

Library Department



TO: Chair Jessica Vega Pederson
Jenny Smith, Chief of Staff
Travis Graves, Interim Chief Operating Officer
Christian Elkin, Budget Director

FROM: Annie Lewis, Library Department Director

DATE: February 14, 2025

RE: FY 2026 Requested Budget Transmittal Letter

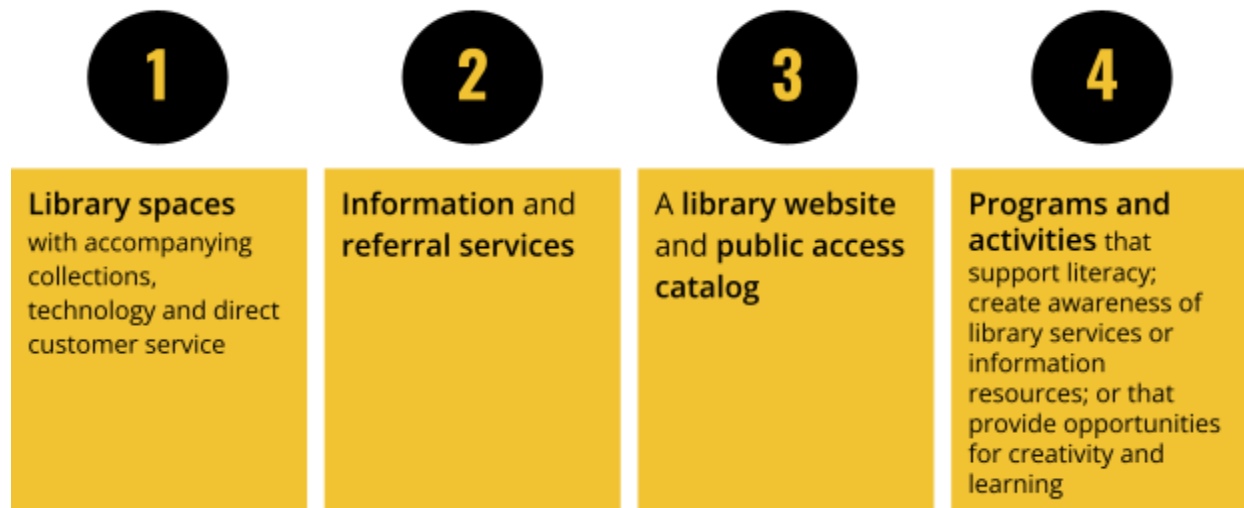
Department Overview

Multnomah County Library (MCL), a treasured community resource since 1864, is undergoing a significant transformation. Funded by a 2020 voter-approved capital bond, the library is implementing a series of major expansions, renovations and new building projects. Alongside these physical changes, the library is reimagining its staffing and collection models, integrating automation and technology, and redefining its approach to serving communities of color and culture as well as addressing safety and security concerns.

Central to the library's mission is creating and maintaining spaces that are welcoming and inclusive for patrons and library staff. The library supports Multnomah County's Mission, Vision and Values in this work with a long-term approach to planning and resource allocation that centers the needs of historically marginalized communities and evolves the library's services. This work includes culturally and linguistically relevant programming and collections, outstanding customer service, and offering diverse books and other physical and digital resources.

The library's goals, as articulated in its [2023-25 Strategic Plan](#), chart a path of change and growth oriented toward community needs and addressing historic patterns of exclusion and injustice. At the same time, the library is planning over a long horizon to ensure fiscal stability amidst escalating costs, expanded spaces and new opportunities to serve communities.

The library developed a new [Service Statement and Priorities](#) in 2024 to establish clear priorities for what services the library will provide in the future. This work informed the finalization of the Future Staffing Plan, discussed further below. The library allocates staffing and funding resources to ensure the public can reliably access the four service areas listed below, in priority order.



