

Rockaway Township Free Public Library Strategic Plan 2024-2026: A Road Map to the Future

October 2024

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Strategic Plan Overview

The Rockaway Township Free Public Library's (RT Library's) new strategic plan establishes a road map to guide investment in and development of the library for the next three years. This brief overview provides the essence of the library's plan, in which library service programs will be strengthened and transformed in response to changing community demographics and needs.

Our Vision

The RT Library plans to provide everyone in our community with a modern library environment that supports personal growth and community experiences important to 21st-century library users.

Our Mission

The RT Library, the heart of our community, offers an innovative and engaging public environment, as well as resources to support the cultural, intellectual, and lifelong learning needs of the Rockaway Township community.

To achieve that vision and that mission, the library will:

1. Position itself as the heart of the community, a welcoming and safe place where people of all ages gather.
2. Offer a warm, engaging environment that creates opportunities for quiet study, conversation, browsing, and reading.
3. Provide an intellectual and cultural focus for the community.
4. Offer materials, programs, and staff to support lifelong learning.

Our Values

Our values ensure that we remain focused on a set of commonly held principles in pursuit of our vision and mission.

The RT Library:

1. Supports the community's personal and intellectual growth.
2. Collaborates with individuals and community organizations to meet residents' library needs.
3. Seeks to provide open accessibility to all library facilities and its website.

4. Offers high quality and diverse collections and programs that respond to the changing community.
5. Improves the library experience by providing modern facilities and engaging new technologies.
6. Embraces innovation and change.
7. Builds community support for the library by demonstrating sound stewardship.

Strategic Focus

Library planners identified three strategic areas of focus to guide their thinking about the future in preparation for obtaining information from community focus groups, an online survey, and an analysis of library usage and demographic trends:

1. Services
2. Spaces
3. Programming

The Planning Process

The Library Trustees felt the best way to develop a comprehensive strategic plan was to involve Library Board members, the Library Director, members of the staff, and members of the community via surveys and focus groups.

This committee contributed much of their personal time and energy to the strategic planning process and to the development of the plan.

Involve the Community

Before launching the planning effort, RT Library trustees determined that to be successful, the plan should reflect the needs and interests of the community served by the RT Library. Through the use of focus groups and an online survey, the Planning Committee reached out to the residents of Rockaway Township to solicit ideas and suggestions about ways the library could become a more essential part of their lives. Library planners listened carefully to this community input, identified the most frequently mentioned suggestions, and devised a plan to improve the library.

Focus Groups

Library staff, trustees, residents, and others met in one or more of 10 focus groups or a town meeting facilitated by members of the committee. At those sessions, participants discussed their ideas for improving library service; they communicated what they liked best about the library; and they identified areas in need of improvement.

Online Survey

Over three hundred thirty residents and library users responded to the online surveys about the library. Their comments and suggestions assisted with the development of the plan. The survey results are available in the library.

Results in Brief

Through the library's outreach efforts, many offered ideas for library improvements. Although many were satisfied with the current library offerings, they wanted to see services and facilities enhanced and expanded to meet changing needs and to provide even better service.

Suggestions from the survey included:

- More programming with a wider range of offerings, times and target demographics
- Updated bathrooms and improved maintenance to the library and grounds
- Adjusted/increased hours at Hibernia
- Library mascot
- Adding Notary service

Thinking about the Future

A planning committee of trustees, staff, and community members met to review the outcomes of the focus groups and survey, review staff and board recommendations for the plan, and finalize recommendations for future library direction.

A number of key assumptions helped establish the groundwork for the plan.

Measuring Success

The RT Library's trustees and staff will annually track progress toward achieving the plan's goals and objectives and thereby determine how well the library is responding to the community. Such measurements include (1) a commitment to review and update the plan annually, (2) ongoing assessment of customer satisfaction, and (3) review of library-use metrics.

Assess Current Library Environment

Population Changes

According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s Census 2010, Rockaway Township’s population was 24,156. Current projections estimate the population at 25,539. The forecast 2030 population is approximately 29,960. The median age of township residents is 42.9 years while residents 50-59-years olds make up the largest demographic in town.

