

# 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



## GOAL 3: BUILD COMMUNITY ALLIANCES & RESILIENCY

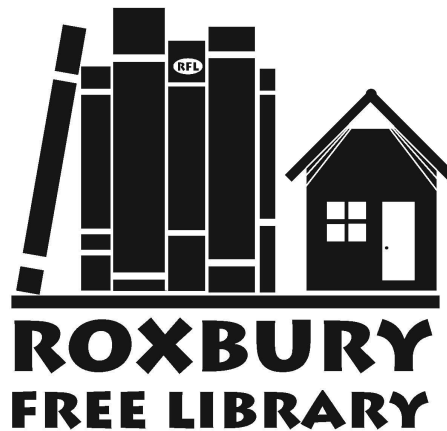
*Objective: Cultivate a stronger, more resilient community that celebrates local talent, skills, history and knowledge*

**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



# **Roxbury Free Library Strategic Plan, 2025-2028**

RFL Board of Trustees: Heidi Albright, Jeanne Beckwith, Carl Ellis, Dotti Guiffre, and Jane Pincus  
Library Director Ryan Zajac and Assistant Librarian Caitlyn Santi



*Our mission is to develop and nourish the spirit and imagination of all individuals in our community and to enrich their knowledge and understanding. We will provide free access to library services, programs, resources, and information.*

*Our vision is to keep our library relevant in a complex world.*

## Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	1
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Our Process.....</b>	<b>3</b>
SWOT analysis and inventory.....	3
Determination of Peer Libraries.....	3
Peer Library Comparisons:.....	4
Community Survey.....	5
<b>Peer Library Comparison Results.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Community Survey Results:.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Conclusions.....</b>	<b>23</b>

All appendices can be found at [www.roxburyfreelibrary.org](http://www.roxburyfreelibrary.org)

**Appendix I: SWOT analysis**

**Appendix II: RFL Descriptive Statistics**

**Appendix III: Copy of blank Survey**

**Appendix IV: Full Survey Results**

**Other resources (mentioned in the text)**

2025 Vermont Civic Health Index: <https://outside.vermont.gov/dept/sos/Civics/Vermont-CHI-FINAL-1.17.25.pdf>

Vermont Community Index (VCI) guide:

<https://finance.vermont.gov/sites/finance/files/documents/VCI%20Technical%20Documentation%20-%20MTAP.pdf>

*The Great Good Place* by Ray Oldenburg, 1989

# 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.

# Our Process

We began the planning process with a Board and staff retreat in February 2024, meeting with Kevin Unrath of the Vermont Department of Libraries to discuss best practices in formulating a strategic plan over the next year. We looked at examples of finished plans from other Vermont libraries which were widely variable in scope and presentation. We discussed how we would gather comparative data and information, and established a rough timeline to do so.

Never having done this before and drafting a plan from scratch, we agreed to loosely follow this step-wise process over the next year, using our mission statement as our guiding principle:

**Review a few strategic plans from other Vermont public libraries, and consider other reflective materials as we develop our plan→ perform a SWOT analysis “inventory” for RFL→ determine Peer Libraries→Compare RFL to Peers→ gather community feedback through a survey or other means→ use the data and feedback to set SMART goals and objectives using the SMART framework→ write a 3-year strategic plan for RFL→ share the plan with stakeholders and the community at large.**

## SWOT analysis and inventory

SWOT analysis is used to develop an inventory matrix of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats to an organization. Strengths and Weaknesses are internal to the organization (we have some control over them), while Opportunities and Weaknesses are viewed as external, or largely outside of direct organizational control.

As a group, we asked ourselves a series of questions, and compiled our answers under each heading.

The SWOT analysis can be reviewed in **Appendix I**.

## Determination of Peer Libraries

To better gauge our place in the library landscape, our Library Director Ryan Zajac sorted and compiled data from the 2022 Vermont Public Library Annual Report, published by the Vermont Department of Libraries. When we began the process, the 2023 data was still being compiled. Because libraries in the state are so varied, we needed to find the “peer” libraries most similar to us. If we only

compared libraries with a similar operating budget or population, we would be comparing our library to others in towns with potentially vastly different resources. We thought it important to consider multiple aspects of a library and its community in order to make accurate comparisons.

Therefore, we added the Vermont Community Index (VCI) score as a means to help accurately compare the RFL in comparison to more similar libraries and communities in a state with highly variable access to resources. The VCI is a metric the VT Department of Finance & Management compiled that looks at community metrics to determine the needs in a community, as well as the means or capacity that the community has available to address those needs.

To find our peer group, Ryan performed a simple ranking of the 190 libraries in the state based on what the Trustees and staff determined to be important metrics and looked at the twenty libraries ranked immediately adjacent to the RFL. We examined the following metrics: population served, VCI, square footage, total annual librarian hours, total income, total local tax, individual tax contribution, physical collection size, total number of borrowers, borrowers per capita, total annual visits, total circulation, and annual hours open.

