

# 2022 -2026 Strategic Plan Buffalo & Erie County Public Library

## **“Equity and Access”**

A strong Strategic Plan is necessary to ensure the continued role of the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library (B&ECPL) in the success of our communities. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the B&ECPL has uninterruptedly strategized to connect patrons with resources both inside and outside library buildings, through traditional and nontraditional means. Equitable access to resources remains necessary to conquer the established digital divide and to help overcome the challenges faced by the communities we serve.

The 37 libraries and the Library on Wheels bookmobile of the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library System enable access to critical resources to individuals and organizations throughout Erie County, including technology, programs and events and educational activities for all ages, which are critical to our communities, our lives and our livelihood. The **B&ECPL 2022-2026 Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan)** highlights strategic focus areas and projects to address the ability of libraries to help Erie County reduce barriers to access and allow for equitable use of resources inside and outside of library doors.

### **Overview of the Strategic Planning Process**

In 2021, the B&ECPL continuously assessed library services, programs and technology. This included surveys involving staff, trustees, partners, stakeholders, library users and library non-users. Survey results and operational data including circulation, program attendance, door counts, collection development activities, public access computer use and internal reports were reviewed.

A Working Group consisting of staff representing the Central Library, Buffalo branches and contracting member libraries, library trustees and B&ECPL administrators worked collaboratively to develop several planning documents as a result of the evaluation process.

### **B&ECPL Planning and Supporting Documents**

The **Strategic Plan** service initiatives are strongly aligned and integrated with, and supportive of, the *B&ECPL 2022-2026 Five-Year System Plan of Service* and the *B&ECPL 2022-2026 Central Library Plan of Service* approved by the New York State Division of Library Development. In addition, it supports the *Free Direct Access Plan for the Period*

2022-2026. Complementing these plans is the *B&ECPL Technology Plan 2022-2026*, which will help ensure technology needs are supported at the System level.

The **Strategic Plan** also reinforces the tenets set forth in the B&ECPL *Mission* and *Vision* statements:

***Mission***

*Connecting our diverse community with library resources that enrich, enlighten and entertain.*

***Vision***

*The Vision of the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library is to be deeply rooted in the community: promoting partnerships, fostering the development of a literate and informed citizenry through free and equal access to cultural, intellectual, recreational and informational resources, planning for the future, and making the most effective use of taxpayer funding.*

**Scope**

The **Strategic Plan** has been developed as a System plan and, as such, will impact System services and initiatives on all levels and at all locations. Physical outlets currently include the Central Library, eight Buffalo city branch libraries and 22 contracting member libraries (operating 28 locations). In addition, the B&ECPL maintains a significant presence beyond the library buildings, which includes the Library on Wheels (bookmobile services) and the Library2Go van (smaller mobile vehicle arriving in early 2022), community outreach and virtual access through the B&ECPL website and social media outlets.

The B&ECPL plays a critical role in the quality of life and continued growth of our community, and this **Strategic Plan** serves as its blueprint for library services and resources. It is intended to be a guide, but more importantly a stimulus to promote awareness, change and growth. While we continue to provide access to information and traditional library materials, we must also continue to expand our reach beyond library walls and provide a variety of resources, programs, services, equipment and nontraditional resources to address community needs, attract new users and adapt to the evolving needs and changing priorities of those we serve.

**Strategic Vision and Focus Areas**

Public libraries have become so much more than books, bricks and mortar. Public libraries can continue to provide safe, clean and welcoming physical spaces, while expanding the reach of libraries through user-friendly virtual environments with a variety of offerings. With increased awareness of what public libraries have to offer,

more of the community can benefit from the availability of traditional and nontraditional resources and innovative programs that enrich lives, engage and support the community and are a reliable source of information.

This **Strategic Plan** targets four key focus areas:

1. Resources and Awareness
2. Technology and Innovation
3. Education and Development
4. Outreach and Collaboration

Addressing each of these areas will help position the B&ECPL to proactively manage evolving needs and promote long-term viability.

### **Target Area 1: Resources and Awareness**

**Enhance and promote access to valuable information and resources.**

- Provide relevant resources that address diverse community interests, needs and expectations through the expansion of traditional and nontraditional collections and the introduction of new library offerings.
- Maximize awareness of offerings to increase use and promote the value of libraries through advocacy and marketing initiatives; targeted communication using traditional strategies and social media platforms; and outreach to new audiences and places.
- Ensure equitable access to library services by reducing barriers to digital equity; providing accommodations for persons with disabilities so they can participate equally in B&ECPL services, programs and activities; and establishing services for homebound and other underserved individuals.

### **Target Area 2: Technology and Innovation**

**Utilize technology and innovation to improve the lives of the patrons we serve with value-added offerings and services.**

- Strengthen the B&ECPL's position as a leader in the utilization of technology and development of digital literacy by adapting to new and changing technology to recognize community interests and needs; engaging the community to address concerns of digital proficiency; and nurturing digital inclusion.
- Explore alternative and innovative models of access and delivery of library materials and services to increase virtual access and digital equity by providing access to the internet, computing resources and training and bringing B&ECPL resources to where people live, work and play.

### **Target Area 3: Education and Development**

#### **Stimulate and inspire learning, growth and development.**

- Strengthen early literacy skills and advance educational objectives by providing materials, services and programs designed to help ensure children will enter school ready to learn; providing resources designed to support and strengthen the Common Core Curriculum and STEM and STEAM initiatives; and cultivating enthusiasm for reading and discovery.
- Maximize opportunities for lifelong learning, personal growth and well-being by establishing the B&ECPL as a reliable and valuable source for information on daily life, living and learning; creating programs and services that provide dynamic and enriching experience; and providing support to strengthen adult literacy skills.
- Support economic and workforce development by engaging local businesses and entrepreneurs through programs, services and resources relating to business growth and development; helping job seekers connect with resources to develop skills, reduce barriers to employment and identify employment opportunities; and partnering with economic and workforce development agencies at federal, state and local levels.

### **Target Area 4: Outreach and Collaboration**

#### **Strengthen community engagement through outreach and collaboration.**

- Establish B&ECPL libraries as reliable, equitable community resources that can assist neighborhoods to thrive through connecting people with information and library services to foster inclusive community enrichment and establishing a coordinated outreach program to ensure alignment with priorities with community wants and needs.
- Collaborate with community organizations and educational institutions to support the interests and needs of neighborhoods and communities by engaging local leaders, elected officials and stakeholders in support of community growth, development and civic awareness.

*Adopted by the B&ECPL Board of Trustees on December 16, 2021 per Resolution 2021-39.*