

# RFL STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-2028

## GOAL 1: INCREASE SERVICE ACCESS & USE

*Objective: Support literacy, education, information access, civic engagement, innovation, and creativity in our community*

**Strategies:** Increase overall use through outreach and communication, leverage digital resources, expand *Newsy* circulation and contributors, maintain excellent collection and diverse programming for a wide range of interests and ages

## GOAL 2: STRENGTHEN FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT & PLANNING

*Objective: Continue rigorous budgeting to support our facilities, collection, technology resources, and invaluable staff*

**Strategies:** develop our services and facilities to meet the needs of the community, increase fundraising, create long-term financial plans for specific grants and reserve funds, support staff wages and education, engage volunteers



**ROXBURY  
FREE LIBRARY**

## GOAL 3: BUILD COMMUNITY ALLIANCES & RESILIENCY

*Objective: Cultivate a stronger, more resilient community that celebrates local talent, skills, history and knowledge*

**Strategies:** Communicate and partner with town groups to conserve resources and efforts by volunteers, connect with other libraries to share programming, cultivate the library as a neutral “third space” to build connections and social resiliency



# Introduction

In late 2023, the RFL Board of Trustees decided that developing a strategic plan for the Library's future would be the focus for our annual retreat. Emerging out of the COVID-19 pandemic had marked some changes to library usage across the state. The Board was curious where we stood relative to other libraries of similar size and in similar communities, and if we were doing a good job at providing services. We wanted to create a plan for the future of RFL so it could readily adapt to changing needs and continue to best serve the Roxbury community.

At the time of our retreat, our community was in a state of upheaval. Tax increases and a school budget rejected by the voters of the Montpelier-Roxbury Public Schools (MRPS) district revealed the possibility that our elementary school, Roxbury Village School (RVS), would be shuttered by Fall 2024. This closure did come to pass, and the repercussions continue to impact all areas of our community. We now grapple with decisions regarding the future use of the RVS building and how it will be funded, all while families adjust to the loss of the school and the school library.

This year, in January 2025, the Vermont Secretary of State released the *VT Civic Health Index*, a document offering a look at the state's civic life. The *Index* revealed considerable strengths as well as areas for growth across six key domains: Volunteerism & Donating; Political Engagement; Community & Social Context; Cultural Access & Engagement; Media Trust & Access; and Government Trust & Access. As a small Vermont town, Roxbury is extremely fortunate to have a vibrant library that can strengthen these domains. The *Index* agrees, and spotlights public libraries as one of the organizations that offer unique support for civic health across the state:

*"Libraries should be centered in community planning efforts, understanding their critical role in providing reliable information, serving as community gathering places, and in broadening access to social services like assistance with job hunting, accessing health care, and building civic engagement."*

By developing a Strategic Plan, the RFL Trustees will place our municipal library in a strong position to continue fulfilling its mission and providing these services. Most recently, the extreme changes in our federal government have brought to the fore the importance of civic engagement, democratic processes, and the protection of free speech in an increasingly authoritarian regime. We cannot emphasize enough that the support for public libraries, a resource available to all people, is essential to our democracy.

The RFL celebrated its 90th birthday in 2024 (a very well attended birthday celebration!) We hope this Strategic Plan will serve as a launching pad for its continuation as a thriving civic resource for another 90 years.

# Conclusions

We have identified three main goals for RFL: **Increase Service Use and Access; Strengthen Financial Management and Planning; and Build Community Alliances and Resiliency.** These goals were determined using the SMART framework: all goals needed to be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-Bound. We propose some strategies to implement our goals in the next three years, and remain open to adapting strategies as needed. Most actions are not resource intensive, but will require time invested on the part of staff and the Trustees to implement. Some require a reciprocal willingness from others in order to work together. Volunteers could help where appropriate.

