

Croton Free Library

Strategic and Long-Range Plan 2026

Approved January 12, 2026

Introduction

This plan serves both a legal and practical purpose. New York State Education Department regulations (8 NYCRR §90.2) establish minimum standards for association libraries, including the adoption of a board-approved Long-Range Plan of Service as a condition of public funding. Equally important, the plan provides a framework for guiding the Library's long-term growth, measuring progress, and aligning resources with community priorities.

The Long-Range Plan reflects input from trustees, the Library Director, staff, and community members, and is intended to serve as a flexible, evolving guide for the next three to five years. The Long-Range Planning Committee will review the plan annually to assess progress, respond to changing conditions, and recommend adjustments as needed. Previous Croton Free Library Long-Range Plans were developed annually and focused on day-to-day operations. Those priorities continue to shape and strengthen our services. Building on that foundation, this year the Long-Range Planning Committee reviewed previous goals and reframed them as Guiding Principles. The action steps from prior plans are now presented as examples of the Guiding Principles in practice. This has enabled the Committee to take a step back and create a plan with a broader, long-term view. Our aim is to balance continuity with vision: to continue to serve the community with excellence while preparing the Library to meet future challenges.

Mission

The mission of the Croton Free Library is to encourage the joy of reading, the exploration of ideas, and the pursuit of lifelong learning for the children, teens, and adults of our entire community.

In support of this mission, the Library provides free and equitable access to books, media, and technology, and serves as a welcoming gathering place for learning, cultural enrichment, and community connection.

Guiding Principles

The Croton Free Library is guided by four interrelated principles in the fulfillment of its mission: **Accessibility, Facility Stewardship, Sustainability, and Visibility**. Each represents a distinct dimension of public service—ensuring equitable access, responsibly managing resources, safeguarding the institution’s longevity, and fostering meaningful engagement with the community.

Together, these principles shape every decision at the Library, guiding both day-to-day operations and long-term initiatives. Actions taken under one principle often support the others, creating a coherent framework for strategic planning, community engagement, and the Library’s ongoing growth.

ACCESSIBILITY — Welcome and Include

The Library ensures that all individuals may equitably access and benefit from its collections, programs, and spaces.

We achieve this by:

- Removing physical, technological, linguistic, and cultural barriers to participation.
- Offering collections and programs that reflect the full diversity of the Croton community.
- Maintaining consistent, convenient hours and a welcoming environment.
- Using technology to expand access both onsite and remotely.

FACILITY STEWARDSHIP— Provide and Adapt

The Library responsibly manages its physical and technological infrastructure to support learning, creativity, and community interaction.

We achieve this by:

- Preserving the building’s functionality and maintaining collections, furnishings, and technology that meet current standards while anticipating future needs.
- Ensuring the building can continue operating and provide public comfort during emergencies or outages.
- Providing flexible spaces for individual and collaborative work, community meetings, lifelong learning, civic dialogue, and artistic expression.

SUSTAINABILITY — Steward and Plan Ahead

The Library acts as a responsible steward of its financial, organizational, and environmental resources to ensure long-term stability and relevance.

We achieve this by:

- Aligning policies, finances, and operations with the Library's mission and strategic direction; fostering effective, supportive board governance; and maintaining transparent budgeting to ensure continuity and accountability.
- Developing a resilient staffing model that balances in-house expertise with contracted services, cross-training department leaders for flexibility, and investing in ongoing professional growth for staff and trustees.
- Integrating environmentally responsible practices into facility management and operations.
- Fostering community investment to support the Library's long-term financial sustainability through engagement, participation, and philanthropy.

VISIBILITY — Connect and Engage

The Library strengthens its presence as a valued and active participant in community life.

We achieve this by:

- Communicating effectively with patrons through digital, print, and in-person channels.
- Collaborating with local organizations, schools, and government partners to advance shared goals.
- Showcasing local artists, scholars, and community groups through programs, exhibitions, and public events, affirming the Library's role as a center for inclusion, creativity, and civic pride.
- Serving as a reliable resource and information hub.

The Five-Year Plan (2026–2031)

Introduction

Over the next five years, the Croton Free Library will advance its mission through both a renovation of its facility and a series of strategic initiatives. These efforts, guided by the Library's four Guiding Principles, will strengthen the Library's physical, financial, organizational, and community capacity.

