JACK RUSSELL MEMORIAL LIBRARY

# STRATEGIC PLAN

## 2026-2031



Our mission statement:
We are the community gathering place that fosters education, personal growth, and enjoyment. By connecting the community, the JRML is Hartford's doorway to discovery.

We value:

- the library as a safe, welcoming, and inclusive place for all members of our community.
- collaboration with the community and fostering collaboration within the community.
- promoting literacy, learning, and the library to impact on our community.
- leading everyone's learning journey as the community's trusted source for information.
- an engaged, innovative, friendly, and trained staff that is appreciated, supported, and vital to creating and advancing library services.

In 2026, Jack Russell Memorial Library, located in Hartford, Wisconsin, participated in a strategic planning process to learn about our community' and library priorities and vision for the upcoming five years. JRML is embarking on this next chapter from a position of strength. Our people, spaces, and connections combine to make us a vibrant and community-inspired place that our users trust and value.

*I LOVE MY LIBRARY! I've been a lover of libraries since birth, but the Hartford library is by far the best I've ever been to! I love the modern, clean interior, the work spaces, the monarch catalog system, and the friendly librarians.* – Community Survey Participant



*When I moved to the area four years ago, the library was a landing zone for me. I was able to use the resource for work and pleasure and got to know the area better - it was a hub to walk around and explore my new home. It feels welcoming to all, something I didn't expect upon moving here, and something that transcends the basic concept of borrowing books to becoming a center for community, curiosity, kindness, and engagement. Thank you for all you do.* – Community Survey Participant

## The Planning Process

To support and oversee the strategic planning process, we convened a planning team in early 2026, including library staff, the Board, and community members. This group of six helped communicate and coordinate information-gathering activities, reviewed and identified themes and takeaways in the resulting datasets, and offered suggestions and ideas for the plan's goals, objectives, and assessment approach.

To center community voices and to gather as much input as possible, we did the following during our strategic planning information-gathering phase:

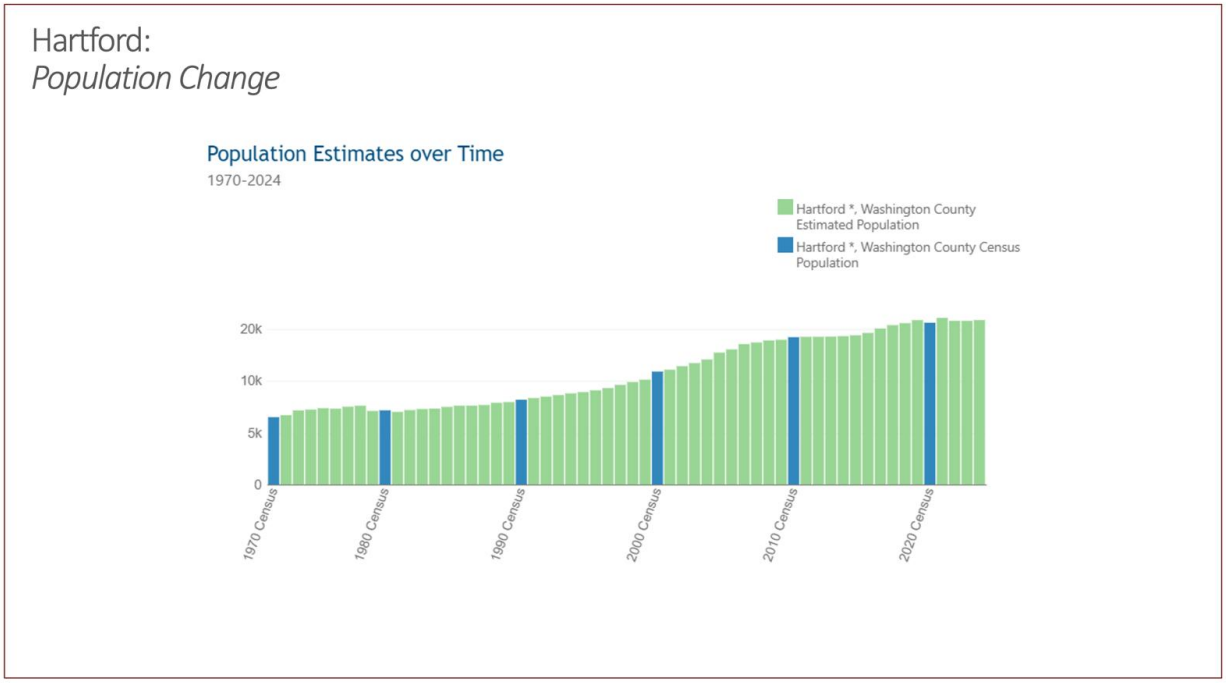
- Community demographics work laid the foundation for much of our information gathering and helped the planning team understand projections for Hartford's population.
- Planning team members completed a Planning Landscape Questionnaire, responding to questions about their views on Hartford's and the library's existing strengths, present challenges or needs, and opportunities.
- A community survey was widely promoted to library users and non- or infrequent users. Over 200 responses were received.
- Notable data points from the last ten years of our library's Annual Report data were gathered to help situate and contextualize the community survey results.
- Library staff contributed to the process with a SOAR questionnaire that explored our Strengths, near-future Opportunities, long-term Aspirations, and expected Results.
- Our many Friends, Board members, and committed volunteers added their ideas with a Library Stewards Questionnaire, exploring our existing strengths, challenges or needs, and opportunities for growth.
- We installed a set of Community Q&A Boards at the library for visitors to contribute to. Our three questions explored community strengths,  challenges, and asked for community priorities for the library.
- Our planning consultants at WiLS facilitated a Community Conversation at the library. This group of eleven included participants from library volunteers, local government, the library's Board, and contacts from the school district, business community, and homeschooling community.

