



**NEW ORLEANS**  
PUBLIC LIBRARY



# 10-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

*Creating a Library Lifestyle*

New Orleans Public Library

2022 - 2031



A photograph of a modern library interior. In the foreground, two young women are sitting in red armchairs, reading books. A round table in front of them holds a stack of books and a white bag. In the background, other people are sitting at tables, and a sign with the word "SEARCH" is visible. The image has a blue tint.

# 10-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

*Creating a Library Lifestyle*

New Orleans Public Library

2021 - 2025

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Letter from the City Librarian.....	01
NOPL Board of Directors.....	02
Executive Summary .....	05
Creating a Library Lifestyle.....	06
Cross-Cutting Themes.....	07
<b>Strategic Goals and Objectives.....</b>	<b>08</b>
<b>SMART Kids.....</b>	<b>09</b>
Early Childhood Literacy	
Stronger Alliances	
Tweens/Teens	
<b>A Ready Workforce.....</b>	<b>13</b>
Adult Literacy	
Digital Literacy	
Workforce and Small Business Development	
<b>Open Spaces.....</b>	<b>18</b>
Reimagining Space	
Digital Resources	
Mobile Services	

# FROM THE DESK OF THE CITY LIBRARIAN

We are pleased to share with you the New Orleans Public Library Strategic Plan for FY22 to FY31. This ten-year plan will provide us with the opportunity to focus on impact rather than activities, and will push us to reimagine how the library can engage with both patrons and the broader community.

New Orleans has been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and, as with Hurricane Katrina, it will take years to fully recover. As families and businesses across our city deal with the learning losses of our children, the financial losses of our families and businesses, and the loss of community borne from a year of closures, the New Orleans Public Library stands ready to help facilitate an equitable recovery for all of our residents.

Over the past year, NOPL has had to adjust its service delivery models and find creative ways to bring our resources to the people. Those adjustments mark a new beginning and an opportunity for us to engage anew with our patrons and the larger community. This strategic plan provides a framework through which we can expand our approaches and deepen our impact. We want to be a part of the everyday lives of New Orleanians across the city.

We invite you to partner with us and explore the possibilities that can exist in “**Creating a Library Lifestyle.**”

Sincerely,

*Dr. Gabriel Morley*

Dr. Gabriel Morley

## PHALA KIMBROUGH MIRE, CHAIR



Phala Kimbrough Mire is the President & CEO of the Women's Business Enterprise Council South (WBEC South), a regional partner organization of the Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC). A non-profit Executive for over 20 years, Mire currently orchestrates business growth and certification programs for women owned businesses in the five state region covering Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee and the Florida Panhandle. Representing over 800 certified suppliers, Mire is a renowned advocate and thought leader on entrepreneurship, diversity and inclusion and women's business issues.

## VONDA FLENTROY-RICE, VICE CHAIR



Vonda Flentroy-Rice is an Information Technology Business Analyst for Entergy Services, Incorporated. Flentroy-Rice serves as a liaison between Entergy's Finance and Human Resource Departments and Entergy's Information Technology Department. Flentroy-Rice is magna cum laude graduate from Southern University A&M College in Baton Rouge, Louisiana with a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Science.

Flentroy-Rice is President of The New Orleans (LA) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated. She is a Board of Trustee for Ursuline Academy and Louisiana Children's Museum. Flentroy-Rice is a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority New Orleans Alumnae Chapter and Jesuit High School Presidents' Advisory Council

## ANDREA NEIGHBOURS, SECRETARY



Andrea Neighbours has been a professional writer and journalist for the past 30 years, with pieces published in the New York Times, Christian Science Monitor, Planning Magazine, Woman's Day, the Baton Rouge Business Report, and 225 Magazine. She is currently at work on a novel. She has also spent the past ten years renovating historic properties in New Orleans. She has a B.A. from Rice University and an M.F.A. from Louisiana State University (LSU).

# BOARD MEMBERS

## KATHLEEN COVERICK



Kathleen Coverick has been a New Orleans resident since 2008. During that time, she worked for the Broadmoor Improvement Association and led the community engagement process as the Keller Library and Community Center was rebuilt after Katrina. She currently serves as the Director of Finance and Operations for Opportunities Academy, a school for college-aged adults with intellectual disabilities and is also a member of the New Orleans Public Library board.

## RAQUEL "ROCKY" DUFAUCHARD, CMP



Raquel "Rocky" Dufauchard, CMP, Director, National Accounts, New Orleans & Company has served in the Hospitality Industry for 31 years. Raquel began her career at the New Orleans Morial Convention Center and worked there for 10 years. In 1999, Rocky started her career at New Orleans & Company. Rocky is responsible for the Financial & Insurance Market as well as Associations and Corporations in the Northeast. Rocky serves as an HPAC Member for Financial & Insurance Conference Professionals as well as a Commissioner for New Orleans Recreation Department Commission.