He then chose the twelve libraries that showed up most often in the rankings— five or more times, and ranked in close proximity to RFL— to be our “peer libraries.”

Ryan’s source data and tables are in **Appendix II**.

### **Peer Library Comparisons:**

We compiled Ryan’s results and additional data gleaned from the DOL Public Library Annual Report into several tables that we grouped into categories: Basic Metrics; Borrowers; Library Visitation; Program Attendance; WiFi Access and Combined Services; Collections and Circulation; and Costs and Funding. For all data we have included the mean (average) and median (middle value) for the entire state as well as our peer group.

We added additional metrics in our data comparisons where information would help us to assess how our library serves the community, or where we could find opportunities for improvement identified in our SWOT analysis. In the data, visitation rates are measured by counting the number of people actually walking into a library building, and visits are counted separately from program attendance. We also added the number of individual WiFi sessions, a service used by many who do not enter the library or borrow

our materials. By combining all three forms of service use, we feel we capture an accurate snapshot of how the community uses many of the services provided. Responses from community members about the importance of these services are summarized in the Community Survey section. Costs and Funding includes the costs of operation, tax allocation and fundraising. Grants and donations are grouped into one category. We included the proportion of our annual expenses that pays the staff, and how much we pay per hour relative to our peers and others in the state.

## Community Survey

We used our SWOT analysis to guide the development of our Community Survey. Once finalized, the survey was made available at the RFL, at community events such as the monthly potlucks, and at the Community Hall for several selectboard meetings, Senior Center lunches and Community Crafter meetings. We mailed a paper copy with our End-of-the-Year Annual Appeal letter (about 40 names on our donor list) and also mailed the survey to 30 names randomly selected from the Grand List. We created a digital version of the survey with a link to access it, which we posted on our website, emailed to the Roxbury Roots (a voluntary community group listserv), posted twice to Front Porch Forum, and once to a Facebook group chat “Roxbury Schools.” We received a total of 41 responses. Those responses are summarized in this document.

A copy of the original Survey is in **Appendix III**, and the Survey results in their entirety can be found in **Appendix IV**.

*“A great library doesn't have to be big or beautiful. It doesn't have to have the best facilities or the most efficient staff or the most users. A great library provides. It is enmeshed in the life of a community in a way that makes it indispensable. A great library is one nobody notices because it is always there, and always has what people need.”*

*— Vicki Myron, Dewey: The Small-Town Library Cat Who Touched the World*

# Peer Library Comparison Results

**Table 1. Basic Metrics**

**Summary:** Libraries from 9 Vermont counties were represented, ten of them Municipal libraries, one Incorporated, and one a Community Library that was a joint school-public library. Roxbury had the highest need as indicated by the VCI, and Sheldon Public Library had the lowest of the peer group. Not all libraries had a town with an index score in the dataset. Our library is smaller than most in our peer group.

**Insights:** We are tiny (but mighty!) and serve a relatively large population for the size of our facility. There were only five libraries with a physical space smaller than RFL, although recent measurements suggest RFL may be larger than recorded here. Five of the libraries in our peer group listed that they had a meeting space available for public use, but it isn't clear if they were referring to the entire library as a meeting space (one library, Sheldon Public, claims it can fit 80 people in its meeting room, while the library is only 384 square feet). For that reason we did not include this metric for comparison, even as it was identified as a potential "need" in the community survey.

library	town	county	type	Pop served	VCI	sq. footage
state median				1880		2720
state mean				3405		4636
median of peers				1264	0.66	800
mean of peers				1329	0.64	1156
Roxbury Free Library	Roxbury	Washington	Muni	1030	0.92	690
Hancock Free Public	Hancock	Addison	Muni	479	0.86	675
Middletown Springs Public	Middletown Springs	Rutland	Muni	742	0.78	800
Winhall Memorial	Bondville	Bennington	Inc	803	-	800
Stamford Community	Stamford	Bennington	Comm	931	0.65	1080
Cornwall Free Public	Cornwall	Addison	Muni	1073	0.46	552
Calef Memorial	Washington	Orange	Muni	1086	0.75	966
Davies Memorial	Lower Waterford	Caledonia	Muni	1442	-	2050
Rochester Public	Rochester	Windsor	Muni	1457	0.68	4000
HF Brigham Free	Bakersfield	Franklin	Muni	1467	-	742
Starksboro Public	Starksboro	Addison	Muni	1978	0.55	1500
Lydia Taft Pratt	West Dummerston	Windham	Muni	2185	-	784
Sheldon Public	Sheldon	Franklin	Muni	2299	0.40	384

**Table 2. Borrowers**

**Summary:** Borrowers are those who have a library card in order to borrow books and other materials. 52% of the population served by libraries in Vermont are registered borrowers, and just over a third of our population is a borrower. 22 out of 190 libraries in the state had fewer borrowers than us. We have a below state average number of borrowers per capita population, and borrowers per population indexes neutral relative to peers