FY 2025 Successes

The library continues to have a strong relationship with the community through its programming, services and outreach. The library has introduced new spaces that offer amenities and features requested by the community, such as children's play areas, teen rooms, flexible programming and meeting rooms, updated technology and outdoor plazas. The library also provides a wide range of programming for children, teens and families to support civic engagement, learning and creativity as well as language and culturally specific programs and activities.

Multnomah County Library has 240,000 active cardholders, representing 38 percent of households in the service area. In FY 2025, digital materials checkouts grew to 7.1 million, the fourth highest rate in the nation. Approximately 115,000 students in grades K–12 have access to library services through Library Connect. Door counts at the newly opened Holgate and Midland Libraries are above 5,000 patrons per week, exceeding expectations.

Bond-funded construction projects are moving forward as planned, making good on the library's commitment to voters who supported the capital bond, with the bond-funded projects nearing completion in FY 2026. New or expanded spaces opened in FY 2025 include Holgate, Midland, North Portland and several smaller library refresh projects, including Central Library. Projects underway in FY 2026 include design and construction of Albina, Belmont, Northwest, St. Johns and East County Libraries along with several library refreshes.

FY 2026 Budget Priorities and Key Issues

Multnomah County Library remains focused on strategic planning for organizational evolution and growth management, and continues to deploy a cautious and long-term approach to budget planning. The importance of this planning work has come into sharp relief, as post-pandemic fiscal realities have coalesced into a challenging economic forecast for the library system.

Multnomah County Library District contracts with Multnomah County for the provision of library services. The District's revenue forecast for the coming year reflects slower than typical revenue growth—similar to the General Fund forecast—and property tax revenue growth is forecasted at less than 2 percent for the first time in the history of the District. The impact of remote work and lower economic activity in the downtown core has depressed assessed value for commercial property values, which is acting as a drag on overall property tax revenue growth. A set of newly established urban renewal areas is also diverting property tax revenue to designated tax-increment-financing districts around the County. At the same time, multiple years of sustained inflation and rapid personnel cost growth since 2020 have set a higher baseline for the library's current level of service.

The library has been planning for bond-related shifts to its staffing and internal service charges (facilities, technology) for several years as new, larger libraries with new amenities are brought online. The FY 2026 requested budget incorporates new assumptions around these operational costs — including the implementation of a new staffing plan — and also anticipates the need for additional adjustments in FY 2027.

Future Staffing Plan

In February 2025, the library introduced a new staffing plan, with the implementation aligning with the opening of the new 95,000 square foot East County Library. In order to help guide the development of this plan, the library engaged a local consulting company in January 2024 to lead stakeholder interviews, staff-focused service mapping sessions, facilitated planning sessions, and provide capacity building support for plan implementation.

The new staffing plan will serve as the library's guide for ensuring adequate staffing and optimal library services for the new library spaces and services. The staffing plan is incorporated into the FY 2026 requested budget submission, though operationally some

aspects of the plan will be implemented during that fiscal year in alignment with bond project timelines.

The staffing plan is built on the foundation of [MCL's Service Statement and Priorities](#), and is informed by an updated methodology to calculate staff requirements for service point coverage across all public service locations. A net total of 4.00 FTE were added as part of the staffing plan, with many underlying reallocations of positions (both vacant and filled) and shifts in scope for current employees.

- The plan reallocates staff who previously provided services in the community outside of library spaces into new, larger library locations where their expertise and skills will continue to support the community.
- The staffing plan also emphasizes safety and security in library spaces, adding new location supervisors, bolstering support for the Person in Charge (PIC) program and partnering with the county to provide contracted security officers.
- The library anticipates further adjustments, as the efficiencies gained from automated materials handling and a new materials management software come into clearer focus.