## DANA HENRY



As a native son of New Orleans, Dana Henry has engaged in advocacy full-time as a Family Law and Juvenile attorney in New Orleans since 2000. Since that time, Dana has also worked professionally as a management consultant and has served on several civic boards and commissions in New Orleans. Previously, Dana served as the New Orleans City Director with STAND™ for Children Louisiana. Dana also led the movement to hire a new school Superintendent for the Orleans Parish School System after a two-year vacancy. And, Dana was the co-developer and lead facilitator of the Education Leadership Institute ("ELI"), a community based leadership development cohort focused on critical public education policies that impact students and families such as differentiated funding, mandatory transportation, common enrollment, and school based wrap-around services for students and families.

# BOARD MEMBERS

## WILLIAM A. SETTOON



Bill is a chemical engineer and MBA with over 40 years of experience in a wide variety of fields. He grew up in New Orleans and is a product of its public schools, NOPL, NORD, LSU, and Tulane. He has lived and worked in Ghana, Jamaica, Colombia, Canada & Houston and for the last 30 years has lived a mile from where he grew up.

His last assignment was developing the medical marijuana facility in Baton Rouge for LSU's contractor. He is happily married to WDSU's Chief Meteorologist Margaret Orr with three grown children and two spectacular grandchildren, all living in NOLA. He loves the library and wants to expand its reach throughout the city.

## DANIEL TAPIA



Daniel Tapia is an iron worker, along with social entrepreneur. After spending 12 years in prison for a crime he was wrongfully convicted of, Daniel has spent the past six years since his release being a relentless advocate for those impacted and victimized by the justice system. A former case manager for Orleans parish Criminal court's reentry program. Daniel branched away to found Trafficontrol, which is a nonprofit that focuses on Career development, as well as advocacy for those who the system left behind.

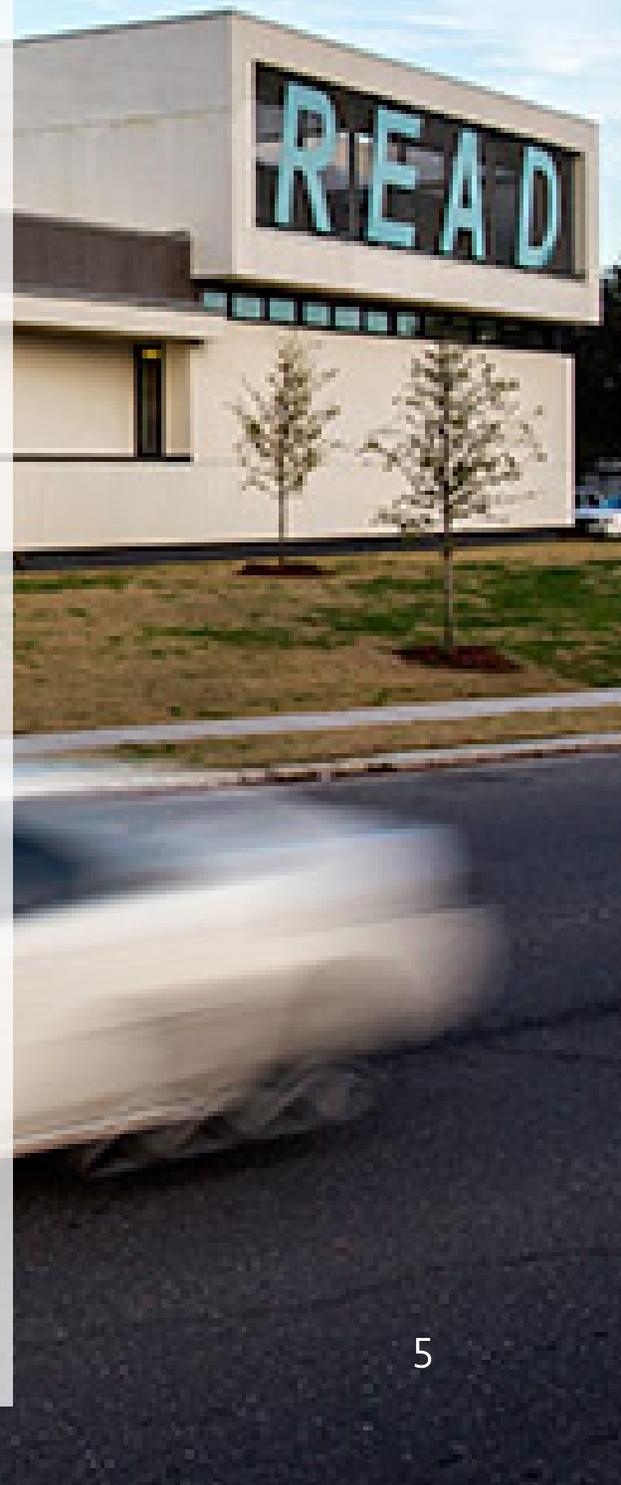
# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The New Orleans Public Library Board and staff, and the New Orleans Public Library Foundation, have worked diligently over the past two years to create a strategic plan that will guide the library system's work for the next ten years. Supported by funding from the New Orleans Public Library Foundation, the NOPL Board chose to create a ten-year plan to provide a framework through which staff can focus their efforts while also taking creative approaches to create long-term impact.

