

Durham County Library Board of Trustees Strategic Plan

2026

Executive Summary

In 2024 the chair of the Durham Library Board [the Board], Willis Whichard, tasked the Library Development Committee with developing a strategic plan for the Board. The strategic plan aims to provide structure to the aims of the Board and a direction for the Board to continue to support the Library through effective advocacy and partnership.

Although the Board has previously operated without a strategic plan, Durham is experiencing rapid population growth (almost 7% since 2020)¹, shifting demographics, new Library leadership, and financial and cultural challenges affecting libraries statewide and nationally. Additionally, the current Board is still early in its service, with one-third of members having served for three years and two-thirds for less than two years. These factors have led us to articulate guiding principles, goals, and objectives to guide our service to the Library and the community. We have an opportunity to better the Board's understanding of the Library and the County, and to be more proactive in our advocacy.

This document is intended to be a forward looking document, created to guide the development of the Board over the next 1-3 years. It is recommended that this document be reviewed and updated biennially by the Board Development Committee at that time.

Mission

The Library Board of Trustees partners with Library leadership for strategic planning and operational decisions and to set Library policies. The Board advocates for the Library within the community and with local and state legislators and leaders to sustain the vitality of the Durham Library system.

¹ [Durham, North Carolina Population 2025](#)

Vision

To support the Library as a thriving cornerstone of a distinct and vibrant community.

Core Values

- **Intellectual Freedom:** Upholding the right to access information and ideas without censorship
- **Inclusion:** Ensuring Library services are accessible and welcoming to all
- **Public Good:** Advocating for the Library as a vital community hub
- **Transparency:** Being open and accountable to the public and government bodies

Planning Process

In preparation for the Durham County Library 2025 Board of Trustees retreat, the strategic planning committee undertook a survey to assess the capabilities of the Board members based on best practices from the Association of Library Trustees, Advocates, Friends and Foundations. Responses to several of the questions are of note with respect to deficits (greater than 50% of the responses neutral or negative) that represent opportunities for the strategic plan.

- Lack of year round engagement in **advocacy** initiatives, before, during and after elections (67% of responses were neutral or negative)
- Leveraging awareness of the **political process** and the manner in which the Board members can impact decision making through **advocacy** (55% of responses were neutral or negative)
- Awareness of local, state and federal **laws** impacting libraries (67% of responses were neutral or negative)
- Familiarity with **Library issues** at the local, state and federal levels (67% of responses were neutral or negative)

The Board development team held a workshop to review the data and inputs into the strategic planning process. The members of the committee used the strengths, weaknesses, opportunity and threats framework (SWOT) to capture issues and challenges for the Library and separately issues and challenges for the Library Board of trustees. The individual inputs from the committee members were then combined into themes.

The next activity of the workshop was for the committee members to identify potential solutions and/or responses for the Board in response to the items identified during the SWOT analysis. The committee summarized the tactical response items to develop themes that the Board could execute over the next 3 years as the strategy to achieve desired outcomes. The initial draft of the

outcomes and the proposed actions have been summarized in the table above, with the green shading showing the mapping of initiative to desired outcome.

Themes

- More effective **Advocacy** (more resources for the Library, strengthen community support)
- **Transparency** (better represent the needs of community through planned **engagement**)
- Increase the Board's ability to represent the needs of the Library through planned **Board development**

The materials from the workshop were then shared with the full Board of Trustees for feedback, and used in the development of the plan.

Plan

Theme

Advocacy

Board Members

Kynita, Ericka, Leah, Aquaris

Outcome

The Board takes an active role in advocating for resources for the Library.