Understanding Our Impact

The library regularly evaluates its performance against its mission and values using data points and analysis to measure success and opportunities to improve. The library updated its annual patron survey in 2024, a redesign in partnership with the Library Advisory Board and with counsel from the Coalition of Communities of Color. In alternating years, a qualitative survey methodology will be used to deepen understanding beyond the numbers, with a focus on communities of language and culture. The 2024 patron survey received more than 14,000 responses and included feedback on library services, spaces, staff and more. Highlights included:

- Most (91 percent) library patrons are satisfied with MCL
- 86 percent agree “When I use the library, I usually find what I need”
- 92 percent of all respondents agree staff are available to help them
- 71 percent of all respondents agree their culture and identity is represented in the library
- 89 percent of all respondents agree library help is available in their language

The library is also working in partnership with the Portland State University Population Research Center to develop a product that will allow the library to analyze patron use data overlaid with demographic data. This data will inform future strategic changes in language and cultural programs and services.

EMERGING ISSUES

Intellectual freedom

The role of public libraries is more important than ever. Multnomah County Library remains committed to resisting censorship in all forms, serving as a champion for intellectual freedom, facilitating open access, the exchange of ideas and information, and protecting the constitutional right to use the library.

Continuity of library services

The library capital bond program included funding to support upgrades at every library location. While several libraries are closed during the bond projects, the library has added temporary library services in impacted areas like St. Johns, and to support library operations in the Belmont Library service area.

Internal service costs

The library is facing significant budget pressures due to escalating internal service charges. These internal services (including IT, building operations and maintenance and security patrols services) are critical services, but are challenging to prospectively forecast and control for a library system experiencing such significant change. The library anticipates that internal service charges - which have grown by over 11% from FY 2025 - may increase by as much as \$1.0 million more in FY 2027.

ONGOING ISSUES

Security

Security remains a top priority and ongoing issue for the library. Library leadership continues to work with the County's Workplace Security and the Security Operations Center to review and discuss on-site guard coverage and perimeter patrols that align with the library's needs. A new incident tracking software is in development for better real-time information, tracking and data sharing for library security incidents. The Future Staffing Plan will add new location supervisors and bolster support for the PIC program. These efforts, while essential, are additional operating costs that lead to reduced budgetary capacity for regular library services. Despite the cost impact, the library remains committed to maintaining secure and welcoming spaces for the community while continuing to evaluate and improve its security measures.

E-book costs

Similar to trends at other library systems, e-book demand continues to surge as e-book prices increase. Currently, 70 percent of MCL's circulation is digital content like e-books, while 30 percent is print books. Unlike physical books that libraries can purchase once and circulate until worn, e-books come with restrictive licensing terms, and costs can be

several times more expensive than physical books. The library is factoring these increased costs into future forecasts and remains committed to providing digital access, while balancing these costs with renewal of the physical collection.

ONE-COUNTY SOLUTIONS

Responding to people vulnerable to or experiencing homelessness

Libraries seek to provide welcoming environments to everyone. Those efforts encompass everything from essential customer service to informational resources, furnishings, technology (80018), clean, functional restrooms (including significant new additions at Central Library, (80001) and providing library services to people experiencing homelessness (80004). The library is also a key partner in Multnomah County's enhanced responses to extreme weather events and augments those services by sharing vital information about shelter, providing water to patrons and providing staffing for regional warming and cooling centers as needs dictate.

Community safety

While safety and security are primary and ongoing concerns for the library inside its spaces, the library also strives to contribute to a wider sense of community safety. The library coordinates many community safety partnerships, including: Workplace Security, Department of Community Justice, Multnomah County Sheriff's Office, and contracted private security with added hours and patrols (80022). Internally, the library continues to advance safety and security efforts by adding permanent supervisors to help manage the library environment at locations with higher levels of disruption. The library uses an established set of library rules, designed to reduce the burden of interpretation and enforcement on library staff and to lessen the lasting impacts of enforcement and exclusion to marginalized communities.

Need for increased behavioral health support

The FY 2026 budget submission includes the continuation of the Peer Support Specialist Program pilot at Central Library. The library, Behavioral Health, and Homeless Services Department teams have collaborated on a program to bring new support into the library system, meeting patrons with higher needs where they are already seeking services. The program contracts with people who have lived experience with mental health diagnoses, substance abuse disorder and/or homelessness and are in recovery. These contracted team members have completed specialized training to help at-risk populations be successful in using the library, using de-escalation and harm reduction approaches.