**Insights:** We could engage more citizens to become borrowers, and increase our proportion of the population that are borrowers to shift closer to the state average. This could involve strategies such as making signing up for a library card easier (at events such as Town Meeting, or Community Suppers). We could expand outreach with informational posts on what services a library card can access. We could implement strategies to improve marketing the services a library card can access: museum passes, etc.

library	Pop served	total borrowers	borrowers per pop
state median	1880	1025	0.45
state mean	3405	1829	0.52
median of peers	1264	397	0.29
mean of peers	1329	402	0.38
Roxbury Free Library	1030	392	0.38
Hancock Free Public	479	350	0.73
Middletown Springs Public	742	470	0.63
Winhall Memorial	803	476	0.59
Stamford Community	931	583	0.63
Cornwall Free Public	1073	306	0.29
Calef Memorial	1086	410	0.38
Davies Memorial	1442	362	0.25
Rochester Public	1457	397	0.27
HF Brigham Free	1467	203	0.14
Starksboro Public	1978	366	0.19
Lydia Taft Pratt	2185	454	0.21
Sheldon Public	2299	457	0.20

**Table 3 Library Visitation**

**Summary:** We are open fewer median and average hours for our peer group. We have a lower than state/peer average visitation rate per open hour, and per capita of the population served. Visits per borrower also indexes low

Davies Memorial Library lists open hours that are double even the state mean and median hours per year, over 65 hours a week. This may be an error. Rochester did not report visitation counts.

**Insights:** To increase visitation, we could expand hours, or shift hours to times more likely to attract visitors. This would require changes on the part of the staff, and currently we have a good balance of mornings, afternoons/evenings and weekend hours.

We could continue to market our collection, or consider other ways to encourage citizens to utilize the building. We could better advertise our hours by adding them to the community calendar listings on FPF, the town's and our own website. Opening up the RVS library during the after school hours is another way to increase both borrowers and visitation, even as it is not the main RFL building.

library	open hours per year	total visits	visits per borrower	visits per capita	visits per open hour
state median	1425	4543	4.43	2.42	3.19
state mean	1346	11495	6.28	3.38	8.54
median of peers	936	1403	3.53	1.11	1.27
mean of peers	1213	1308	3.25	0.98	1.27
Roxbury Free Library	915	653	1.67	0.63	0.71
Hancock Free Public	728	572	1.63	1.19	0.79
Middletown Springs Public	936	1908	4.06	2.57	2.04
Winhall Memorial	884	1354	2.84	1.69	1.53
Stamford Community	819	1014	1.74	1.09	1.24
Cornwall Free Public	1664	416	1.36	0.39	0.25
Calef Memorial	1248	2517	6.14	2.32	2.02
Davies Memorial	3380	684	1.89	0.47	0.20
Rochester Public	884	-	-	-	-
HF Brigham Free	1341	1452	7.15	0.99	1.08
Starksboro Public	1040	1845	5.04	0.93	1.77
Lydia Taft Pratt	780	1785	3.93	0.82	2.29
Sheldon Public	1144	1500	3.28	0.65	1.31

**Table 4. Program Attendance**

**Summary:** We host fewer programs annually than our peers, but they are very well attended. The annual program attendance per population is the same as the mean and median of our peers. Our program attendance is about half of the state average for attendance per population served. Program attendance per population indexes neutral, and high per program among our peers.

**Insights:** To improve our proportion of program attendees per population we could diversify programs, or collaborate with other groups that are running similar programming efforts (afterschool enrichment, food-related efforts, arts and crafts, etc.) We could offer more programs per month, though this likely could only happen with collaboration with other libraries or community groups who volunteer their time and efforts.

library	#programs per year	annual total program attendees	Average attendees per program	attendees per pop
state median	72	815	11	0.43
state mean	113	1418	13	0.42
median of peers	24	286	12	0.23
mean of peers	25	293	12	0.22
Roxbury Free Library	10	231	23	0.22
Hancock Free Public	11	55	5	0.11
Middletown Springs Public	44	442	10	0.60
Winhall Memorial	29	286	10	0.36
Stamford Community	19	235	12	0.25
Cornwall Free Public	0	0	-	0.00
Calef Memorial	27	418	15	0.38
Davies Memorial	21	318	15	0.22
Rochester Public	59	654	11	0.45
HF Brigham Free	0	0	-	0.00
Starksboro Public	24	370	15	0.19
Lydia Taft Pratt	47	664	14	0.30
Sheldon Public	33	131	4	0.06

**Table 5 WiFi Access and Combined Services**

**Summary:** RFL WiFi usage indexes high. Combined uses (Visitation, Programs and WiFi sessions) are double the rate of our peers, and just below average for the state.

Many of our peer libraries only estimated WiFi sessions, or did not list any at all, so comparisons are harder for that metric on a peer level. We did not include public computer sessions here for similar reasons, and also because the number of available computers varies considerably among libraries. Using a public computer would be captured in Visitation counts.

