



## Interim Strategic Plan: FY2025 – FY2026

### **Historical Perspective**

From 2021-2024, the Board of Trustees adopted a [strategic plan](#) centered around the library as a social asset connecting the community with the following four priorities:

- *Library as Community*: Focus on community building, partnerships, and establishing Highwood Library as an active member of the community to it remains a culturally relevant and sustainable social asset.
- *Library as Place*: Serve as both a physical and virtual hub where community members have access to resources and feel welcome and safe, both in the building and online.
- *Library as Platform*: Support the community's ever-changing digital needs and provide access and training for all forms of technology.
- *Library as Literacy*: Create relevant language, health, financial, multicultural, and civic programs and services. The library will evaluate programming using an outcome-based approach.

### **A Time of Uncertainty**

During the timeframe of this strategic plan, the Highwood Library & Community Center (HLCC) faced two unique challenges: the COVID-19 pandemic and a major building renovation. During the COVID lockdown, many libraries took the opportunity to reorganize and refresh. Highwood Library took the lead in creating protocols that allowed them to continue service to the community. HLCC expanded their role as a community support system during this time of uncertainty, assessing and adapting to the changing needs of its community. This took place through curbside pick-up, Zoom programming, vaccinations, and a food pantry that served 200 families per week out of the library's back storage room.

#### ***Addressing Food Insecurity: A Story of Caring for Community Members***

Multiple elderly Highwood community members struggled with issues including cancer, limited mobility and recuperating from medical issues. During the pandemic, these elderly individuals were left without income. They desperately needed food but did not have family in the area, transportation, nor connections with food-serving organizations. When the Highwood Library began to provide emergency food distribution, these individuals were not able to come to the Highwood Library to receive food because they were not able to carry it to their homes. To address this issue, two of our community health workers mobilized to transport food on a weekly basis to these individuals' homes. Without this food, they would have become malnourished and severely ill. The library's commitment to reducing the barriers faced by the community made it possible for hundreds of families who would have otherwise have fallen through the cracks to receive food each week.



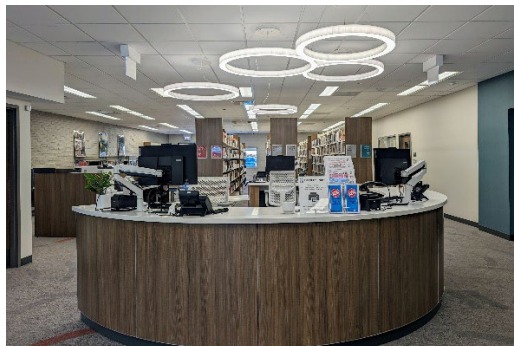
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### Tragedy Strikes

On July 4, 2022, the Highland Park shooting resulted in seven community members perishing and 48 community members being injured. Although HLCC team members and patrons were present at and impacted by the shooting, the team quickly mobilized to provide bilingual case management, counseling, and serve as a triage center, hosting federal and local resources for affected community members. HLCC also developed targeted programming to aid in community healing, including support groups, walking clubs, meditation, and other modalities of health.

### Community-Centered Space

From 2022 to 2023, HLCC underwent a comprehensive building renovation with programs primarily offered offsite at partner locations. During renovation, significant upheaval of space and programs was required, and yet the Library team successfully created continuity of services for the community, maintaining a service-oriented approach rather than adhering to traditional library norms. The staff constantly explored how to maintain services regardless of these unique circumstances. As programs continued to grow during the renovation, upon returning to the renovated facility, HLCC is finding creative solutions to accommodate its expanding services.





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### **Reimagining Possibilities**

Highwood Library & Community Center is in a very different place as a team, organization, and community than it was when the previous Strategic Plan was created. The unique challenges and situations of the past few years have provided insight into what it means to be a library that is responsive, flexible, and resourceful. We want to use our discoveries to reimagine possibilities about the future of HLCC.

Recognizing the need to pause and assess, the Board of Trustees has developed this Interim Strategic Plan for FY2025–FY2026, which will focus on the following priorities:

- With stakeholders, develop the library's values and guiding principles. These will drive the creation of a multi-year strategic plan.
- Assess organizational structure to include team responsibilities and capabilities, and program capacity.
- Assess how spaces within the renovated building create a sense of welcome, accommodate the logistics of offering simultaneous programming, and meet the needs of the community.
- Evaluate how well the installed technology addresses the community's needs and identify potential areas for expansion.
- Explore possibilities to build partnerships to introduce new services to the community.