FY 2026 Equity in Budgeting

Multnomah County Library is working to create a system that equitably nurtures, empowers, and lifts staff, patrons, and the community to their highest potential. Libraries are uniquely positioned to address barriers to opportunity and access that disproportionately affect families in poverty and communities of color. Besides residency, there are no membership requirements; no annual fees; and no restrictions based on identity, age, income, gender, race or creed. Multnomah County Library is committed to the goals of equity and inclusion, and is sustaining a workforce that reflects and engages the community it serves.

FY 2026 will be the 10th year of the library's Equity and Inclusion program. Ongoing efforts include work to provide education and training; support for library staff and managers of color and culture; coordinated group meetings and activities; one-on-one support following racially-motivated incidents; and follow-up support and coordination around Complaint Investigation Unit complaints or outcomes. An important aspect of the library's strategic planning work is a strategic goal focusing on staff engagement, and the library is working to define a positive racial equity culture and develop a framework to achieve that based on themes from staff input.

The library is engaging in activities and actions of the Workforce Equity Strategic Plan (WESP), as well as broader transformational actions. The WESP provides a foundation to support staff, management and senior leadership by educating and shifting practices. It also allows for improvement in the way the library supports staff who are most impacted by oppressive systems. Internally, the library has allocated resources to provide opportunities to expand culturally and linguistically diverse staff and team; of the total Library positions, 27.4% have Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSA) designations related to language or culture. This supports staff by having a community within the library, and it extends efforts to reach out and connect with communities that have been underserved and/or have not historically viewed the library as a place for them. The library has provided input and feedback to the current WESP development steering committee to inform the next phase of this work. The library is moving forward and developing plans to implement the current WESP recommendations.

Library managers and supervisors also engage in a required equity learning series. A new series is developed each year and meets the WESP requirement of four hours of manager training annually. Learning modules include Understanding Systems of Race and Racism; Confronting Anti-Blackness; Inclusively Leading with Race; Power, Privilege, and Bias; Difficult Conversations; Microaggressions; Equity Lens Tools; and Cross Cultural Communication.

The library is implementing targeted universalism principles to intentionally develop all library services to be responsive to the individual needs of communities, particularly those who face significant barriers to access. This means designing services to be

inclusive of cultural responsiveness, language accessibility, physical access, psychological and emotional safety, developmental needs and trauma-informed practices. While targeted universalism is a new concept at the library, the organization has long been committed to equitable service delivery.

The library applies the fundamentals of the equity lens in a variety of ways as it crafts its budget. The Equity and Inclusion team works with groups of managers and individuals to develop program goals that support equity with a focus on centering race and language. Each library manager is asked to evaluate their current service level funding for ways to improve equitable service provision within existing resources. In the context of budget changes (additions or reductions), the library assesses how programs and services advance equity goals or would potentially have a negative impact on those experiencing the greatest barriers. These assessments of equity impacts are a core aspect of overall prioritization when balancing the budget.

The Library Advisory Board functions as the library’s Community Budget Advisory Committee and has an equity subcommittee. Work sessions focus on library personnel planning and costs; discussion of the library’s changing operating expense landscape; potential budget changes and strategy; and a 5-year library financial forecast.

FY 2026 Equity Budget				
Offer Number	Program Name	Equity JCN & Position Title or Budget Category	Total Equity Funding*	FTE
80010	Library Director’s Office	9715—Equity & Inclusion Manager 9748—Equity & Inclusion Analyst	\$462,873	2.00
80017	Human Resources	Systemwide travel and training for culturally specific conferences	\$50,000	-
80022	Public Services Division Management	Qualitative patron survey, with focus on communities of language and culture	\$20,000	-
80025	Library Special Projects	9748—LDA HR Analyst, Sr. supporting language / cultural KSA assessment	\$54,375	-
Total			\$587,248	2.00

* Equity investment may only represent a portion of the total program offer budget.