**Insights:** RFL counted 2,833 individual WiFi sessions in 2022, or nearly 8 sessions per day, and currently we average at over 200 individual device logins per month to our WiFi system. These may or may not be registered patrons. We are clearly serving a need in the community for internet access. We should invest effort into increasing borrowers and visitation.

library	wifi sessions per year	total use combined (Visitation, Programs, Wifi) per year	annual combined use (visitation, program attendance and wifi sessions) per population
state median	1500	6858	3.65
state mean	5892	18805	5.52
median of peers	210	1640	1.37
mean of peers	603.7	1965	1.87
Roxbury Free Library	2833	3717	5.01
Hancock Free Public	365	992	2.07
Middletown Springs Public	200	2550	3.44
Winhall Memorial	-	1640	2.04
Stamford Community	22	1271	1.37
Cornwall Free Public	2000	2416	2.25
Calef Memorial	0	2935	2.70
Davies Memorial	97	1099	0.76
Rochester Public	-	654	0.45
HF Brigham Free	-	1452	0.99
Starksboro Public	220	2435	1.23
Lydia Taft Pratt	300	2749	1.26
Sheldon Public	0	1631	0.71

**Table 6. Collections and Circulation**

library	total borro wers	total physical collection	phys circulation	e-circ (digital coll.)	total circ (phys+dig)	phys circ per phys coll	total circ per pop	total circ per borrower	phys coll per pop	coll. per sq ft
state median	1025	13911	7181	1605	8786	0.52	4.67	7.01	7.40	5.11
state mean	1829	19730	18615	4645	23260	0.94	6.83	10.18	5.79	4.26
median of peers	397	7655	2317	399	2716	0.30	2.15	5.84	6.06	9.57
mean of peers	402	8439	2511	535	3046	0.33	2.29	6.25	6.35	7.30
Roxbury Free Library	392	8103	2412	502	2914	0.30	2.83	6.15	7.87	11.74
Hancock Free Public	350	3921	548	776	1324	0.14	2.76	1.57	8.19	5.81
Middletown Springs Public	470	7655	2431	1231	3662	0.32	4.94	5.17	10.32	9.57
Winhall Memorial	476	7996	1728	404	2132	0.22	2.66	3.63	9.96	10.00
Stamford Community	583	8283	2445	117	2562	0.30	2.75	4.19	8.90	7.67
Cornwall Free Public	306	5964	1385	75	1460	0.23	1.36	4.53	5.56	10.80
Calef Memorial	410	7680	1074	22	1096	0.14	1.01	2.62	7.07	7.95
Davies Memorial	362	5722	2180	155	2335	0.38	1.62	6.02	3.97	2.79
Rochester Public	397	27344	4300	875	5175	0.16	3.55	10.83	18.77	6.84
HF Brigham Free	203	7338	2816		2816	0.38	1.92	13.87	5.00	9.89
Starksboro Public	366	7963	4967	1477	6444	0.62	3.26	13.57	4.03	5.31
Lydia Taft Pratt	454	6032	2202	389	2591	0.37	1.19	4.85	2.76	7.69
Sheldon Public	457	5705	4053	394	4447	0.71	1.93	8.87	2.48	14.86

**Summary:** We have a large physical collection for our borrowers and square footage, higher than the state average and median, and circulate those materials around the average rate of our peers. Digital circulation is lower than the state and our peers. Circulation of physical collection indexes neutral and total circulation indexes neutral for both borrowers and the population served.

**Insights:** It is not clear if we would circulate more books if they were all available at the same time (we currently need to rotate books). Borrowers have access to a large collection of materials, and if they find it in our catalog, we can retrieve it for them. Do we have a large enough collection that we could potentially stock another satellite location (funding and staffing questions notwithstanding)? If we increase the number of borrowers, our visitation and thus circulation might increase as well. Barriers to digital circulation could be overcome through education on how to access. A recent grant will address this in our children's collection. Book delivery was mentioned several times in the survey as a requested service, even though we offer it. More promotion on this service, new books coming into the collection, or highlighting the digital collection could help get the word out.

"Books permit us to voyage through time, to tap the wisdom of our ancestors. The library connects us with the insight and knowledge, painfully extracted from Nature, of the greatest minds that ever were, with the best teachers, drawn from the entire planet and from all our history, to instruct us without tiring, and to inspire us to make our own contribution to the collective knowledge of the human species. I think the health of our civilization, the depth of our awareness about the underpinnings of our culture and our concern for the future can all be tested by how well we support our libraries."

