



DOVER FREE
PUBLIC LIBRARY

Strategic Plan 2026–2030





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Introduction

Community Profile

Dover stands as a distinctive community rich in historical significance and cultural diversity. Founded in 1722 when entrepreneur John Jackson established an iron forge along the Rockaway River, Dover evolved from industrial roots that even attracted General George Washington during the Revolutionary War. The Morris Canal's operation from 1825–1925 shaped much of the town's development before its incorporation in 1869.

Today's Dover features a vibrant multicultural population of 18,348 residents, with 75% identifying as Hispanic and 51.5% foreign-born, creating a uniquely diverse tapestry within Morris County. With its blend of historical significance, industrial heritage, and cultural richness, Dover presents distinctive opportunities and needs for library services that reflect its community character and values.



Purpose of the Strategic Plan

This plan sets a direction for the Dover Free Public Library for 2026–2030, aligning our services with community needs, addressing barriers to access, and positioning the library as a trusted connector and civic anchor.





The Planning Process

Data Collection & Community Engagement

The library is committed to an inclusive planning process, reaching out to residents across demographics, including seniors, immigrant families, and community leaders. Input was gathered through:

- Community surveys distributed and focus groups were scheduled (in English and Spanish)
- Stakeholder interviews with town officials and local leaders
- Direct outreach to the Mayor's Office and senior housing facilities

Despite limited responses from some institutions, the process illuminated both strengths and gaps in community participation.

Survey Results & Analysis

Between June and July 2025, the Library collected 23 responses.

- Usage Patterns: 73% visit regularly (monthly or more)
- Barriers: Library hours, lack of awareness, preference for digital resources, and environment discomfort
- Awareness: Only 22% reported being "strongly aware" of services.
- Communication: Top sources included the website, signage, and Facebook. Instagram and newsletters were underused.

Priorities Ranked from respondents:

1. Expand cultural programming
2. Increase community awareness
3. Enhance multilingual services
4. Strengthen senior services
5. Address needs of unhoused patrons
6. Build community partnerships



Stakeholder Engagement

Of the 22 stakeholders invited, only two responded:

- One Councilman emphasized affordable housing, public safety, youth engagement, equitable access, and the need for bilingual communication, stronger partnerships, and proactive outreach. He sees the library as a connector and catalyst for civic engagement.
- Another respondent stressed racism and governance barriers, citing limited Latino/Hispanic participation in civic leadership. He pointed to potential allies in faith communities, healthcare providers, and police leadership.

Barriers to Engagement

- Mayor's Office: There was no response to a request for assistance in contacting seniors.
- Senior Housing Facilities: There were no responses to bilingual invitations for surveys and presentations.
- Although there were four different dates scheduled for the focus groups, attendance was zero on all four dates.

These silences highlight systemic gaps in outreach and engagement. They also underscore the library's unique role as one of the few local institutions proactively seeking inclusive input.

Key Insights

- Dover's diversity requires bilingual and culturally relevant programming.
- Communication gaps limit awareness and participation.
- Seniors remain underserved despite outreach efforts.
- The library is uniquely positioned as a neutral, trusted convener in the community.



Library Mission and Values

Mission Statement (**draft update**):

The Dover Free Public Library empowers all residents by providing equitable access to information, fostering cultural understanding, and serving as a hub for lifelong learning, community connection, and civic engagement.

Core Values:

- Equity & Inclusion
- Access to Knowledge
- Community Connection
- Respect & Dignity
- Innovation & Responsiveness

Previous Mission Statement:

The mission of the Dover Free Public Library is to educate, inform, enlighten, enrich, and entertain. We are committed to:

- Providing all patrons with free and equal access to information in a variety of formats;
- Fostering lifelong learning, personal enrichment, and a literate society;
- Stimulating and encouraging interest in reading and learning among youth;
- Communicating and cooperating with area schools to aid students in developing research skills;
- Supporting and defending the principles of intellectual freedom, the Library Bill of Rights, and the Freedom to Read Statement.

The Library's overall vision is to remain a living and active contributor to contemporary Dover. The Library mirrors the past and present interests and the needs of the community it serves.



Plan Priority Areas

1. Expand Cultural & Multilingual Programming
2. Strengthen Outreach & Communication
3. Engage Seniors
4. Build Community Trust
5. Expand Partnerships

Strategic Action Steps

Priority Area 1: Expand Cultural & Multilingual Programming

- Develop and maintain a bilingual (English/Spanish) collection growth plan
- Launch a monthly cultural celebration series
- Partner with schools and ESL programs for Spanish-English conversation circles
- Train staff in basic Spanish phrases and cultural competency

Priority Area 2: Strengthen Outreach & Communication

- Relaunch the library newsletter (bilingual)
- Establish a regular social media calendar
- Recruit Library Ambassadors from trusted community members
- Host an annual 'Library Open House'

Priority Area 3: Engage Seniors

- Pilot a Homebound Delivery Service
- Offer monthly Senior Tech Help sessions
- Establish Senior Social Afternoons
- Develop transportation collaborations

Priority Area 4: Build Community Trust

- Host quarterly community forums
- Create a 'Community Voices' display
- Facilitate civic engagement workshops
- Ensure welcoming, safe, neutral library spaces

Priority Area 5: Expand Partnerships

- Establish partnerships with local schools
- Collaborate with Zufall Health and healthcare providers
- Partner with faith communities
- Develop a shared community calendar





Plan Communication Strategies

The library will use a multi-layered approach:

Internal Communication:

- Regular staff/trustee updates
- Progress dashboard inside library

External Communication:

- Quarterly bilingual progress updates
- Presentations at town council/community forums
- Infographics and short videos

Community Engagement:

- Feedback loop (surveys, social media, suggestion box)
- Recognize community contributors

Branding the Plan:

- Memorable tagline (e.g., 'DFPL: MORE than just books!' / DFPL: ¡mucho MÁS que libros!)