**We will continue offering our essential services** to our citizens, for free, in the form of entertainment, educational materials and programming, arts and culture enrichment, literacy development in our youth, access to technology (including WiFi and computers, but also through learning and technology-oriented educational programs) in a safe and welcoming environment. The town newsletter, the *Newsy*, has become an important source of information and we could expand circulation by reviewing the mailing list periodically to make sure all residents receive a copy. Small changes to our marketing/promotion of events may better inform residents of all the services we offer. We will remain receptive and adaptable to the needs of the community, especially during times of change or upheaval.

**RFL appears adequately funded for current operations,** and we will continue rigorous budgeting each year while seeking additional outside funding. Our staff is highly valued as a resource in our community, and will continue to fund their wages, as well as continuing their career development and certification, so they can continue to serve the community with excellence. We need to engage more community volunteers to assist with operations where it is helpful to staff. We need to develop robust policies and financial plans for specific grants and funds we receive, in particular our recent facilities grant.

**We can better leverage our services by creating alliances with other groups and partners in the community.**

We are in close proximity to three other libraries, and should consider collaborating with them around programming and outreach. This will require more thought, as the intention is not to consolidate, but to support and encourage each other. Scheduling, communication, and marketing will require more effort on the part of staff, but is likely to get easier with time.

Roxbury has seen a large increase in community building efforts in the last several years, and the following community organizations currently exist: Roxbury Senior Center Lunch group (a group of community elders that have lunch in Community Hall once a week), Roxbury Community Crafters (weekly low- or zero-cost crafting classes open to adults, now a federal non-profit) , Roxbury Roots (focused on local agriculture and food security, free monthly community dinners and other activities around food), the Roxbury Food

Shelf, Roxbury Rising (community group focused on youth belonging and enrichment activities), Roxbury Community Trust (a federal non-profit focused on community vitality through ownership and preservation of a local historic building), ROCOR (Roxbury Committee on Outdoor Recreation, an official committee focused on mapping active recreational resources and organizing outings for citizens), and the Village Park Committee that facilitates events in the village park. Long-standing groups include the Historical Society that manages historic town artifacts, the Volunteer Fire Department that hosts community-wide events including the Independence Day Barbeque, and the Cemetery Commission who maintain town cemeteries with volunteer help. The Congregational Church has been an invaluable partner and neighbor to the RFL, and hosts its own monthly potluck and movie nights. All these groups share a desire to create a sense of community in our town, and have a strong volunteer ethic. Since the school's closure, the after school Bridges program has emerged as a highly valued and essential program to Roxbury kids, and could be another partner to engage youth. Coordinating events and programs together with these groups would conserve effort and resources, all while celebrating the skills and talents present in our community. Collaboration with groups could help erase a sense of "territory" or competition for limited resources or attention. Good communication and a willingness to work together will be essential.

**An important part of most resilient communities are "third spaces"** (coined by Ray Oldenburg in his 1989 book *The Great Good Place*), a location where people from differing backgrounds can come together in an informal way and interact. This expansion of social interactions outside of a group that is "known" can build more social cohesion, tolerance for differences, and the structures for mutual aid and support. Third spaces can reduce loneliness and isolation and create a sense of belonging. These effects can have a positive effect on public health, as well as civic engagement and collective sense of town pride and identity. The above groups in Roxbury provide opportunities for these types of interactions, though some are more formalized or specific in focus. The Roxbury Country Store and the Post Office are two essential third spaces in Roxbury,, though there is no place to sit or linger in either so the time spent there is limited. We intend to continue cultivating the library as a third space for all Roxburians to share. One way to do this is to promote informal "community conversations" at the RFL, an initiative that was briefly started during the pandemic and was well-received at the time. Community story-telling, "coffee-house hours" or other such gatherings are additional ideas that could build on this concept of third spaces, as well as build trust in the library as a space and service that is available and open to all. Coordinating systems of communication among citizens that allows for greater connectivity and resilience during local emergencies, or to share resources, skills and mutual aid is another way RFL can continue to be a trusted information and resource hub.

