

San Mateo
County
Libraries



Strategic Plan 2025-2030



Director's Message

We are thrilled to unveil our new five-year strategic plan. Created with extensive community input, this plan is both responsive and adaptable, ensuring we inspire lifelong curiosity and meet the diverse needs of our county.

Grounded in our core values of Belonging, Connection, Growth, Access, Compassion, and Creativity, the plan reaffirms our promise to each other and the communities we serve.

Our updated vision, mission, and goals reaffirm San Mateo County Libraries as a welcoming place that celebrates diversity, fosters belonging, and strengthens community connections. Guided by our commitment to inclusivity and removing barriers, it ensures that we remain a vibrant, relevant, and essential resource for all.

While this plan provides a clear path forward, we know that the ongoing engagement, insights, and contributions of our communities will be key to our success. We invite you to join us on this exciting journey as we shape the future of our libraries!

Anne-Marie Despain
Director



Our Vision

Where community grows and thrives

Our Mission

Together, we build meaningful connections and inspire lifelong curiosity

Our Process

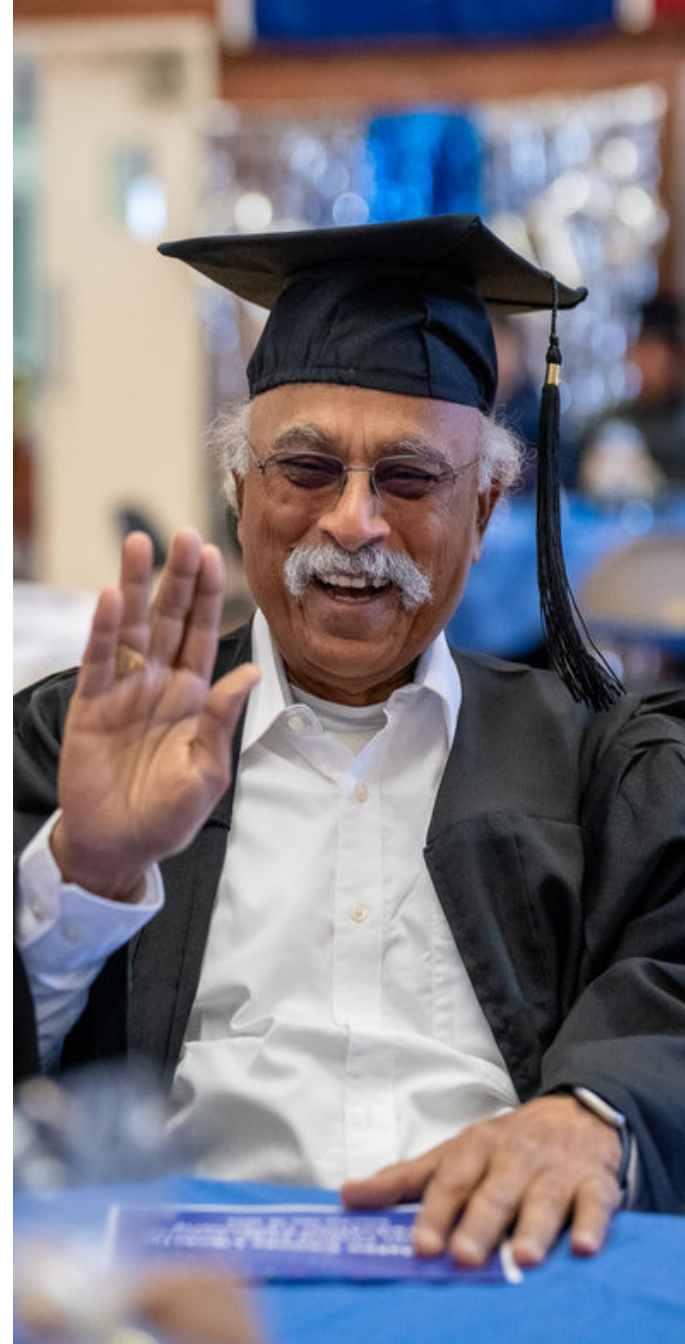
The development of San Mateo County Libraries Strategic Plan 2025-2030 reflects our commitment to evolving alongside our communities, building on existing strengths while identifying areas for growth.

Developed over a year-long effort, our goals were to:

- Deepen our understanding of our communities
- Engage harder-to-reach populations
- Foster shared ownership with staff and stakeholders
- Set equity-focused, ambitious goals
- Inspire and guide our work into the future

Research and Discovery

Our process followed a phased, inclusive, and data-driven approach. We began by updating a demographic analysis of our service area to help identify gaps in reach and researched current and emerging trends in library science, public service, technology, and community interests. Key insights were analyzed to identify opportunities to strengthen current work or expand into new areas.