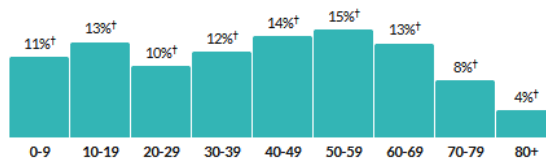
Age

42.9 ±1.5

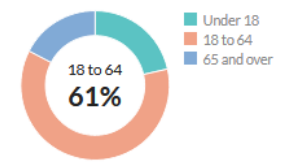
Median age

about the same as the figure in Morris County: 42.7 ±0.2
 about 10 percent higher than the figure in New Jersey: 40 ±0.2

Population by age range



Population by age category



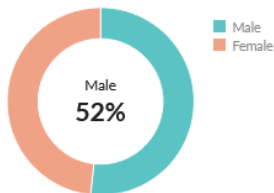
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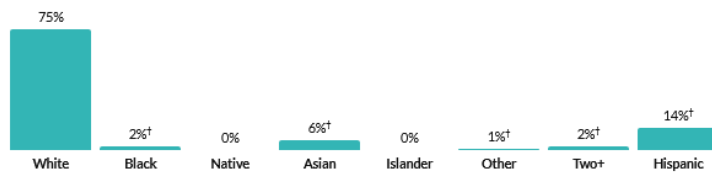
Ethnicity and Language

Rockaway Township is becoming more ethnically diverse. According to recent statistics and studies, residents of Asian background make up 6%, and residents of Hispanic background have grown to 14% of the population. Asian languages and Spanish are spoken by more residents of Rockaway Township today than in the past.

Sex



Race & Ethnicity

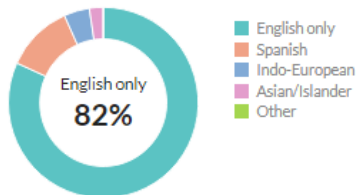


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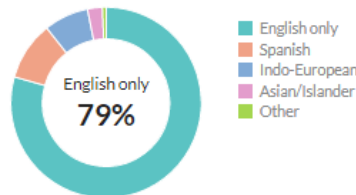
* Hispanic includes respondents of any race. Other categories are non-Hispanic.

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Language at home, children 5-17



Language at home, adults 18+



Educational Attainment

In Rockaway Township, educational attainment is above the New Jersey average of the population age 25 and older: 54.4% have a bachelor's degree or higher; the New Jersey average is 42.3%.

Educational attainment

96.9%

High school grad or higher

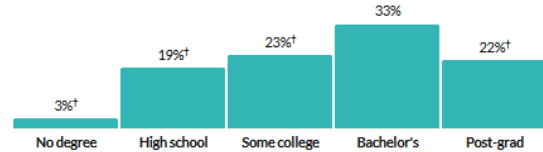
about the same as the rate in Morris County: 95.1%
about 10 percent higher than the rate in New Jersey: 90.6%

54.4%

Bachelor's degree or higher

a little less than the rate in Morris County: 57.1%
about 1.3 times the rate in New Jersey: 42.3%