Budget Overview - Base Budget

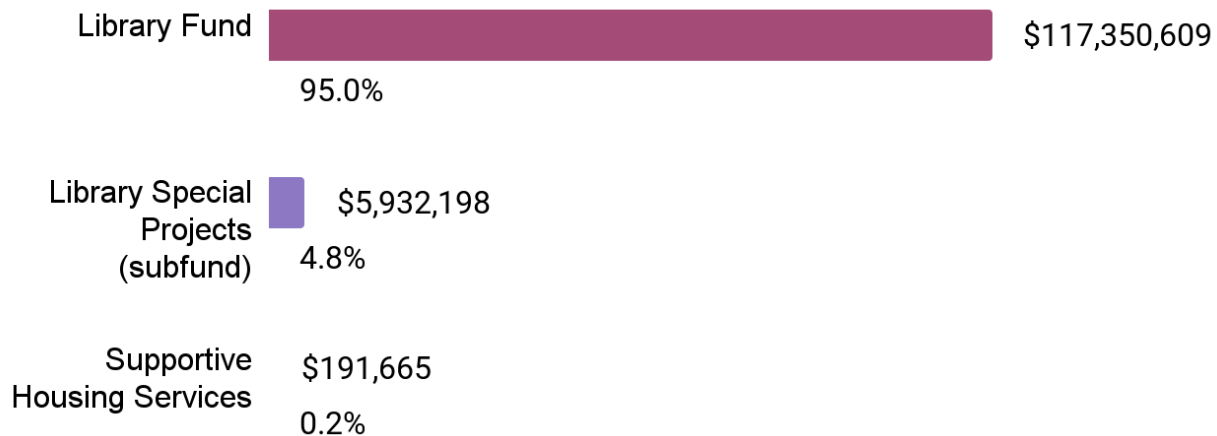
The Library Department base budget submission totals \$123.5 million and 541.75 FTE for FY 2026. The submission is detailed in the table below showing the total allocation, distinguishing between ongoing revenues from the Library District and the use of District fund balance to support one-time-only operational projects.

FY 2026 Library Department Budget Submission						
	FY 2026 General Fund	FY 2026 Library Funds (Ongoing)	FY 2026 Library Funds (OTO)	FY 2026 SHS Funds	Total Funds	Total FTE
Total FY 2026 Submission	\$0	\$117,350,609	\$5,932,198	\$191,665	\$123,474,472	541.75

The Library Department does not receive any County General Fund resources. The department budget is funded primarily from a dedicated property tax in Multnomah County, which was approved via Measure 26-143 in 2012, and is received as intergovernmental revenue from the Multnomah County Library District. The FY 2026 Library Department budget reflects the continuation of a \$1.22 per thousand dollars of assessed value levy rate for the Library District, which is lower than \$1.24 maximum rate.

FY 2026 property tax revenues are forecasted at \$115.4 million for the Multnomah County Library District. Other revenue sources include grants, interest earnings and user charges for services, totaling \$2.0 million. Inclusive of a planned draw on Library District fund balance for one-time operational projects and spending (\$5.9 million), revenues budgeted in the Library Department total \$123.3 million. In addition, the budget submission includes a request for \$191,665 in Supportive Housing Service resources to continue funding a Peer Support Specialist Program at Central Library.

FY 2026 Base Budget by Fund \$123.5 million



Balancing the Library Department Budget

The Library Department, in conjunction with the Budget Office, developed a financial forecast that reflected a \$1.4 million operating deficit in FY 2026. This deficit is inclusive of wide-ranging efforts to find low-impact savings across the library.