All told, over 280 community members contributed to and helped inspire this strategic plan.

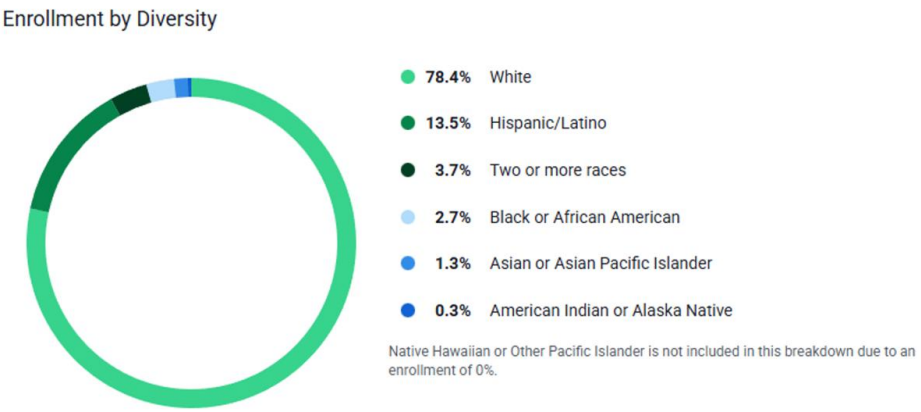
## Findings

In this section, we'll share notable findings and themes that emerged across multiple datasets. To see the data and information gathered, please ask at the library.

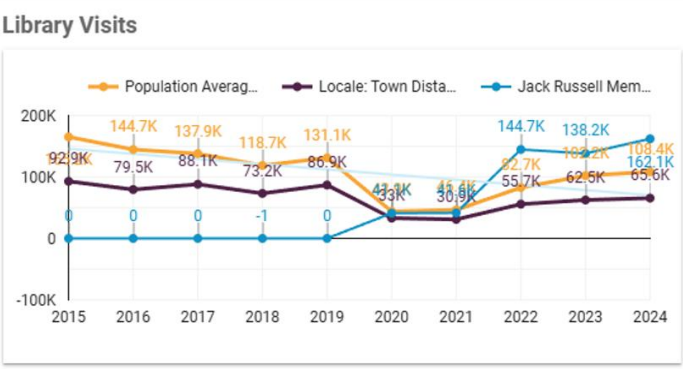
Hartford is a growing and increasingly diverse community. This was noted throughout the questionnaire responses and is evident in the demographic information from the US Census and the American Community Survey. Jack Russell Memorial Library is widely viewed as a community connector, bringing together new and longtime residents and helping cultivate a sense of community identity.