Renovate the Facility

The current Library building, opened in 1965, requires major updates to remain safe, welcoming, and efficient. To improve key infrastructure, the Library plans to:

- Replace the roof
- Install energy-efficient windows
- Upgrade the HVAC system

In response to community feedback and evolving usage patterns, the Library aims to reorganize interior spaces with minimal expansion of the footprint. Planned improvements include:

- A redesigned entrance from the parking lot, providing a safe, welcoming point of access with clear sightlines and direct visibility to the circulation desk.
- A larger Children's Room with a dedicated program area for families.
- Flexible, open interiors that support browsing, studying, gathering, and programming across all age groups.

Together, these changes advance all four Guiding Principles: **Accessibility** by ensuring patrons can enter, navigate, and use the building with ease, **Facility Stewardship** by modernizing and maintaining the building, **Sustainability** through energy-efficient systems, and **Visibility** by creating spaces that encourage community engagement.

Strategic Initiatives

In addition to the above potential renovations, the Board will pursue several strategic initiatives. These goals will be developed through committee work, community input, and ongoing assessment.

I. Revise the Budget and Secure Funding

The Library's annual budget has consistently remained within the tax cap. The rising cost of general operations, utilities, and appropriate staff compensation make it increasingly challenging to do so and could require difficult choices about the Library's services and programs. Additional funding would also be required for any potential renovations. We intend to:

- Revise the budget in anticipation of obtaining debt financing to ensure timely completion of the renovation plan. Adding a budget line to cover these payments will require overriding the tax cap at the beginning of the project
- Continue to evaluate the Library's financial plan as needed to ensure long-term stability

These efforts reflect **Sustainability**, ensuring responsible stewardship of financial resources, and **Visibility**, by fostering public trust and encouraging community investment.

II. Create a Development Plan

Current fundraising consists of a few key annual events that provide discretionary funds. A more robust development plan would strengthen year-round community engagement and increase both participation and donations. Suggestions for discussion include:

- Evaluate current fundraising efforts and donor tracking, building on momentum created by the renovation-focused Capital Campaign
- Consider the establishment of a separate Friends group
- Develop a comprehensive Donations, Gifts and Naming Policy

These initiatives are aligned with **Sustainability**, ensuring long-term financial health, and **Visibility**, by engaging and cultivating the support of the community.

III. Evaluate the Long-Range Planning Process

The Board of Trustees is transitioning from annual Long-Range Plans focused on daily operations to a more aspirational, strategic multi-year plan. This process requires further refinement. Ideas under consideration include:

- Revise the yearly Long-Range planning process timeline
- Restart Blue Sky Meetings
- Engage the community through discussions and surveys
- Include measurable objectives (**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**elevant, and **T**ime-based)
- Create a regular reporting process of progress against the Long-Range Plan

These actions reflect **Visibility** through open engagement, **Accessibility** by responding to patron needs, and **Sustainability** by creating a clear, accountable framework for future decision-making.

IV. Strengthen Board Development and Governance

The Board will strengthen its recruitment, training, and succession practices to ensure effective governance and continuity of leadership. We seek to balance the value of experienced trustees with the fresh perspectives brought by new members. Potential actions include:

- Conduct annual self-evaluations for individual trustees and the Board as a whole, taking into consideration Board meeting procedure and Committee work, potentially with the support of a consultant
- Develop a transparent, public-facing process for trustee recruitment and applications
- Create a standardized training checklist to ensure new trustees understand the Library's structure, finances, and policies
- Review trustee term lengths and limits in alignment with best practices from the New York State Education Department
- Evaluate officer terms of office and succession planning

These efforts reflect **Sustainability**, ensuring the Board of Trustees remains representative, knowledgeable, and well-prepared, and **Visibility**, by engaging and cultivating community involvement.

Conclusion:

Grounded in the Library's mission and guided by its four core principles, this Long-Range Plan serves as a blueprint for the Croton Free Library's initiatives over the next five years. It anticipates both challenges and opportunities, while acknowledging that objectives will be achieved incrementally. Through ongoing assessment, community engagement, and thoughtful implementation, the Library will continue to fulfill its mission and strengthen its role as a vital, accessible, and sustainable community resource.