The library developed reduction options with the following criteria in mind:

- Minimize service level impacts to patrons
- Preserve staffing levels as articulated in the Future Staffing Plan, avoid layoffs
- Avoid reductions with negative impact to equity commitments

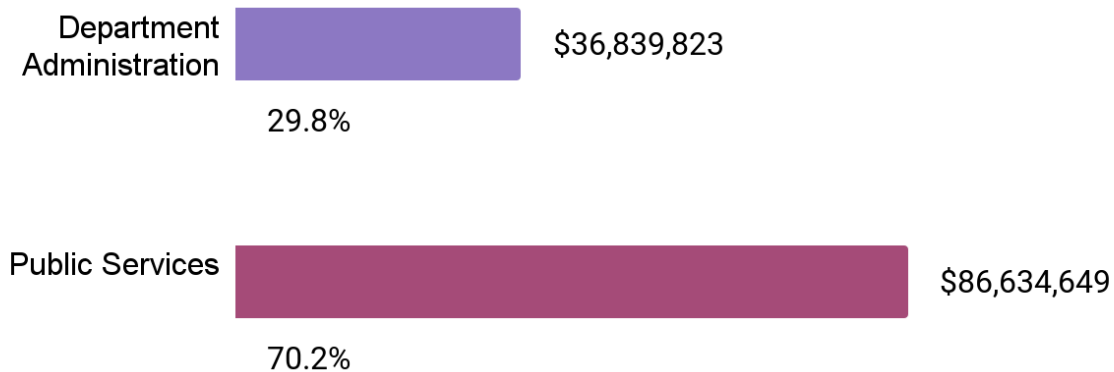
In order to submit a balanced requested budget aligned with FY 2026 forecasted revenues, the library has incorporated the following budget reductions into its submission.

Library Budget Reductions

Reductions to Balance Library Department Budget		
Priority	Brief Description and Program Offers	
1	Multiple Program Offers Reduce substitute staffing budget for location services, and professional services.	(\$551,591)
2	Human Resources Reduce travel and training including conferences, coaching, mediation and retreats.	(\$100,000)
3	Integrated Library Services Reductions to low utilization subscription services and other online databases. Reduce e-book holds maximum from 20 to 10 to slow escalating e-book cost pressures.	(\$390,200)
4	Multiple Program Offers Reduce janitorial hours assumptions for several library locations and the Operations Center.	(\$75,000)
5	Public Services Division Management Reduce contracted security staff at Central Library from 4 to 3 officers per open hours.	(\$97,636)
6	Central Library Reduce budget for contracted mental health support for patrons at the Central Library. Retains 50% of current contract, and augments with peer support specialists.	(\$140,619)
Total		\$1,375,046

The Library Department has two divisions, with the budget distributed as shown in the bar chart below.

FY 2026 Budget by Division, All Funds \$123.5 million



The core work of these divisions and their goals for community change are as follows:

PUBLIC SERVICES DIVISION

- Providing support for staffing and services throughout the county at 19 public service locations and offering informational, programming, computer, and internet services along with access to library materials (80001–80005).
- Supporting youth ages 0–18, focusing on brain development, multiple literacy skills, school readiness, social emotional development, teen leadership development, connected learning, and summer reading through the Youth Development program (80006).
- Providing virtual information services in all library service languages through the contact center (80007).
- The Library Events and Reader Services (80026) provides support for creative learning, culturally specific programming and events, large and small scale systemwide events, digital literacy services, and adult literacy services.
- The acquisition, cataloging, and sorting of library materials, including digital and outreach collections, through Integrated Library Services (80020).

- Engagement with underserved communities with a focus on communities of color, and outreach library services for individuals with no or limited access to library buildings through the Community Engagement program (80023).

ADMINISTRATION DIVISION

- Administrative services that support the infrastructure for delivering library services, including the Library Director’s Office (80010), Business Services (80012), Facilities and Logistics (80014), Human Resources (80017), IT Services (80018), and Marketing and Communications (80019).
- Coordination of library engagement with the capital bond work through the Library Building Bond Administration program (80024).
- Supporting the continuity of library services, temporary space and staff capacity during bond-related closures (80025).