Population by highest level of education

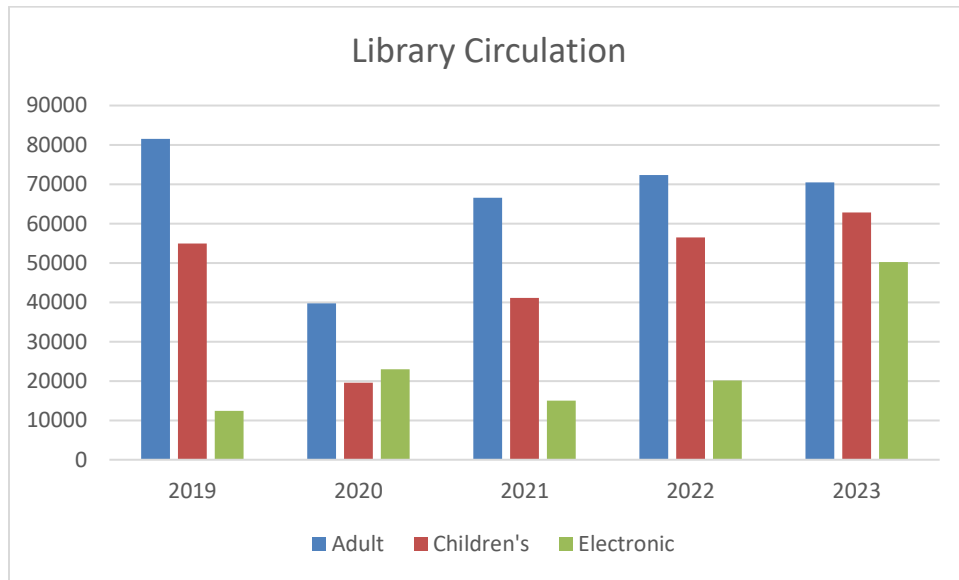


* Universe: Population 25 years and over

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Library Usage Circulation

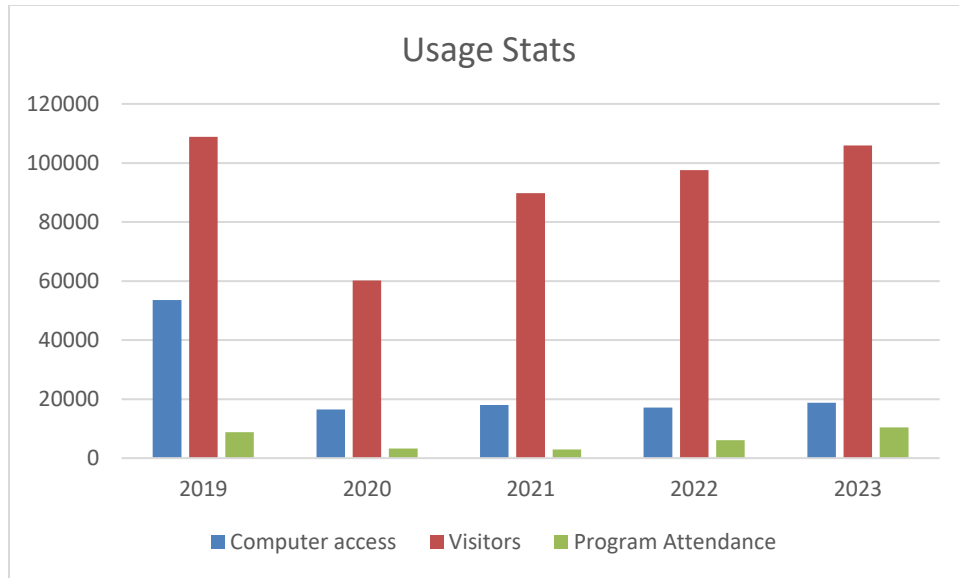
Overall library use has been steadily increasing in the past few years, according to statistics provided by the library. The Library was closed for most of 2020 and 2021 due to the Covid-19 Pandemic but once reopened quickly rebounded to previous circulation levels with a marked increase in electronic materials circulation.



Information and Reference

Use of public libraries for reference and extensive research has changed due to the ubiquitous access to information online and via mobile devices. That trend is reflected in reference statistics for both the main library and the Hibernia branch.

The number of computer and Internet users at the Library has decreased significantly since the Covid Pandemic, however use of the library has rebounded to near pre-pandemic levels, with a significant increase in programming attendance.



Library Achievements

The 2024-2026 Strategic Plan will continue to build on recent library successes during the past few years.

Technology

1. A new, centralized print system that makes it easier for customers to print their work
2. A new staff network server that provides better security and the ability for staff to share information more easily
3. Addition of WiFi printing
4. Increased bandwidth that makes information available more quickly to library PC users
5. Redesign of the library's website to more closely follow current design trend and create a more streamlined site allowing for ease of navigation

Collection Development

1. Increased budget for materials purchasing
2. Introduction of new and additional electronic services such as Kanopy, RB Digital, and Tumble Books
3. Significant investment into ebooks and eaudiobooks

4. A commitment to systematic and regular weeding to ensure that the collection remains fresh and that old and worn materials are replaced regularly

Building Improvements

1. Created new lounge space in Adult area
2. Renovated the Hibernia Branch Library
3. Relocated Local History to Hibernia Branch Library
4. Completely redesigned the Children's Room resulting in increased usage and time spent in the library by patrons
5. Created new Quiet Study Space
6. Removed large, old CD storage and relocated CDs to underutilized shelves open up valuable floor space
7. Had book drop shelter built to help keep residents, staff and most importantly, materials dry during inclement weather

Programming

1. Reactivated and improved the Museum Pass Program
2. Implemented and enhanced Library of Things
3. Developed virtual storytimes for Covid lock downs, and gradually reinstated general program after reopening
4. Offer one on one technology instruction sessions
5. Initiated book clubs for both adults and teens
6. Implemented bi-annual In-Service Training

Community Outreach

1. Partnered with Vision Federal Credit Union and the Morris County Council of Education Associations, Inc. (MCCEA) to produce the Library's Annual Spring Festival attracting nearly 2,000-3,000 visitors annually
2. Increased community involvement with the library by involving the community in the strategic planning process
3. Improved communication with Rockaway Township residents such as via an electronic newsletter, Facebook, and Twitter
4. Collaborated with local historical society, the Lion's Club, and the Women's Club
5. Improved library's visibility by marching in the White Meadow Lake Day Parade, conducting story times at the Parks Lake

Gazebo, hosting information booth at the Mayor’s Senior Picnic,
etc.

Strategic Issues

Focusing on the Future

The focus groups, surveys, community analysis, and planning committee discussions surfaced a number of critical issues that the RT Library needs to consider as it plans for the future. Many of the issues are specific to Rockaway Township; others reflect the current public library environment.

Customer-Targeted Services

Successful libraries provide a wide array of services that are convenient and easy for customers of all ages to use and enjoy. The plan will help focus the RT Library on how it can work more efficiently to provide customer-targeted services. Both self-checkout and return of library materials, one-on-one and group technology instruction classes, drop-in story hour programs, and after-school homework help are among the services that will be considered.

Library Space That Works

Creating flexible and inviting library space is essential to the library's long-term success in attracting new customers and retaining current customers. Renewed focus on library layout and design will improve library functionality and enhance its aesthetic appeal. This will enable the RT Library to provide the widest variety of community activities, from quiet reading and research spaces to group study space as well as space for programs and socializing.

Changing Technology

The impact of information technology is transforming the way libraries deliver service. Many people rely on the library as their only source of technology, and as more people find their way to the library to use its public-access computers, library staff is increasingly being asked to provide instruction and coach customers in the use of new technologies. Investing in modern, easy-to-use technology will enable the RT Library to accomplish its technology objectives more effectively.

Community Connections

The RT Library plans to work with other local organizations to extend library service. By collaborating with cultural and educational organizations, the community will benefit from expanded and dynamic programming.

Building Awareness

Rockaway Township's population is continuing to grow, with more retirees moving to the area and older adults choosing to age in place. At the same time, new families are finding their way to town. It is imperative that the library continues to focus its efforts to (1) inform the community about all the library has to offer and (2) respond to population and lifestyle changes. Current and potential users should know what the library has, where to find it, and how to use it.

Services to Preteens and Teens

Teens and preteens are valued library users. Consistent programming, staff dedicated to these age-groups, library resources that support preteens' and teens' educational and leisure-time reading interests and a wide variety of programs are essential to get teens and preteens thoroughly engaged in the library.

Staff Development

Great staff is vital for producing great library service. The RT Library intends to provide highly knowledgeable staff in sufficient numbers to support the level of service expected by the community. The library will invest resources to ensure that staff receives ongoing training and the skill development needed to provide excellent service.

Resource Development

The RT Library depends primarily on tax support from Rockaway Township to deliver library services. Increasing needs for additional private and public funding will require that the library explore other avenues for generating support.

The aforementioned strategic issues were used in the development of broad goals for achievement during the course of this plan along with specific suggestions for steps to assist in implementation.

Goals: 2024-2026

Adult/YA Department and Library Development: 2024

1. Spaces

- Investigate automatic door opener
- Clean carpets
- Clean windows
- Contact architects to discuss bathroom renovation
- Add art hanging strips in meeting room

2. Services

- Identify staff willing to become notaries
- Enhance signage and marketing of flyers/pamphlets
- Begin growing world language collection
- Grow Library of Things
- Identify measurable metrics for targeted marketing
- Transition email to Gmail
- Meet with schools to improve cooperative programming and marketing

3. Programming

- Begin offering refreshments at programs
- Identify ELL educator
- Identify possible adult craft program
- Discuss possible pay to attend craft programs

2025

1. Spaces

- Investigate meeting pod for zoom calls/interviews
- Renovate bathrooms
- Investigate new water filling stations
- Paint and enhance main library stairwell

2. Services

- Enhance signage and marketing of flyers/pamphlets
- Revamp Reader's Choice Program
- Implement new social media marketing techniques such as Bookstagram

- Grow Museum Pass Program
- Implement targeted marketing campaigns
- Develop intranet in Gmail Suite to centralize staff resources such as policies, time balances, scheduling, etc

3. Programming

- Identify babysitting certification educator
- Implement Passport Days
- Identify programming opportunities at the Gazebo or other non-library locations
- Implement new programming such as Bookchats (themed topics, not book specific)
- Look to add more weekend and evening programming with the addition of potential PT Children’s Librarian
- Investigate pay to attend craft programs
- Begin adding performances by school system such as Preview shows of plays or concerts as well as art shows

2026

- Investigate new flooring
- Begin considering new library furniture

Children’s Department:

2024

1. Spaces

- Identify potential Library mascot
- Begin investigation of creating a “cozy space” for parent/child enjoyment
- Review signage and investigate Book neighborhoods for easier browsing

2. Services

- Improve marketing by setting specific, measurable metrics and improved marketing of overlapping adult services such as Museum Passes.
- Investigate the purchase of additional educational toys/electronics such as Toonies

3. Programming

- Review programming times for maximum attendance and potential conflicts with other community programs, school schedules, etc
- Extend the story time sessions
- Investigate the feasibility of adding additional Programming Librarian and define role and responsibilities

2025

1. Spaces

- Implement creation of “cozy space” for parent/child enjoyment if deemed feasible
- Implement new signage or book layout options as identified in 2024

2. Services

- Evaluate metrics of marketing and adjust as needed
- Purchase educational toys/electronics as needed
- Identify local organizations/businesses/groups willing to partner with the library to offer discounts or free activities for patrons as part of summer reading

3. Programming

- Implement new programming times/days
- Extend the story time sessions
- Hire additional Programming Librarian and implement additional programming at both the Main Library and Hibernia Branch

2026

1. Spaces

- Continue review best use of space and adjust signage as needed

2. Services

- Evaluate metrics of marketing and adjust as needed
- Continued to investigate new services and offerings to the public

3. Programming

- Continuously strive to improve programming, times, offerings, etc

Hibernia Branch Library: 2024

1. Spaces

- Stripe parking lot and remove Authorized Vehicles sign
- Install solar lights by exterior stairs
- Purchase and install smart TV
- Identify and install a faux fireplace to enhance library ambiance

2. Services

- Begin growing large print collections
- Continue enhancing new book collections
- Install lower level doorbell/chime for improved accessibility assistance
- Install exterior sign for hours and announcements
- Host Board of Trustees meeting
- Host Open House

3. Programming

- Evaluate times and marketing of programs
- Develop and plan for additional programming

2025

1. Spaces

- Improve interior signage
- Investigate costs of replacing frosted glass with clear
- Purchase and install baby changing station
- Investigate book lockers
- Identify and purchase furniture for outdoor seating
- Investigate the painting the exterior

2. Services

- Implement curbside delivery

- Identify and improve marking to local communities
- Add kid’s digital touch table as discussed with Foundation
- Investigate new hours of operation

3. Programming

- Implement new/additional programming
- Host Board of Trustees meeting

2026

- Have exterior painted
- Host Board of Trustees meeting

Measuring Success

Each year, library staff and trustees will conduct a planning session or retreat to assess their progress in meeting the plan’s goals and objectives. Goals and objectives will be modified, added, or eliminated depending on changing needs and circumstances during the planning cycle. The results of such an annual assessment will be shared with all library stakeholders.