— Carl Sagan, Cosmos

**Table 7: Costs and Funding**

library	total operating expenses	total income	tax contribution	\$\$ raised (grants + fundraising)	indvl. tax contr.	staff expenses	librarian hours per week	cost per librarian hour	proportion staff expenses to operating expenses	volunteer hours per week
state median	\$103,507	\$108,463	\$66,000	\$42,463	\$36.00	\$61,120	40	29	0.59	6
state mean	\$198,527	\$200,543	\$151,498	\$49,045	\$44.49	\$134,016	65	40	0.68	8
median of peers	\$34,549	\$38,982	\$28,793	\$10,189	\$22.78	\$22,042	21	20	0.66	5
mean of peers	\$34,895	\$36,927	\$27,680	\$9,247	\$20.84	\$21,255	20	20	0.64	5
Roxbury Free Library	\$34,549	\$39,516	\$32,550	\$6,966	\$31.60	\$22,729	23	19	0.66	12
Hancock Free Public	\$21,622	\$20,200	\$17,500	\$2,700	\$36.53	\$16,237	15	21	0.75	10
Middletown Springs Public	\$37,005	\$47,647	\$27,772	\$19,875	\$37.43	\$24,784	26	18	0.67	4
Winhall Memorial	\$38,117	\$39,241	\$27,500	\$11,741	\$34.25	\$25,286	20	24	0.66	6
Stamford Community	\$26,992	\$31,593	\$28,793	\$2,800	\$30.93	\$20,793	20	20	0.77	0
Cornwall Free Public	\$8,706	\$11,511	\$4,000	\$7,511	\$3.73	\$0	-	-	-	5
Calef Memorial	\$45,651	\$38,982	\$36,982	\$2,000	\$34.05	\$17,759	14	24	0.39	0
Davies Memorial	\$33,470	\$25,458	\$13,860	\$11,598	\$9.61	\$18,427	23	15	0.55	6
Rochester Public	\$68,992	\$70,799	\$46,375	\$24,424	\$31.83	\$37,242	22	33	0.54	6
HF Brigham Free	\$31,273	\$38,513	\$35,000	\$3,513	\$23.86	\$22,042	22	19	0.70	0
Starksboro Public	\$40,484	\$40,946	\$35,166	\$5,780	\$17.78	\$26,869	24	22	0.66	6
Lydia Taft Pratt	\$28,131	\$31,384	\$14,900	\$16,484	\$6.82	\$14,488	13	21	0.52	5
Sheldon Public	\$38,640	\$44,256	\$39,437	\$4,819	\$17.15	\$29,660	20	29	0.77	0

**Summary:** Total income is a combination of tax allocation and other sources of income. Individual tax contribution is higher than our peers, lower than the state median and mean. Because we do not charge for our services or late fees for overdue materials, income raised is a combination of grants and direct fundraising. Our operating expenses are average relative to our peers, and lower than the state average and median. We raise less money through grants and fundraising than our peers, though this may be due to some libraries having a “good year” for obtaining grants. Two thirds of our operating expenses cover staff salaries, which is average for both our peers and the state. Our staff are slightly underpaid, on average, compared to our peers, and much lower than the state average and median. One library (Cornwall) does not list any paid staff. We had a high number of volunteer hours listed in 2022, but fewer volunteers more recently due to volunteer attrition.

**Insights:** RFL appears adequately funded for current operations. Our staff are good at grant raising to help fund specific tasks such as collection development or improving facilities, and should stay the course! Grants usually have stipulations on what the funds can be used for, and so are less flexible than other forms of raising funds and require careful planning. We need to increase Trustee fundraising efforts, and explore other methods of direct fundraising. We should continue to invest in our staff, in terms of funding education and certification to maintain excellence, and continue budgeting for competitive wages. We need to continue to recruit volunteers. The volunteer hours per week are estimated, and there are certain tasks at certain times of the year where volunteer projects are more concentrated.

“If this nation is to be wise as well as strong, if we are to achieve our destiny, then we need more new ideas for more wise men [people] reading more good books in more public libraries. These libraries should be open to all—except the censor. We must know all the facts and hear all the alternatives and listen to all the criticisms. Let us welcome controversial books and controversial authors. For the Bill of Rights is the guardian of our security as well as our liberty.”  
— John F. Kennedy

# Community Survey Results:

**Demographics:** Our survey had 41 respondents in total.

60.9% answered the survey from an online link they accessed through FPF, FB or an email to the community listserv of Roxbury Roots. 19.5% responded from the random grand list mailing. 14.5% filled out the survey at another community event, 9.8% were from our annual appeal mailing and 4.9% were filled out at the RFL.

Nearly all respondents are from the “older” generations, born before 1989: 60% of respondents are 51 or over, 37.5% are 36-50 years old. There were no responses from the 21-35 yrs age group, and only one person aged 11-20yrs. Some respondents included comments from their children in the open-ended questions, and so we hope the survey results reflect the needs of families with school-aged children.

82.1% live in the village or “West Roxbury,” and 15.4% live in East Roxbury/Bull Run. One respondent (2.6% of respondents) lives outside of Roxbury and still uses RFL.

**Demographic Insights:** responses from an entire age demographic are missing, and may warrant an invitation to a “focus group” for targeted feedback. Our attempts at gaining responses from a random sample that included non-library users (see below) and East Roxbury residents was fairly successful.