Homelessness Response Action Plan (HRAP)

In FY 2024, Multnomah County and the City of Portland launched the Homelessness Response System and the [Homelessness Response Action Plan](#) (HRAP), a strategic reset of the community’s response to homelessness. The following table lists the department’s HRAP-related program offers and funding, followed by bullets describing their FY 2025 estimated outcomes (progress on, or completion of, goals and/or action items described in the HRAP) and FY 2026 target outcomes.

FY 2026 HRAP-Related Program Offers and HRAP Funding					
Offer #	Program Name	FY 2026 Base General Fund	FY 2026 Other Funds (not SHS)	FY 2026 SHS Funding	Total HRAP Related Funding*
80027	Peer support specialists at Central Library	\$0	\$0	\$191,665	\$191,665
80001	Mental health support at Central Library	\$0	\$110,755	\$0	\$110,755
Total					\$302,420

* HRAP investment may only represent a portion of the total program offer budget.

The Library Department and the Behavioral Health team collaborated to pilot a program to bring two contracted peer support specialists to Central Library. The goals of this program are to support access to resources via referral. Resources can include shelter or homeless services, help to navigate social service systems, assistance with applications, food resources and finding mental health, substance misuse, or medical resources for library patrons. The peer support specialists will also engage and connect with library patrons to support de-escalation and successful use of the library. 1,500 individuals are expected to be supported by this program in FY 2026.

The new Peer Support Specialist Program (SHS-funded) compliments and builds upon an existing (library-funded) contract for qualified mental health professionals in Central Library. Under this contract, mental health professionals have in-office hours at Central library to support patron needs. Through primarily in-person support, they focus on providing a variety of support to library patrons, ranging from mental health to housing and shelter. In a typical month, well over 100 clients are seen by these providers.

Other Significant Program Changes

Ensuring the library can adequately offer services and programs at library locations and support its service priorities means making difficult choices about ending some specialized outreach programs that benefit the community, which include:

- Sunsetting the Community Learning Program Offer. Staff from these teams are being reassigned to other teams. The work to support learning activities will continue within the Library Events and Reader Service and Youth Development program offers.
- Dissolving the Youth Learning team and ending three programs at the end of FY 2025: School Corps, Books2U, and Listos para el Kínder. Many of these programs were established with grant funding, and the library continued offering them after grant funding expired. To meet its service priorities, the library can no longer offer the same scale of outreach programs that require dedicated staffing and subject matter experts working in the community outside of libraries. The library remains committed to serving students, educators and young children through multiple library services that support literacy development and library access needs.

Risks and Other Issues

Structural Operating Deficit

The Library District was established in 2012, with the intent of providing a stable funding source for the provision of library services for 10 years. It has long been understood that the District faces a structural operating deficit, with the pace of expenses—especially personnel costs—eventually expected to exceed the stable but constrained growth of dedicated property taxes over a long enough period. FY 2026 will be the 14th year of the Library District.

Library financial policies and budget practices are geared toward delaying this issue well into the future. But eventually, the library will experience an inflection point where year-over-year service level reductions will be required to balance the budget.