Engagement and Insight

Several strategies were used to ensure robust, thorough, and broad-based community engagement. A multilingual survey completed by 3,500 residents established community priorities, with 1,000 responses gathered through in-person street interviews at grocery stores, laundromats, and other community centers, to obtain extensive, multicultural engagement.

Five focus groups with parents, seniors, teens, Spanish speakers, and Chinese speakers provided deeper insights. Additionally, one-on-one interviews with nonprofits and other community-based organizations informed our understanding of the library's role and our impact on the community.

Through these efforts, we were able to hear from active library users, non-users, and underrepresented groups across the county.

Staff engagement, including workgroup discussions and interviews, highlighted staff priorities and operational improvement areas. Collaborative sessions with key internal stakeholders, including the Governing Board, Operations Committee, and Friends and Foundation Presidents, also contributed valuable input and strategic guidance.



“The library is an excellent destination for families during extreme weather, such as rainy days or heatwaves. It’s accessible to people of all income levels, as there’s no admission fee.”

- Focus Group Participant

Listening and Learning

The strategic plan is a thoughtful balance of building on existing strengths while identifying areas for growth. By listening to residents, stakeholders, and staff, the plan reflects a shared vision that is inclusive, innovative, and responsive to the needs of our communities.

- Our role as a trusted and accessible “third place” remains a key strength.
- Community members value us as a safe, welcoming place to foster lifelong learning and connection.
- While our libraries have made strides in outreach, expanding bilingual resources could further strengthen connections.
- Participants want flexible library spaces that balance quiet study areas with lively zones for social and creative activities.
- Digital equity emerged as a significant opportunity to expand the library’s impact.
- Another area of focus involves the library’s growing role in supporting community well-being.
- Residents suggested enhancements to cultural programming. Most participants rated cultural events as a priority.
- Using libraries in person is still the preference of most at 40%, with 32% preferring online.
- Over 90% of respondents had a favorable opinion of our libraries.

Strategy and Implementation

San Mateo County Libraries is poised to continue its legacy as a trusted and important community resource. Our five-year strategic plan builds on our strengths, allowing us to adapt and innovate while honoring the traditions that have made us a cornerstone of community life.

At the core of our work is equity, which guides every aspect of our mission and operations. It is embedded in our priorities and will shape our decisions, ensuring that under-resourced communities receive the support they need to thrive. The plan reaffirms our commitment to uplifting all members of our community.

To ensure successful implementation, we will set internal benchmarks and targets, tracking our progress toward larger goals. An ongoing focus on information-gathering and data-driven decision-making will help us evaluate the effectiveness of our actions, course correct when needed, and continuously work toward advancing our strategic plan over the next five years.

With targeted investments in spaces, services, and staff, this plan is both a response to present needs and a vision for a future that grows alongside our communities.



Our Goals



Listen

We listen to our community and create responsive services and spaces where everyone belongs

Strategies:

- Actively reach out to our communities to ensure they are heard
- Prioritize culturally relevant, community-focused, and intergenerational programming
- Ensure staff, collections, programs, and library spaces reflect our communities
- Enhance and update facilities to create inviting and flexible spaces
- Offer fun, free, and joyful opportunities that inspire and uplift

Connect

We connect people and build partnerships to achieve shared goals

Strategies:

- Align our efforts with the needs and aspirations of our communities
- Build partnerships that bridge community needs and library offerings
- Create opportunities to bring people together to strengthen connections
- Leverage resources in inventive ways to help our communities flourish
- Communicate an inspiring vision and the library's story of impact



Our Goals



Discover

We champion a culture of continuous growth and discovery for all

Strategies:

- Engage children, teens, adults, and seniors in high-quality, research-informed experiences
- Sustain our strong literacy initiatives with a dedicated focus on low literacy and English-language learners
- Prioritize digital literacy by ensuring our communities have access to a variety of technologies, reliable internet, and essential digital skills
- Champion the freedom to read and explore a rich diversity of information, ideas, and perspectives
- Support the growth and well-being of our staff

Engage

We engage our communities through meaningful outreach and expanded access to resources

Strategies:

- Strengthen organizational capacity and prioritize our work and resources to enhance outreach efforts
- Connect community members to library experiences in ways that best meet their needs
- Provide a wide range of services and access points that extend beyond our buildings
- Utilize a variety of communication platforms, including multimedia and language resources, to share library programs and services



"San Mateo County Libraries is doing a good job of closing the digital divide by providing access to technology for diverse groups, from children to newcomers."

- Community Survey Participant

Our Story

Our 13 libraries are incomparable destinations for inspiring lifelong curiosity. With caring staff and innovative services, San Mateo County Libraries strives to meet the needs of the community's ever-changing landscape.

Covering 351 square miles, the Library Joint Powers Authority's service area is comprised of all the unincorporated areas of the County and the cities of Atherton, Belmont, Brisbane, East Palo Alto, Foster City, Half Moon Bay, Millbrae, Pacifica, Portola Valley, San Carlos, and Woodside.

