



# The Seattle Public Library Foundation

## 2026-2030 Strategic Plan

### Background & Context

In 1980, a group of volunteers founded The Seattle Public Library Foundation (SPLF) to replace an aging Bookmobile. Today, The Seattle Public Library Foundation has grown into one of the most successful library foundations in the world. Since its inception, the Foundation has raised and generated more than \$261 million to support The Seattle Public Library (SPL). Its prominence soared during the Libraries for All campaign (1998–2004), which raised \$83 million to build and refresh 27 locations, including the iconic Central Library.

Over the past two decades, the Foundation has expanded its donor base and, in 2016, formalized its independence from the Library. This shift enabled deeper engagement in advocacy, underscoring the critical role of public funding in sustaining an exceptional library system. In 2019, the Foundation launched its first Strategic Plan, achieving key goals such as strengthening ties with the Library and embedding equity into its work. The plan also broadened the Foundation’s advocacy efforts. Since its founding, the Foundation has championed more than \$527 million in public funding for the Library, including two successful citywide levies.

Today, the Foundation is strong and vibrant, supported by over 8,000 donors and 1,500 advocates. This new plan builds on past successes and charts a bold course for the next five years.

### About This Plan

To develop the plan, the Board held two retreats and dedicated substantial board meeting time to discussion and development of the plan elements. We listened to our community via interviews, focus groups, and a survey. Our outreach included hundreds of donors, SPL trustees, SPL executives and management staff, Friends of SPL leadership, and SPLF’s emeritus board. Through this listening, we learned:

- There is a desire for bold and innovative projects to improve fundraising and excite donors.
- SPLF is trusted, but people can benefit from increased understanding of our impact.
- Advocacy needs to remain front and center, as government funding will be challenging to obtain.
- SPLF is generally unknown beyond current donors and has room to expand its base of supporters and advocates.
- SPL is a willing partner in helping us expand our reach.

These learnings, along with SPL’s new strategic plan, informed the strategic priorities below.

## Vision

A library where knowledge flourishes and people find inspiration and belonging.

## Mission

To inspire the community's philanthropic support of, advocacy for, and pride in the Library.

## Values

- **Integrity** – We act with honesty and accountability to build trust.
- **Belonging** – We champion diverse voices and access for all. We treat everyone with dignity, kindness, and openness.
- **Innovation** – We embrace curiosity, learning, and bold ideas.
- **Intellectual freedom** – We promote freedom of thought and expression. We believe everyone should have access to books and Library resources.
- **Partnership** – We are stronger together. We collaborate with the Seattle Public Library, donors, and advocates to create lasting impact.
- **Gratitude** – We honor and celebrate those who support the Library's mission.

## Five Years From Now

- SPL will be at the cutting edge of library work, with the Foundation funding and catalyzing innovation.
- Our grassroots army of advocates will wield great influence and become donors and ambassadors.
- Policymakers will prioritize the Library in budget decisions.
- Donors will be making transformative commitments to build our endowments, support major initiatives, and shape our future.
- SPLF's presence in the branches and among the SPL staff will be well-known and celebrated.
- The public will know where to turn to support the Library!

## Foundational Commitments

**Equity** → Continuing to instill equity values through the Foundation and support and enable the Library's equity mission.

**A Vibrant Organization** → Building out and supporting a strong, healthy organization that can execute our strategy. We recognize that staff capacity will need to increase to keep pace with our growth.

## Strategic Priorities & Goals

**Grow and diversify fundraising year over year to increase giving to SPL 50% or more by 2030**

*Increased fundraising leads to greater Library impact.*

- Ensure continued donor growth and stability into the future each year from 2026-2030.
- Grow fruitful giving categories such as major gifts, endowments, and planned giving.
- Ensure SPLF is ready to support a major capital/comprehensive campaign by 2030.
- Develop board and staff capabilities to achieve growth.
- Identify areas of Library alignment with corporate and foundation priorities to establish deeper partnerships.

**Build advocacy capabilities to leverage public support**

*SPLF organizes advocates to protect and increase the public investment that SPL relies on.*

- Create resounding support for the 2026 levy and future ballot measures.
- Develop strong relationships with civic leaders and policymakers at all levels of government.
- Position ourselves to respond rapidly to emerging challenges.
- Develop proactive strategies to ensure Library infrastructure receives public investment.
- Build a roster of influential supporters and advocates and a powerful base of grassroots advocates.

**Support Library strategy and transformation**

*The Library is committed to organizational transformation. The Foundation's role is to support Library leadership to move boldly to create the Library of the Future.*

- Strengthen trust-based philanthropy to empower SPL to achieve its strategic plan.
- Continue to strengthen the partnership with library leaders and staff at all levels.
- Catalyze and fund bold and innovative projects envisioned alongside the Library.
- Partner with SPL to build pride and enthusiasm for Library programs, collections, and branches.

**Increase the visibility of the Foundation so the community understands and contributes to advancing our mission**

*Broadening the support and engagement of community members as Foundation donors and advocates is the best way to ensure continued Library excellence.*

- Create broad public awareness of how the Library is funded and the need for philanthropic support and advocacy.
- Increase awareness of the distinctive role of the Foundation among patrons, donors, library staff, and other partners.
- Build a strong brand reputation and clearly demonstrate the Foundation's impact.

## **Acting On Our Priorities**

These strategic priorities will guide our work over the next five years. We will create more detailed annual work plans to guide and track our progress. Board and staff will revisit our direction throughout each year to ensure we adapt to changing conditions.

The SPLF CEO will lead the development of staff work plans by January that include objectives in support of plan goals and success measures. The SPLF Board Executive Committee will create a similar plan to guide the Board's work at the committee level and for the Board as a whole.

Success measures will be used to create a dashboard, and a progress report utilizing the dashboard will be shared with the Board three times a year. The Board will discuss progress, scan for changes in the environment, and consider adjustments to SPLF's strategy at board meetings and the annual retreat.