Hartford:
*Racial and Ethnic Composition – Public Schools*



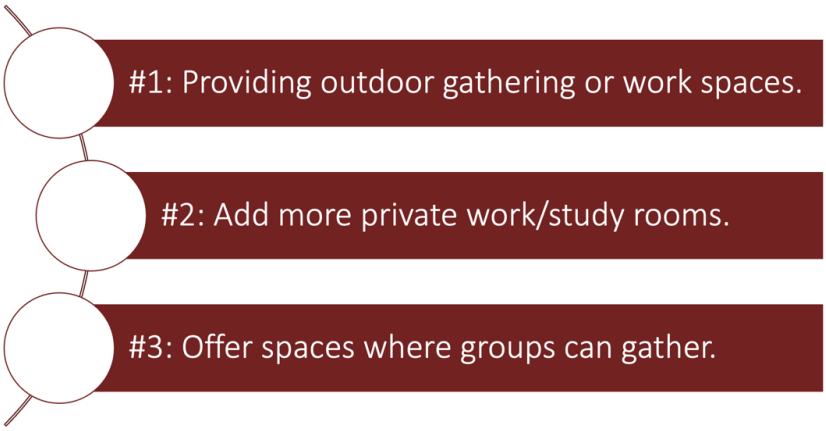

JRML's visitor count since 2020 has trended higher than that of our peer libraries in the same geographic locale and with similar average populations.




Library staff, library stewards, and community members all see an opportunity to create functional, comfortable spaces within our beautiful structure and to connect our many visitors with reliable information about how to live, work, and play in Hartford.

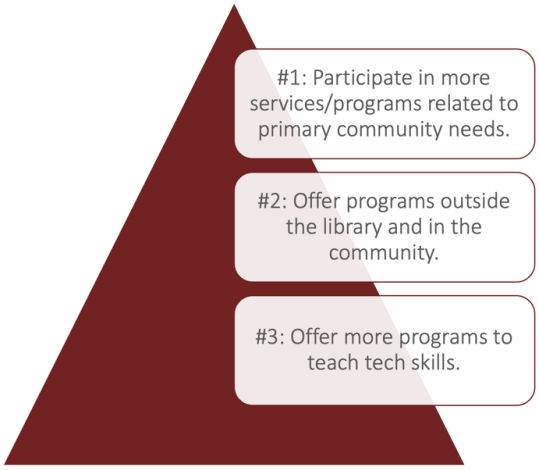
While our building is relatively spacious and modern, upgrades to our lighting and HVAC systems can make our spaces more efficient and more accessible to staff, users, and volunteers.

When it comes to potential changes to the library's physical spaces, users ranked **providing outdoor gathering or work spaces** as their top selected priority.



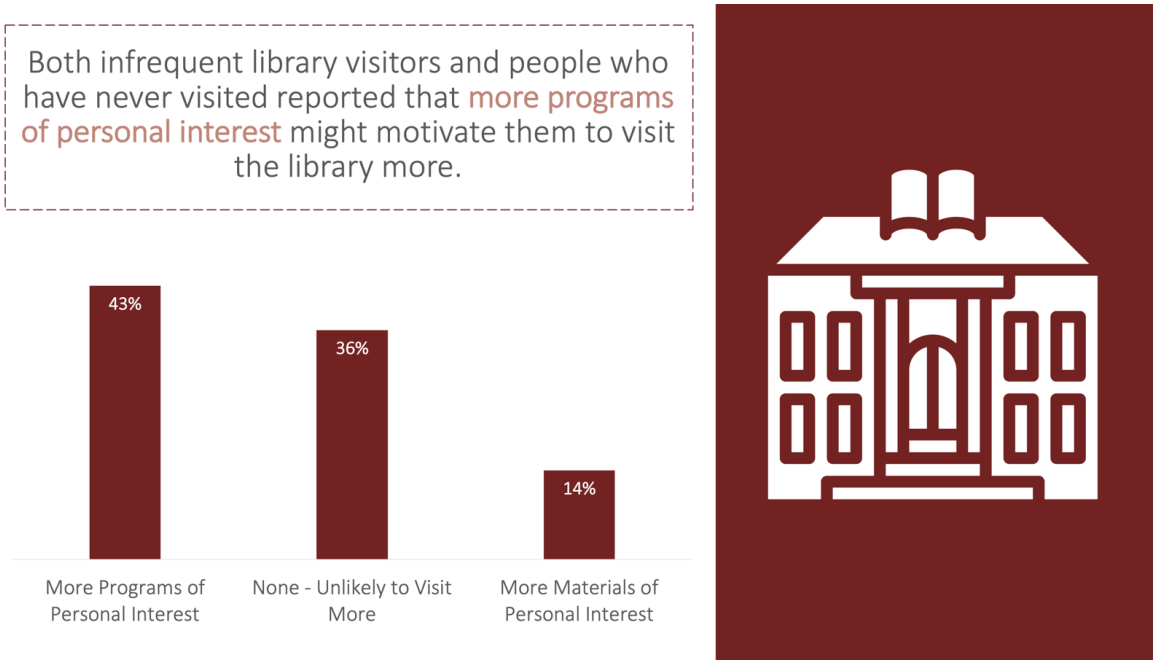

When it comes to our programs, services, and collections, the community survey revealed several priorities for our near-term focus. Survey respondents see primary community needs as a top priority, with an offsite or pop-up library presence and more programs to support technology learning and literacy also among their top priorities.