**We hope the goals, objectives and strategies of implementation of the RFL Strategic Plan 2025-2028 will benefit the entire community by strengthening the six domains identified in the *VT Civic Health Index*. While we cannot address some of those domains directly, our commitment to the mission of the Roxbury Free Library will support our role as a necessary and vital civic resource in times of uncertainty and change.**



# RFL STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS AND STRATEGIES

## **Increase access and service use**

*This goal is directly connected to our mission, and our objective to improve support of literacy, education, information access, civic engagement, innovation and creativity in our community. The Library Director and staff will be primarily responsible for implementation of these strategies, with Trustee support, volunteer assistance and community collaboration where possible.*

- Maintain scheduling of approximately two programs per month on a diversity of topics, including but not limited to: educational/informational, culture and arts, current events and politics, science and technology, kids or family oriented, local history and experiences, literacy-based, and idea/skill-sharing. Specifically, develop two tech-based programs per year, and create an educational technology-use recording with a link for the RFL website by end of 2025, and include two outdoor-based programs each year. Measure success by tracking program attendance annually.
- Continue managing our collection: review and update book and digital resources, develop a physical item lending library, such as tools or recreational gear, directed by community desires/needs, and with volunteer assistance. Collection development will be in process throughout 2025-2028. Circulation will be tracked annually.
- Improve communication and outreach to the community: update all contact lists twice per year, increase total recipients of library informational materials (expand Newsy circulation, RFL email recipients, social media followers). Continue strategizing how to support residents of East Roxbury as resources allow.
- Increase patronage: directly contact inactive patrons annually, reduce barriers to obtain patronage card such as a sign up at community events and an online form to obtain a card. Monitor progress annually.
- Over the next three years, improve marketing strategies to increase use (attendance, circulation and visitation) by >5% each year. Use strategic promotion on social media and FPF through event pages, regular posts, calendar listings and an updated email newsletter design.
- Post hours of operation on RFL website calendar and town website by July 2025.

## **Strengthen financial management and planning**

*It is our responsibility to manage taxpayer and donor contributions wisely, and make the best use of state and federal grant money in order to fulfill the purpose for which it was awarded. It is the responsibility of Trustees, Director, and staff to develop a long-term financial plan and implement it together.*

- Continue rigorous annual budgeting to support staff, our collection, technology resources and facilities. Maintain level budgeting as much as possible. Continue to review actual spending vs. budgeted amounts at the close of each fiscal year.
- Increase direct fundraising: update donor contact list in October every year. Coordinate Trustee development of other creative fundraising efforts, and participation and outreach. Investigate setting up a direct donation platform for RFL on the website, by October 2025. Money raised through these methods will be tracked annually.
- Increase volunteer engagement: via direct recruitment or collaboration with other groups willing to volunteer in order to cover tasks that do not require librarian expertise. Increase number of volunteers or volunteer hours, tracked annually (see Building Community Alliances).
- Develop long-term plans and policies for allocating recently awarded grants, by July 2025
- Develop facilities and collection to meet the emerging needs of the community: obtain information from a focus group or survey to directly address facilities needs and desires, by February 2026. Reevaluate annually, and revise as needed.

## **Build community alliances**

*This goal is relevant especially to foster a cohesive, resilient community that will continue to support one another in times of change. Implementation is the responsibility of Director, staff, and Trustees, with volunteer assistance and community collaboration.*

- Collaborate with other community centered groups in town to celebrate local talent and resources: create programming four times a year in collaboration with other community groups, organizations, or individuals (a “free university” model of skill and knowledge sharing)
- Connect with other libraries to share programming resources when possible, at least once a year.
- Position ourselves to assist kids, teens and families: from early literacy to career planning. Increase youth engagement in program development (see above for programming goals) and cultivate our youth as the next civic leaders in our community. Measure success by increasing youth library use metrics, measured annually.
- Cultivate the library as a “third space,” where community members can also interact informally. Schedule open houses, coffee hours, or ice cream socials at least three times a year. Measure success by increasing library use metrics, and consider a community satisfaction or civic health survey after two years (in 2027).
- By 2026, coordinate systems of communication among citizens to allow for greater connectivity and resilience during local emergencies, or as a method of collaborating to share resources, skills and mutual aid. This strategy requires teamwork with municipal entities such as the selectboard and emergency management coordinator, and other community groups.