**Use of RFL:** Of those who responded, 70.7% use the library.

For the people who do not use the library, the main reason was that the services were not needed (63.6%), and 27.3% responded that the location was not convenient to where they live or work. The other listed reasons (all 9.1% respectively) were that the hours don’t work, or they use a more convenient library, and two others responded with these longer answers: *“‘Need’ is relative, while I can and enjoy purchasing books, I find I do that more than seek to borrow. Environmentally this is not the best choice, and recognize that. I tend to read slowly, so it seems better just to own the book.”*

And: *“I have access to the internet from my home.”*

**RFL Use Insights:** No one who filled out the survey said they were “unaware of what we offer”, or that the programs we offer “do not interest them,” indicating we are doing a good job promoting our services and offering programs that interest most people.

### **Community Information resources:**

85% of respondents read the *Newsy* (the community newspaper that RFL publishes), and 80% Front Porch Forum postings. Word of mouth was also a big source of information at 57.5% Both Town (42.5%) and RFL (45%) websites were also important sources of information about our community. Front Porch Forum calendar listings or the RFL bulletin board were used by a third of the respondents. Some comments praised our clear FPF postings, and that the redundancy of hard-copy notifications via the *Newsy* was helpful, especially because some do not have a home computer. There was much praise for the *Newsy*, and it was mentioned several times in the “What are we doing well?” portion of the survey, though it appears not everyone is getting mailed a copy. Some respondents mentioned the RFL monthly emails as a great way to keep up with what is going on, but that they could use a bit more “flash” by using photos, and in two other places respondents did not seem to know we have a monthly email announcing upcoming events at the RFL. Two respondents did not find the town’s website easy to use. A later question about the ease of use of the RFL website indicated that 58% found the RFL website easy to navigate.

**Information Resources Insights:** RFL is an important resource to stay informed in our community, especially through our quarterly newspaper, the *Newsy*, and our Front Porch Forum postings. We need to update our *Newsy* mailing list to make sure everyone gets a paper copy, or a digital copy if they choose that option. We should also review our email list and make sure it is up-to-date, and consider refreshing the design to sustain interest. We already link to the FPF community calendar through our website, but adding our hours of operation may help remind people when we are open. We should continue to monitor and update the website for ease of use and glitches or broken links.

### **Resource and Service ranking:**

We listed our services and asked respondents to rank them from 1-5, where one was “not important” and 5 was “very important.” For simplicity, we grouped the responses into “more important” (rank of 4 or 5) and “less important” (rank of 1 or 2), and left the middle ranking to stand alone. Staff assistance had the highest importance ranking (88.9% scored it as important) and Books and Inter Library Loans and WiFi and Museum Passes also were weighted as very important. Of least importance was Computer Use and Access to Newspapers and Magazines.

**Books:** ~85% found important, and only 3.8% did not find books important.

**Inter-library loans (ILL):** 70.9% found important, 12.5% not important and the remainder in the middle.

**Job seeking and other personal information:** 52.6% did not find this to be very important, and the remainder was in the middle.

**Computers:** 70% found this resource not important, and 30% gave it the middle scoring.

**WiFi:** 64% ranked it as important, and 20% not important. The remaining 16% scored it in the middle.

**Staff assistance** was deemed very important by 88.9%, and the remaining 11.1% scored it in the middle.

**Non-book print materials** (newspapers, magazines) was fairly evenly distributed, though weighted to “less important”

**Digital resources** were also fairly even in importance, slightly weighted to “more important”.

**Little free library** (a free book exchange) was the most evenly distributed, about a third in each category

**Universal classes and museum passes** were important at 59.1%, and 18.2% feeling it was not so important to them.

#### **Comments about our resources:**

Several people (5 out of 13 who commented) responded that they do not fully take advantage of the services we offer, but would like to. Two people mentioned that the hours of operation were not working for them, and one requested we post the hours on the FPF calendar. Another suggested we post more often on what we offer. One expressed frustration with the digital resources (ebooks) having very long wait times, and another asked for more recent books to be available.

**Resource Insights:** We can consider posting our regular hours to all local calendar listings, and doing a New Book promotion. We can consider hosting a “How-to: Digital resources” recorded webinar and posting to the website. We should consider reinstating the Universal Classes, and promoting the museum passes, especially around school vacation times. Computer use in our Peer Comparisons was another metric that was estimated in most cases, so we did not include it. RFL gave an actual count of 52 public computer sessions in 2022, so they are being used about once a week. We could continue to promote their availability.

#### **Summary of Program Attendance:**

Kids programs received the most checkboxes, a total of 39 from 26 respondents. Invited speakers (73.1%) and holiday themed events (53.8%) were the second two most-attended groupings. Combined events featuring community members were also very well-attended by nearly everyone, as were those involving local politicians or candidates (nearly three quarters of the respondents). 26.9% attended educational programs. Cultural programs such as film screenings (19.2%) and travel slideshows (30.8%) were popular. Regularly occurring groups such as Book Group (19.2%) and Games Night ( 3.8%) were important, but are more specialized interests and we would expect fewer attendees.