Users of the JRML prioritized participation in more services or programs related to community needs such as healthcare, food security, transportation, etc. as their top potential change to the library's services.




Our community survey respondents who are infrequent users or who don't use the library at all right now state that programs of greater interest to them or their families may make

them more likely to use the library. The idea of community-driven or even community-led programming also came through in the Community Conversation. Highlighting the many life experiences, areas of expertise, skills, and interests already present in Hartford may help make library programming and events feel relevant without overburdening staff with the creation of a whole new raft of programs.




## Plan Development

We organized our findings into a strategic plan framework to focus our attention, creativity, and other resources on four areas, which we refer to as goals. Within each goal is a set of measurable objectives. These objectives will facilitate our planning and day-to-day work, allowing us to chart progress toward the big-picture goals. Activities or projects are one way to assess our progress and to activate the goals and objectives, and will be determined internally by the library team on an ongoing basis.

Strategic planning often generates more ideas than one organization can realistically implement, even over several years. The staff SOAR comments revealed that our team is already feeling overwhelmed. Therefore, prioritizing activities and re-scaling workloads where possible will help us implement the goals and objectives effectively and responsibly.

**Goal 1: Growing a Connected Hartford**
*Hartford's projected growth offers an exciting opportunity for the library to help welcome new residents and library users by engaging our community and sharing local know-how.*

Objective A: Expand library outreach and our community presence throughout Hartford and beyond.

Objective B: Facilitate ways to work on the big questions about community growth and Hartford's identity.

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**Goal 2: An Activated Community Hub**
*The library embraces our role as the spot to learn about community resources and local events; a comfortable, appealing place to connect with neighbors and discover something new.*

Objective A: Increase usage of the library building by making key infrastructure and space improvements.

Objective B: Expand community knowledge of local and regional resources and services.

Objective C: Increase usage of library spaces, collections, and services through a targeted marketing and communication strategy.

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**Goal 3: An Informed User Base**
*Our community has access to high-quality, responsive programs, collections, and services that support learning and literacy and promote community connections.*

Objective A: Increase program offerings for adult, teen, and intergenerational audiences by refining the existing program calendar and collaborating with community members.

Objective B: Expand our users' digital and technological literacies with services and resources.

Objective C: Continue to curate collections that reflect the needs and interests of our community.

**Goal 4: Investing in Our Future**
*The library commits to offering excellent service now and into the future by continuously enhancing our team's skills, building on our strengths, and communicating our story to library users, partners, and supporters.*

Objective A: Build a base of library champions, including Friends, partners, and power users, who can share about JRML with neighbors and community leaders.

Objective B: Create a multiyear continuing education plan to support ongoing staff skill development.

Objective C: Increase staff satisfaction through more balanced workloads and more time for project work and program prep.

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## Activation and Assessment

We will activate the goals and objectives by incorporating and documenting activities and projects as we work on them. Working on or completing activities is one way to assess progress, though many objectives can be assessed using quantitative data such as visitor counts, material check-outs, event attendance, and newsletter or social media followers. The library will work with the Board to make a plan for tracking and monitoring our work and progress.

## Communication

Throughout the years of our strategic plan, we will share updates with the community to increase awareness of our activities and progress. Regular updates will be shared with the library Board through meeting packets and agendas and with the public through a series of social media posts/newsletter features/annual report.

## Acknowledgements

Jack Russell Memorial Library sincerely thanks the members of the strategic planning team who contributed many hours to this process and to the hundreds of community members who shared their ideas and experiences with us.

### Strategic Planning Team

Steve Volkert
Craig Westfall
Renee Ham
Ann Schmirler
Micki Hoffmann
Vanessa Taylir

Appreciation is also due to the Library Board for their support throughout the process, and to the Library Staff, who work hard every day to help the library run smoothly and make it the vibrant, welcoming space it is.

We also thank the consulting team from WiLS, who guided the planning team's work and helped manage this project.