Objective	Target
Develop a messaging and advocacy plan	• Develop Advocacy calendar for 2026-2027 board year • By _____ 2026, write 3-5 messages the LBoT members can share with community and decision makers • Host advocacy breakfast (late winter/early spring) each new year in order to advocate funding library • Community broadcast of the talking points - Write an Op-Ed and submit to

	local media in support of public libraries (for example, an op-ed commending the IndyWeek for its amazing coverage of libraries over the past year) • Work with the DCPL Public Relations/Marketing Department to make Reels and other short videos about the DCPL, programs & services it offers (late summer/early fall)
Plan an advocacy strategy session	• Led by the Advocacy Committee for the full Board - November Board meeting
Board members to attend relevant county meetings	• Attend budget meeting of County Commissioners as a group to speak on the impact and importance of the DCPL as a community resource (late spring/early summer)

Theme

Community Engagement

Board Members

Tracy, Tal, Rama

Outcome

The community knows that the Library Board of Trustees exists to advise the Library in line with community expectations.

Objective	Target
Staff BoT tables at community events	Outreach Committee will identify 2 events in 2026-2027 Board year to attend, create shift schedule.

	• Committee will work with Friends and Foundation to identify which community events they attend; discuss joining them • Committee will create signage for a BOT addition to Friends/Foundation set-ups • Board members will sign up for shifts; at least two Board members per shift • During tabling, Board members will invite community members to attend Board meetings and comment; Board table will also maintain a shared notebook or online doc to record comments • Board will discuss tabling and comments at following Board meeting
Implement Board listening sessions at branches	Outreach Committee will schedule pilot listening sessions in different locations for 2026-2027 Board year. • 2-3 Board members will attend • Sessions publicized through signage in Main and selected location libraries, Library event calendar, Library social media, etc. • During event, Board members will explain what the Board does and when our meetings are, then invite comment • Board members will make notes and report back for discussion at following Board meeting
Increase/maintain community awareness of Board actions/existence	• Form a BOT Outreach or Transparency Committee • Identify ways to make Board documentation available to the public appropriately for the 2026-2027 Board year ◦ Work with DCL and County staff to post meeting agendas one week before the meeting ◦ Modify location report template with the intention of including reports with meeting minutes posted online. ◦ Work with DCL and County staff to identify how BOT can save and post other BOT documents (including procedures, templates, etc.) to be available to public

Theme

Board Development

Board Members

Carl, Ann, Ericka

Outcome

Board members are informed and confident about issues facing libraries and Durham County.

Objective	Target
BoT meetings are more topic based	• Solicit topic suggestions from board members to develop a list of topics (September 2026) • Develop a list of topics; review annually for relevance and priority (October 2026) • Have at least 2 topic based meetings/year. Topic-based meetings should have outcomes, i.e. things we do might do differently (beginning in 2027)
BoT is conversant with Library statistics, including budgets and personnel	• Review and discuss library data including need for headcount (vacancies) and significant shifts in usage and programming • Review budget request and outcomes with Library Director in order to opportunities for public support (March 23 public comment/related advocacy) (June budget adoption) (Attendance at annual budget meetings; verbal support if possible) • Participate as stakeholders in the Library Strategic Planning processes (2nd half 2026)
Look into external Board training	• Identify 2-3 free options for board training, library-related or other non-profit. Present to full Board for discussion/decision (Oct 2026)
Leverage external sources for environmental scanning about Library	• Identify 3-5 local, state, and national sources that publish accurate and current information about issues and laws that impact public libraries. Once

issues and best practices	identified, monitor them at a regular interval and alert LBoT of relevant and urgent issues. (September 2026)
Create written procedures for Board transitions, Director transitions, Board operations	• Develop a new Board member training pack so each Board member gets the same introduction to the Board (Ann, Ericka, Rama September 2026) • Develop a written list of criteria to consult when reviewing potential new Board members (June 2026) • Create a Board calendar with meeting dates, County Commission meeting dates, budget and planning cycle dates and Trustee award dates (May 2026) • Create a Board Operating Procedures document (June 2026)

Key metrics will be established for each of these focus areas using a shared spreadsheet for tracking our targets and progress. These targets will be monitored and adjusted, as needed, over the next three years to ensure that we achieve our aims.