**Comments about Programming:**

We received several positive responses encouraging us to continue our program offerings. Some said the program list was “inspiring”, and they will pay closer attention to what is offered in the future, and another enjoyed the programs and hopes to attend more. A couple of requests were made for programs with more high quality speakers on current events, and topics on technology, such as how to use computers and social media and digital marketing for small businesses. Another listed a bunch of ideas, most centered around group discussions on various topics, or open ended conversations such as “coffee talk” times. There was another mention of the RFL monthly email as a resource for them to plan ahead, even if it is redundant. One person expressed interest in more collaboration between RFL and the other active groups in town in order to offer more of a cross section of interests, and another said *“I would love to see something offered to our students/young adults in transition to life after high school --- college application support, job readiness, how to write a resume, non-traditional pathways post high school, parent supports -- how do I help guide my child after high school?”* There were two requests for non-book physical items. Of special note was this comment about our Library Director: *“I want to appreciate Ryan Zajac for helping to coordinate conversations w/ local state reps and hosting virtual school board meetings to ensure access for anyone seeking to participate. Ryan goes above and beyond; he is an incredible resource for the community.”*

**Operating hours:** Nearly 50% were not sure they would use the library if it was open at other times, and 34% said they would.

**Comments summary:** two mentioned afterschool hours here, and several more requested this in a later section on how to serve the community now that the school is closed. Three others asked for more evening hours, and one for Sunday hours. Two wanted the hours to be easy to remember and regular.

**Insights:** It will be hard to make everyone happy. Our variety of open hours in the week is good, given the staff availability and funding limitations to add hours to the schedule. We can better advertise our hours of operation through calendar listings.

**Additional space:** 51.4% were not sure they would use the library more if it had more space, and 29.7% said they would.

Of additional spaces they would like to see at RFL, 60% said they would like meeting space for groups or conferences, and 55% would like additional work space for individuals. One emphasized the need for private work spaces for groups and individuals. Another suggested more spaces to sit and read. One respondent said they did not think RFL needed any additional space. Some said they would use the library no matter what, even if RFL *“was in a cave”*! Hopefully our recent facilities grant will prevent that from happening!

**Insights:** Current space is available to reserve for meetings, as long as it falls under the fully public guidelines (open to anyone to attend). More information is needed about the use of our facility space. In other places in the survey people said how much they loved our current building and space.

**Website and Parking:** Over 58% said they found our website easy to use, 36% were not sure, and 5.6% did not find it easy. Nearly three quarters had no problems with parking, 10.5% did and almost 16% were not sure.

**Insights:** It is observed that for larger events, program attendees often use the RVS parking lot. Later comments on what we could improve did mention parking, and also education on how to access digital collection through the website was suggested.

**Outdoor programming:** Two thirds of respondents would like to see more outdoor programming, 22% not sure, and 11% said no.

**Insights:** We realized we neglected to include the Garden Tours in our list of programs earlier, but the response here indicates people like attending outside programs and would like to see more, perhaps in collaboration with other outdoor groups such as the Parks committee or ROCOR.

**Library Collaboration:** Over half of respondents were not sure, and 43% said yes, they want to see collaboration with other libraries. 5.4% said no.

**Insights:** Collaboration with other libraries would mean coordinating scheduling of or sharing invited speakers and possibly the costs associated with hosting an event. Coordinating with Randolph and Northfield was suggested later in a comment on “How can we improve?”

**Beyond Books: Physical items** Over half (52%) said they would use these items or kits if offered, and 18% were not sure. Nearly 29% said not. Ideas ranged from specialized cooking equipment, or power tools not used very often, to educational kits such as traditional photography, fiber arts and computer/technology skills development. Others requested more outdoor recreation equipment that can be borrowed. A community cider press or maple tapping equipment were also mentioned.

**Insights:** The outdoor recreation group, ROCOR, has expressed interest in pursuing this idea with outdoor equipment, but storage of equipment is currently problematic. However, they could be tapped as a pool of volunteers to create a lending

library of equipment. There could be an opportunity to access equipment left at RVS, but this remains a gray area of ownership.

**Volunteers:** Over half the respondents were not interested in volunteering, and a third were not sure. Of the remaining who said yes, only one left a contact and the others said they were already volunteering.

**Insights:** We need to better organize volunteer-friendly tasks, and continue advertising and recruiting new volunteers. Collaborating with other community groups could be a way of engaging with others who already have the spirit of volunteerism. One person said they didn't have time to personally volunteer, but wanted to collaborate as a member of another community group. This type of coordination and teamwork could be a way to expand programming opportunities.

#### **Now that the school will be closed, how can the Library provide services for children and families?**

**Comments summary:** the most common request here was to make the RFL available during after school hours, to collaborate with other groups in town, including the after school Bridges program, to continue to be a source of truth. Roxbury Rising was mentioned three times. One asked for more older-kid mentoring, volunteer opportunities for highschoolers. There was a request for Townwide visioning and best use of the spaces available. Homework club was mentioned twice, or having space for private tutoring. More storytimes for kids, after school gatherings or weekend kids programming. Using the library as a bus stop, or for RFL to provide transportation match-making, improve our marketing, create an online book ordering page and do book deliveries. Most common request was more kids programming in various forms, including a kids book club and outdoor kid-centered activities, in collaboration with the other groups. One respondent suggested RFL move into the RVS building to consolidate resources under one roof. Another simply said *"stay open!"*

**Insights:** The community sees RFL as an essential resource for families and kids: a safe location to gather, and by providing access to literacy tools or for fun and engaging programming. We need more information on how our hours are meeting (or not meeting) the needs of families. In early 2025 we are going to try a pilot program to open our collection at RVS immediately following the Bridges program, during the pick up time. Teen use, as indicated in our Survey Demographics, and from some of these responses, is a place for expanded programming efforts.

#### **Can you think of ways RFL can better serve East Roxbury?**

**Comments summary:** Someone requested we build a book exchange (little free library) for the bottom of Steele Hill, two mentioned opening up old trails through the woods that connect East and "West" Roxbury and one suggested a tunnel! Having a Book Mobile that coordinates delivery to East Roxbury was mentioned multiple times. Creating a satellite library (or

pop-up) was also mentioned several times, one asked that we keep sending the mailings with extra notice for planning, and another said more promotion was needed. Someone noted that a spokesperson for RFL who lives in East Roxbury would be helpful. Another two suggested more cross-promotion (collaboration?) with nearby libraries in Northfield and Randolph.

**Insights:** East Roxbury has certain geographic barriers to be able to use the RFL easily. We can't do much about that, but we could collaborate more with the libraries that East Roxburians do use, and improve our communication on events so there is more time to plan ahead. We could find a volunteer willing to build (and a landowner to host) a "little free library" for book exchanges. Without additional funding, a satellite library would be challenging to implement at this time, but is something to consider.

### **What is the best thing about the RFL?**

**Comments summary:** Out of 31 responses, the people of RFL (Director, staff, Trustees and volunteers) were mentioned thirteen times. Its overall existence in our community was mentioned nine times, the building and facilities were also noted nine times, with adjectives such as "cozy" "welcoming" "well -organized" (the bathroom floor was mentioned twice) The book collection was listed five times in the comments, and events and programming mentioned twice, digital services once. One person said they plan to start using the RFL more, while one person said they have not been inside the building in the ten years they have lived in town. Stand out comments were : *"The building itself and of course the folks who work/volunteer there."* and *" So welcoming, so kind, so well-resourced to support patrons with ideas and supports. The monthly emails are always on time and full of info."* and *"Friendly staff who go above and beyond. Accessibility, flexibility, lovely space!"*

**Insights:** Our exceptional staff are highly valued in the community! We need to support their continued service to the community by budgeting for decent wages and career development/certification, and find more volunteers to assist them where appropriate. Our building is also cherished, and some financial planning to assist with the large facilities grant will help us figure out how best to use those funds. We could host more open house events with direct invitations for people to come and see what the library is all about (ice-cream socials, coffee-hour).

### **What needs improvement at RFL?**

**The following items were mentioned as things to improve:** energy efficiency through heat pump or solar,, improvements to communication, space considerations (better design and use), more comfortable seating. Another said that if we increase space we can increase offerings. Parking issues were mentioned three times. One requested more adult programming, and two others requested a workshop on how to access the digital offerings. One said they wanted *"the townspeople to believe in its continued relevance and spirit"* One more said we could improve fundraising.

**Insights:** These are all great suggestions, and most could be examined as part of financial planning for facilities. Simply increasing space may not directly increase offerings, but will increase use options (meetings, tutoring etc.). Parking tends to be an issue for larger programs, and many do use the RVS lot for overflow. Parking would become more of an issue if the RVS lot was no longer available. Increasing programming may require more volunteer efforts or collaboration, or additional staff hours (which requires more funding).

### **What are we doing well?**

**Comments summary:** One thing repeatedly mentioned was the RFL's responsiveness as an organization: helpfulness, open communication, always seeking feedback and our desire to improve our services. People value RFL as an information providing resource, our programming and events, and especially the staff.

**Stand-out comments:** *"Our little library is big on serving our community."*

*"Not a patron but fully support the RFL. Good work!"*

*"Offering variety of programs for different people in a variety of formats"*

**Insights:** the RFL is cherished in our community! We should continue to seek feedback and develop policies and strategies that maintain trust in us as a civic entity and source of reliable information.

*"When a library is open, no matter its size or shape,  
democracy is open, too."*

*— Bill Moyers*

# 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.