- Consistent visuals and bilingual messaging

Evaluating the Plan

Progress will be tracked through:

- Annual patron surveys
- Program attendance/demographic participation
- Partnerships formed
- Senior engagement metrics
- Growth in bilingual programming and outreach

Evaluation will be transparent, with results reported to the Board and public.



Appendix

Survey Instrument

Focus Group Questions

- What are our community's greatest strengths?
- What challenges are most pressing?
- Does the community have all the services/resources you need?

Stakeholder Interview Questions

- What issues most affect the people you serve?
- What prevents progress on these issues?
- What changes would make a meaningful difference?
- Who do you trust to take action?
- How will we know if progress is made?





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2025 Community Survey

This survey is designed to help us understand how well the library serves our community and identify areas where we can improve. Your responses are valuable and will help us make decisions about future services and programs.

This survey should only take 5 minutes to complete. All responses are optional and anonymous.

Thanks for your participation!

Please answer the following questions as honestly as possible. There are no right or wrong answers.

1. Have you visited the Dover Free Public Library in the past 12 months?
 - Yes (regularly - monthly or more)
 - Yes (occasionally - a few times a year)
 - Yes, once
 - No, but I have visited in the past
 - No, I have never visited

2. If you do not use the library regularly, what are the main reasons? (check all that apply)
 - Library hours do not fit my schedule
 - Transportation challenges
 - Do not know what services are available
 - Prefer to buy books/access materials online
 - Language barriers
 - Not comfortable with the environment
 - Find what I need elsewhere
 - Other:

3. What is your age range?
 - 18-24
 - 25-34
 - 35-44
 - 45-54
 - 55+

4. What is your gender? (Multiple choice: Female, Male, Non-binary, Prefer not to say)



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- Male
- Female
- Non-Binary
- Prefer not to say

5. Do you have children under the age of 18 in your household?

- Yes
- No

6. Are you a resident of Dover?

- Yes
- No

7. Please rate your agreement with the following statements:

a. I feel welcome at the public library.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
- Not applicable/Never visited

b. The library is accessible to me and my family.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
- Not applicable/Never visited

c. I am aware of the programs and services the library offers.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
- Not applicable/Never visited

8. Are there any books/media/resources that you would like to see more of?



9. Are there resources missing from the library or that are underrepresented?

10. How do you usually find out about library services and events? (check all that apply)

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Other social media
- Library website
- Library newsletter
- Library signage
- School
- Word of mouth
- Other: _____

11. What services or programs would you like to see the library offer in the future?(Open-ended: Please list your suggestions)

12. What improvements would you like to see at the library? (Open-ended: Please list your suggestions)

13. How can the library better serve the community? (Open-ended: Please share your thoughts)

14. What role should the library play in promoting community connection?

15. What partnerships or community collaborations would you like to see the library pursue?

Instructions: Please rank the following library service areas in order of importance to you and your community, with 1 being the highest priority and 6 being the lowest priority. Each service area includes multiple specific initiatives that would be implemented together.

Example of how to complete this ranking: If you believe multilingual services are most critical, community partnerships are second most important, senior services are third, cultural programming is fourth, homelessness support is fifth, and community awareness is least urgent, you would fill in:



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- 1 Enhance Multilingual Services and Communication
 - 2 Build Strategic Community Partnerships
 - 3 Strengthen Senior Services
 - 4 Expand Cultural Programming
 - 5 Address Homelessness with Dignity and Safety
 - 6 Increase Community Awareness of Library Services
-

Rank these service areas from 1 (highest priority) to 6 (lowest priority):

___ Enhance Multilingual Services and Communication

(for example: Implement bilingual signage throughout the library, Create spanish language marketing materials, develop basic Spanish language training for all staff, establish monthly Spanish/English conversation groups).

___ Increase Community Awareness of Library Services

(for example: Launch targeted outreach programs in predominantly Latino neighborhoods, create "Library Ambassador" programs with community leaders, develop mobile library services for seniors, Partner with local schools for student library card drive).

___ Address Homelessness with Dignity and Safety

(for example: Partner with local social services for weekly onsite support, train staff in trauma-informed service approaches, create clear behavioral guidelines in multiple languages, designate quiet study areas separate from general seating).

___ Expand Cultural Programming

(for example: Host monthly cultural celebration events, create bilingual storytime programs, develop Latino heritage collection, partner with local cultural organizations).

___ Strengthen Senior Services

(for example: Launch senior technology training program, create homebound delivery service, develop large print Spanish collection, host monthly senior social events).

___ Build Strategic Community Partnerships

(for example: Establish regular meetings with community organizations ,coordinate service delivery with partner agencies, create shared program calendar, develop resource referral network).



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Additional Comments (Optional):

Please share any thoughts about why you ranked these services as you did, or suggest other services not listed that you believe should be prioritized: