

INTRODUCTION

As part of its strategic planning process, **Somerville Public Library** conducted **Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results (SOAR)** exercises with both **Library staff** and the **Board of Trustees**. These activities provided structured opportunities to reflect on the Library's current strengths, identify emerging opportunities, articulate future aspirations, and define meaningful results (measures of success).

In **June 2024**, a SOAR exercise with the Library's **Board of Trustees** was facilitated by **Michelle Eberle of Massachusetts Library Services**. In **September and October 2025**, Library **staff** participated in three facilitated SOAR brainstorming sessions led by **Barbara Alevras of Sage Consulting Services**. Together, these inputs offer a shared, complementary perspective that informs the Library's strategic direction, goal development, and future resource-allocation decisions.

SUMMARY BY SOAR CATEGORY

Library Strengths:

Common Themes: Shared strengths identified by both staff and trustees include:

- **Highly engaged, caring, and knowledgeable staff**
- **Strong and diverse collections**, including nontraditional materials and technology
- **Wide-ranging programs** for all ages
- **A welcoming and trusted community presence**
- **Strong partnerships and networked resources**, including Minuteman Library Network access

Staff Highlights: Staff perspectives emphasize:

- **Internal collaboration and teamwork**
- **Equity-driven services**, including social work support, multilingual collections, and technology access
- **Operational strengths**, such as extended hours, accessible facilities, and system-wide consistency

Board of Trustees Highlights: Trustee perspectives focus on:

- **Visible community impact**, such as museum passes, heating and cooling center functions, and pandemic-era innovations

- **Signature programs and initiatives**, including citizenship services, teen programming, and cultural events
- **Strong municipal support**, including City Council backing and alignment with city needs

Key Takeaways: Staff tend to articulate strengths through **systems, capacity, and service delivery**, while trustees emphasize **public-facing value and community recognition**. These views reinforce one another and reflect a well-rounded institutional identity.

Library Opportunities:

Common Themes: Areas of strong alignment include:

- **Teen engagement and partnerships**
- **Facility improvements and space constraints**
- **Expanded collaborations** with schools, city departments, and community organizations
- **Multilingual and inclusive services**
- **Sustainability and social support services**

Staff Highlights: Staff priorities focus on:

- **Staffing capacity and sustainability**
- **Renovation and accessibility needs**
- **Formalized partnerships and coordinated outreach**
- **Information literacy and civic trust**
- **Equitable technology access**

Board of Trustees Highlights: Trustees emphasize:

- **Creative and cultural programming**
- **Expanded use of space**, including pop-ups and shared community use
- **Sustainability education and environmental practices**
- **Legal information access and civic support**
- **Teen voice and leadership**, including councils and planning input

Key Takeaways: Staff frame opportunities around **organizational readiness and infrastructure**, while trustees imagine **programmatic growth, visibility, and creative expansion**. Together, these perspectives highlight the need to align capacity with ambition.

Library Aspirations

Common Themes: Shared aspirations include:

- Renovated, modern, and flexible library spaces
- A strong identity as a community hub
- Expanded teen engagement
- Language access and inclusion
- Deeper partnerships and collaboration

Staff Highlights: Staff aspirations prioritize:

- Sustainable staffing and funding
- Inclusive workplace culture
- Equitable access to services and technology
- Long-term institutional trust and stability
- Consistent, high-quality programming

Board of Trustees Highlights: Trustees articulate aspirations around:

- Physical transformation of facilities
- Increased community use and visibility
- Creative spaces, including makerspaces and media production
- Expanded adult education and cultural programming
- Positioning the Library as a civic and social anchor

Key Takeaways: Staff aspirations emphasize **durability and internal health**, while trustees focus on **growth, visibility, and community-centered identity**. Both sets of aspirations point toward a Library that is resilient, inclusive, and central to city life.

Library Results (progress/performance metrics):

Common Themes: Common measures of success include:

- Program participation and attendance
- Expanded community reach
- Improved teen outcomes
- Reduced reliance on police intervention
- Stronger partnerships and city alignment

Staff Highlights: Staff-defined results emphasize:

- Quantifiable metrics, including staffing data, budgets, circulation, attendance, and digital usage
- Facility condition and accessibility indicators

- **Survey-based measures of satisfaction and perception**
- **Program outcomes tied to equity, youth engagement, and social services**

Board of Trustees Highlights: Trustees focus on results such as:

- **Reaching new and underserved populations**
- **Being included in citywide planning efforts**
- **Improved teen relationships and collaboration**
- **Clear plans and proactive responses to challenges**
- **Stronger positioning within municipal decision-making**

Key Takeaways: Staff emphasize **data-driven accountability**, while trustees prioritize **visible progress and civic integration**. Together, these result measures balance operational rigor with community impact.

KEY SOAR TRENDS AND HIGHLIGHTS:

- **Facilities and space limitations** are a recurring theme across all SOAR categories
- **Teen engagement** is both a challenge and a shared priority
- **Staffing capacity and sustainability** underpin nearly every opportunity and aspiration
- **Equity, inclusion, and language access** are central to future success
- **The Library's role as a community anchor** is widely recognized and deeply valued
- **Partnerships and city alignment** are seen as critical levers for impact

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS:

- Align **programmatic ambitions** with **staffing, funding, and facility capacity**
- Prioritize **facility planning** that supports flexibility, accessibility, and community use
- Develop a **coordinated teen engagement strategy** grounded in partnerships and youth voice
- Formalize and strengthen **cross-department and community collaborations**
- Balance **quantitative metrics** with **qualitative indicators** of trust, belonging, and impact
- Ensure strategic goals reflect both **internal sustainability** and **external visibility**

CONCLUSION

SOAR exercise input from staff and trustees reflects a **shared commitment to Somerville Public Library's mission, values, and future relevance**. While each group brings a distinct perspective, together they paint a cohesive picture of a Library that is **trusted, inclusive, creative, and essential to community life**.

These findings provide a strong foundation for developing strategic goals that are **aspirational yet grounded**, ensuring the Library continues to evolve while remaining responsive to the needs of Somerville's diverse and dynamic community.

STAFF SOAR ANALYSIS INPUT PRIORITIZATION RESULTS

Following the SOAR Analysis brainstorming sessions, staff participants completed a survey ranking the ideas they generated and indicating which they considered most important to the Library's future success. The results of the staff's SOAR Analysis Input Prioritization Survey are presented below. **NOTE:** The number in parentheses after each supporting input section's italicized citation shows the idea's score, calculated as a weighted average. The higher the score, the higher the priority assigned by participants.

PRIORITIZED LIBRARY STRENGTHS:

The Library's current **strengths** were brainstormed and ranked from 1 (most important) to 11 (least important) for the Library's future success.

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|--|---|
| 1. Friendly, Engaging, and Caring Staff (8.62) | 7. Strong Network and Resource Sharing (5.90) |
| 2. Innovative and Diverse Collections (8.10) | 8. Robust Adult and Lifelong Learning Programs (5.52) |
| 3. Community Support and Social Services (7.00) | 9. Commitment to Innovation and Access to Technology (4.38) |
| 4. Welcoming and Accessible Facilities (6.62) | 10. Creative and Effective Marketing and Outreach (3.95) |
| 5. Broad Array of High-Quality Programming for All Ages (6.52) | 11. Unique Local Initiatives (3.05) |
| 6. Strong Community Connections (6.33) | |

PRIORITIZED LIBRARY OPPORTUNITIES:

Library **opportunities** were brainstormed and ranked from 1 (most important) to 13 (least important) for the Library's future success.

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|---|--|
| 1. Address Staffing Capacity and Sustainability (9.65) | 8. Expand Social and Support Services for Patrons (6.80) |
| 2. Pursue Facility Improvements and Space Renovations (9.05) | 9. Improve Information Literacy and Combat Misinformation (6.15) |
| 3. Increase Accessibility and Inclusion Across Facilities (8.00) | 10. Reaffirm Commitment to Privacy, Equity, and Democratic Values (6.00) |
| 4. Strengthen Multilingual and Multicultural Services (7.75) | 11. Enhance Early Childhood and Family Offerings (5.70) |
| 5. Reinforce the Library's Role as a Core Community Anchor (7.35) | 12. Broaden Access for Homebound and Underserved Populations (5.50) |
| 6. Deepen Community Integration and Partnerships (7.20) | 13. Invest in Technology Access and Education (4.90) |
| 7. Expand Services and Engagement for Teens and Young People (6.95) | |

Additional Opportunity Submitted for Consideration: Parking for patrons, many of whom are mobility impaired, would be a real asset to the Library, especially Central.

PRIORITIZED LIBRARY ASPIRATIONS:

Library **aspirations** were brainstormed and ranked from 1 (most important) to 14 (least important) for the Library's future success.

1. Maintain Modernized, Welcoming, and Fully Functional Library Spaces (11.10)
2. Offer Adequate and Diverse Staffing (10.35)
3. Community Trusts the Library And Recognizes Its Value (9.75)
4. Offer Accessible and Inclusive Services for All Patrons (8.05)
5. Secure Sufficient and Sustainable Funding (7.95)
6. Deliver Strong and Evolving Programming (7.65)
7. Workplace Culture is Inclusive and Supportive (7.60)
8. Expanded Social, ELL, and Equity-Focused Services (7.40)
9. Collections are Well-Maintained and High-Quality (6.85)
10. Serve as a Vibrant Creative and Cultural Hub (6.25)
11. Expanded Commitment to Teen Engagement and Youth Development (5.85)
12. Library's Presence Extends Beyond Its Walls (5.70)
13. Maintain Deep and Sustainable Community Partnerships (5.50)
14. Provide Broader Access to Technology and Digital Resources (5.00)

Additional Opportunities Submitted for Consideration:

1. Reinforcing the Library's role as a core community anchor (hub) while taking the library into the community through partnerships, services, and marketing (spokes) strikes me as our best opportunity to be both useful and valued.
2. Our continued existence depends on external funding, so the most important things we can do to ensure future success are to maintain relevance and goodwill among the community writ large. This manifests in both the services the Library provides and in the collective nostalgia, imagination, and perception of the Library held by individuals. As such, we would want to be responsive to community needs and partnerships and hew closely to our original purpose of providing knowledge, information, literacy, and culture. We want to provide a meaningful service and be viewed as a valuable community resource, even by those who do not use the Library but are aware of it as a necessary good.

PRIORITIZED LIBRARY RESULTS:

Library **results** (progress/performance metrics) were brainstormed and ranked from 1 (most important) to 10 (least important) for the Library's future success.

1. High Staffing Levels, Retention, and Diversity (7.45)
2. Enhanced Facility Space Configuration, Use, and Maintenance (6.55)
3. Rising Library Visits and Membership Growth (6.25)
4. Growth in Stable Funding and Resources (6.10)
5. Growth in Program Attendance and Community Partnerships (5.80)
6. Increased Positive Community Perception and Satisfaction (5.40)
7. Increased Use of ELL, Multilingual, and Social Services (5.30)
8. Increased Teen Engagement and Positive Outcomes (4.55)
9. Improved Technology Access, Makerspace Use, and Digital Engagement (3.95)
10. Strengthened Arts, Cultural, and Collaborative Programming (3.6)