing a public communication plan that effectively promotes the wide range of services, supports, and resources available at the Cornwall Public Library. Improving communications and information sharing with our stakeholders will enhance their understanding of who we are, what we do, and how to access our services, in addition to broadening our reach and engagement with our community.
- **Joint Promotion:** Actively seeking out cross-promotional and referral opportunities with community partners, while exploring collective alignment and leveraging our strengths for the benefit of the community.
- **Accessibility:** Increasing our understanding of the barriers that limit access to services and programs and exploring ways to increase accessibility, such as leveraging technology and virtual service delivery, simplifying navigation between services, and collaborating to provide greater convenience for our patrons.
- **Community Recovery:** Recognizing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the health and well-being of the residents of Cornwall, developing a strategy to gradually re-engage patrons and community members post-pandemic and support the community in its recovery.
- **Awareness and Social Media:** Continuing to showcase the library and its website and increasing its visibility by enhancing the organization’s presence on social media and exploring opportunities to strengthen awareness and branding and attract new patrons. Positioning the library as a safe and welcoming environment and a popular destination for reading, learning, research, leisure, and social interaction.

4. Operational Excellence

An agile and sustainable organization relies on strong internal communication, efficient systems and processes, and effective human resources and leadership. As Cornwall Public Library continues to evolve in response to the community’s needs, focusing on these elements will position the library for continued success.

We recognize that the operations of the library are driven by our dedicated staff and management team, with guidance from a dedicated Board of Directors. We commit to investing in our team to support mentorship, professional development, and effective recruitment—elements that will ultimately support the library in delivering enhanced, professional services to our patrons. We will prioritize internal communication, with the goal of empowering staff with access to information that will support them in doing their jobs even better. By focusing on these organizational areas, we will ensure the library is equipped and well-positioned to manage the changes that will impact our work in the coming years.

Over the next five years, we commit to *Operational Excellence* through:

- **Internal Communication:** Strengthening internal communication channels and increasing awareness of programs, services, and processes on an ongoing basis; breaking down silos; and empowering staff with information and tools that will help them succeed in their roles.

- **Mentorship and Professional Development:** Creating a culture of mentorship throughout the library by providing opportunities for staff to learn from one another, share experiences, and enhance their skillsets—as a team and with patrons. Leveraging the strengths of our staff and providing regular opportunities for goal setting, education, and training.
- **Recruitment:** Approaching hiring and onboarding with intention to ensure those joining the staff team have complementary skills and knowledge and—most importantly—believe in our community values.
- **Fiscal Responsibility:** Continuing to strengthen our relationship with the City of Cornwall, while exploring potential options for revenue diversification to further support the library in maintaining a stable financial foundation and a balanced budget.
- **Succession Planning:** Ensuring the organization is equipped to manage change and gradual staff turnover by prioritizing succession planning for key positions and developing processes that will support the library’s long-term sustainability.

C. NEXT STEPS

Our newly developed strategic directions provide Cornwall Public Library with clear focus to guide the organization in the coming years. Together, as a Board of Directors, we’ve jointly recommitted to the future success of the organization and our mission and vision. Having come to the end of our strategic planning journey, we are now prepared to action the strategic priorities and champion change and progress. As we take the first steps to drive the strategy forward, the Board has committed to the following action items:

1. Communicating the strategic plan, both internally and externally;
2. Developing annual organizational goals and objectives to align and further each strategic priority;
3. Providing year-end progress updates for all stakeholders; and,
4. Seeking regular feedback as the directions are implemented and the results are known.

D. CONCLUSION

The Board of Directors is proud of all that Cornwall Public Library has accomplished to date. Through our strategic plan, we will ensure our patrons and community remain our top priority. Our new strategic directions have been designed to provide a stable framework that will anchor us as

new challenges arise and our landscape shifts over the next five years. We are committed to operating in a sustainable manner and maintaining accountability through all our initiatives.

We thank all those who took the time to contribute thoughts and feedback through our virtual engagement activities, during a particularly tumultuous year with many competing priorities. We've listened carefully and your voices have been instrumental in helping us shape a shared, exciting new future.

As we progress in fulfilling our strategic directions, the Board of Directors looks forward to sharing our accomplishments and performance with our community. We invite you to join us on this new, exciting stage of Cornwall Public Library's journey.