Open seven days a week, our libraries offer worlds of discovery. Through active outreach and mobile services, we connect with our communities beyond our libraries.

Serving approximately 280,000 people, our residents comprise a diverse collection of individuals that our programs and services reflect. We host thousands of events each year, creating experiences that have a lasting impact on our community members.

We're champions of learning, sharing, and exploration — of open minds, new ideas, and bright futures. Our talented staff and wonderful volunteers create a welcoming atmosphere that inspires community and includes all.

San Mateo County Libraries provides unmatched service to our community members, and we are consistently ranked as one of the best libraries in the nation.

Our Values



Our Thanks

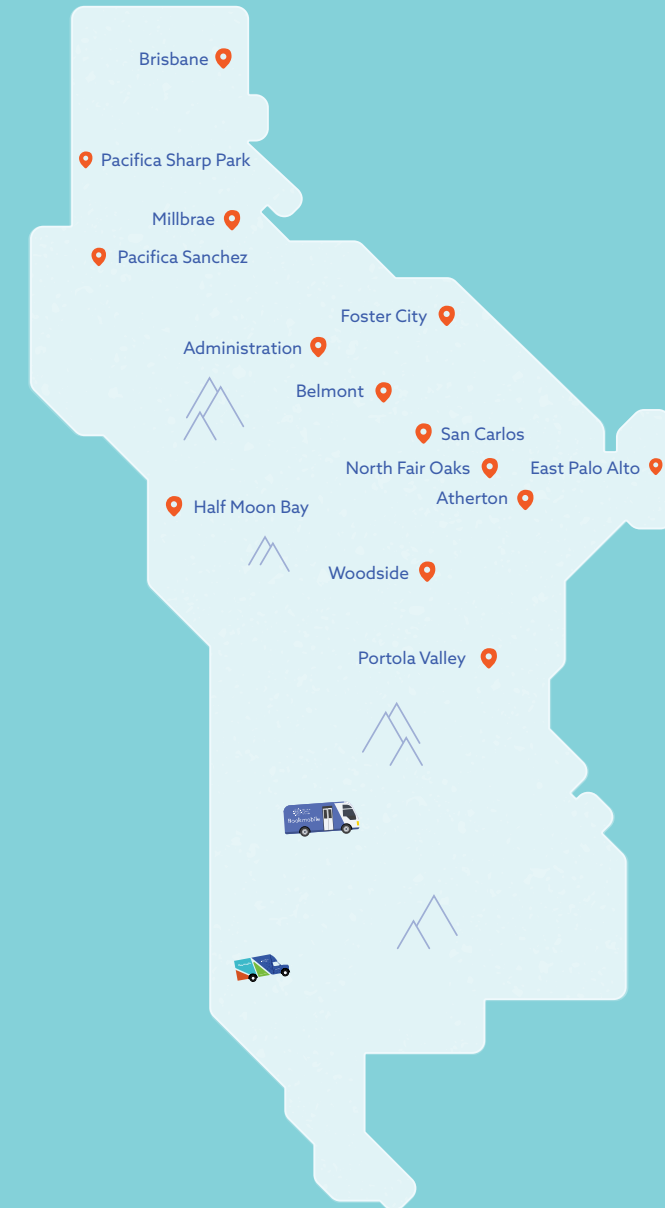
San Mateo County Libraries extends our sincerest thanks to the many individuals that contributed to the work of this plan.

Special thanks to our project consultants InterEthnica, Construction Disruption, and EMC Marketing whose efforts stewarded a robust and inclusive engagement and planning process.

Our work would not be possible without the leadership, support, and dedication of our Library JPA Governing Board and Operations Committee, Friends of the Library boards, Foundation for San Mateo County Libraries, and community partners. We extend our deepest gratitude for your invaluable contributions.

To our valued patrons and community members, thank you for sharing your honest and thoughtful ideas, opinions, and insights throughout the strategic planning process. Your input plays a crucial role in shaping the future of our library and ensuring it meets the needs of our community.

We look forward to realizing the goals of the 2025-2030 Strategic Plan and creating a bright future together where community grows and thrives.



5
Outreach Vehicles

230,000
Active Cardholders

351
Square Miles in Service Area

13
Community Libraries

1
Library Outpost

We honor and affirm the rights of the Ohlone and the other Indigenous Peoples who call the unceded territories of the San Francisco Bay Area their traditional homeland. They are the descendants of the village sites that are seen and unseen. We pay respect to the Ancestors, Elders, and Relatives of Indigenous Peoples for their historic and current contributions to San Mateo County.

Select photos by Anna Hoch-Kenney/Embarcadero Media



San Mateo
County
Libraries

Always open for exploration at smcl.org