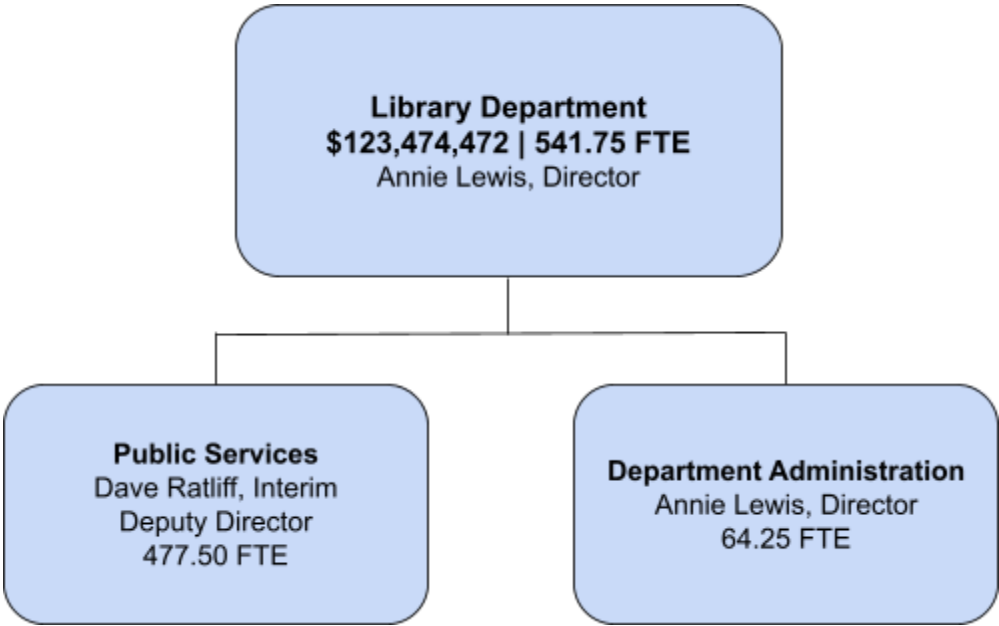
This fiscal reality may be closer than anticipated just a few years ago, hastened by multiple years of higher-than-typical inflation and cost of living adjustments, and combined with slowing property tax revenues and foregone revenues diverted to tax increment financing districts and property tax abatement programs.

In the near term, the library will look to staffing and resource reallocations to meet its highest priority service commitments and baseline operating needs. Smart utilization of the District's fund balance can be employed to support infrastructure related expenses and other one-time-only expenses, extending this issue out even further into the future.

There is not an imminent risk to overall library services, but initial discussions about the long-term funding strategy for the Library Department may be warranted in the next several years if property tax revenue growth remains sluggish for the foreseeable future.

Division Level Organization Chart (Base Budget)

The span of control ratio for the library is 7.68 overall. The Department Administration ratio is 4.40, and the Public Services division is 8.55.



List of Program Offers

Prog. #	Program Name	General Fund	Other Funds	Total Cost	FTE
Public Services					
80001	Central Library		\$9,717,284	\$9,717,284	59.50
80002	North / Northeast Libraries		\$10,463,883	\$10,463,883	71.25
80003	West / South County Libraries		\$9,705,872	\$9,705,872	62.50
80004	Mid County Libraries		\$10,220,965	\$10,220,965	66.50
80005	East County Libraries		\$11,257,613	\$11,257,613	73.50
80006	Youth Development		\$1,465,435	\$1,465,435	6.25
80007	Community Information		\$1,987,763	\$1,987,763	14.50
80020	Integrated Library Services		\$16,592,152	\$16,592,152	52.75
80022	Public Services Division Management		\$9,635,209	\$9,635,209	43.25
80023	Community Engagement		\$2,395,908	\$2,395,908	13.00
80026	Library Events and Reader Services		\$3,000,900	\$3,000,900	14.50
80027	Library Peer Support Specialist		\$191,665	\$191,665	0.00
	Total Public Services Division		\$86,634,649	\$86,634,649	477.50
Department Administration					
80010	Library Director's Office		\$1,549,005	1,549,005	6.00
80012	Business Services		\$3,305,437	3,305,437	8.00
80014	Facilities and Logistics		\$7,612,657	7,612,657	10.00
80017	Human Resources		\$3,747,977	3,747,977	17.75
80018	IT Services		12,306,783	12,306,783	5.00
80019	Marketing and Communication		2,385,766	2,385,766	11.50
80024	Library Building Bond Administration		0	0	6.00
80025	Library Special Projects		\$5,932,198	5,932,198	0.00
	Total Department Administration Division		\$36,839,823	\$36,839,823	64.25
	Total Dept. Library		\$123,474,472	\$123,474,472	541.75