Stakeholder engagement began in 2019 with surveys, focus groups and stakeholder interviews to get community input on the future of the New Orleans Public Library. Through those efforts, more than 4,000 stakeholders offered their vision for the future of the library system. Concurrent to that work, a committee of NOPL staff members worked in earnest to develop a draft three-year strategic plan until the COVID-19 pandemic hit—halting those efforts. In January 2021, the NOPL Board and NOPL Foundation renewed the planning efforts and incorporated the previous work, along with guidance from the Youth Master Plan and the Human Relations Commission, to produce this plan.

As the city begins to ease COVID-19 restrictions and our community works to equitably recover from the impacts of the pandemic, stakeholders feel strongly that the New Orleans Public Library has an important role to play in that recovery. Some stakeholders expressed concern about the library maintaining its relevance, while others dreamed of a future where the library is a part of the New Orleans way of life, hence the theme of this plan “Creating a Library Lifestyle.”

The framework for creating a library lifestyle is built on three pillars: S.M.A.R.T. Kids, A Ready Workforce, and Open Doors. These three goals were developed based on the feedback provided by both internal and external stakeholders. Those goals, along with their complementary objectives, will be detailed later in this document. The intent of this plan is to create a library lifestyle for residents across this city. This requires reimagining what the library is and does. It pushes us to think beyond the bricks and mortar and create innovative ways to connect the community to the library's resources with the goal of significantly moving the needle towards positive outcomes for our children and families, for our workforce, and for our library system.



# CREATING A LIBRARY LIFESTYLE

The New Orleans Public Library system serves as an anchor institution in neighborhoods across the city. For the committed patrons, their local library is already a part of their lifestyle. However, the framework laid out in this strategic plan aims to create a library lifestyle for residents across the city. This requires reimagining what the library is and does. It pushes us to think beyond the bricks and mortar and create innovative ways to connect the community to the library's resources.

{ *lifestyle.* }

*lifestyle*, noun.

life·style | \ 'līf-'stī(-ə)l , - ,stī(-ə)l \

*The typical way of life of an individual, group, or culture*

New Orleans celebrates a rich cultural heritage full of food, music and fun. The New Orleans Public Library seeks to become a part of that cultural fabric by engaging our community in meaningful ways that contribute to their well-being. In order for NOPL to become a part of the New Orleans way of life, we must find inventive ways to connect and add value to residents across the city. This will require expanding our resources and access to them by creating platforms to celebrate the history and culture of our city while exposing our residents to resources that will expand their imaginations.

More than just buildings, the New Orleans Public Library is its people and its resources which are available to all citizens for free. The library is a space to share and receive information, and connect with neighbors, friends and opportunity. NOPL has something for everyone, from the young to the young at heart. Our challenge over the next ten years is to connect in meaningful ways with citizens across the city to share resources, ideas, culture, creativity and community. We want to inspire you to make the New Orleans Public Library a part of your way of life.

# CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

Throughout the conversations, with both internal and external stakeholders, several themes consistently emerged as important topics of discussion. These cross-cutting themes serve as a foundation on which this plan is built. Whenever possible, NOPL staff should consider these themes as the lens through which all policy and programmatic decisions should be viewed and make intentional strides to include elements of these themes in all initiatives.



## COMMUNICATION

Internal and external communications were identified as a persistent challenge facing NOPL. While regular patrons may have access to information about upcoming programming or new services, the larger community is not generally informed about all that the New Orleans Public Library has to offer. Internally, the various communications tools are not utilized in a consistent manner, making it difficult for staff to know where to go to learn about important decisions that impact the workplace. Externally, the general public is often unaware of the library's programs and services unless they seek the information out, usually on the NOPL website. It is imperative that NOPL make investments in communications tools and protocols that will ensure the equitable distribution of information and a more aggressive approach to making the public aware of the vast array of offerings that are available. Outreach, marketing and communications are critical to the success of creating a library lifestyle.

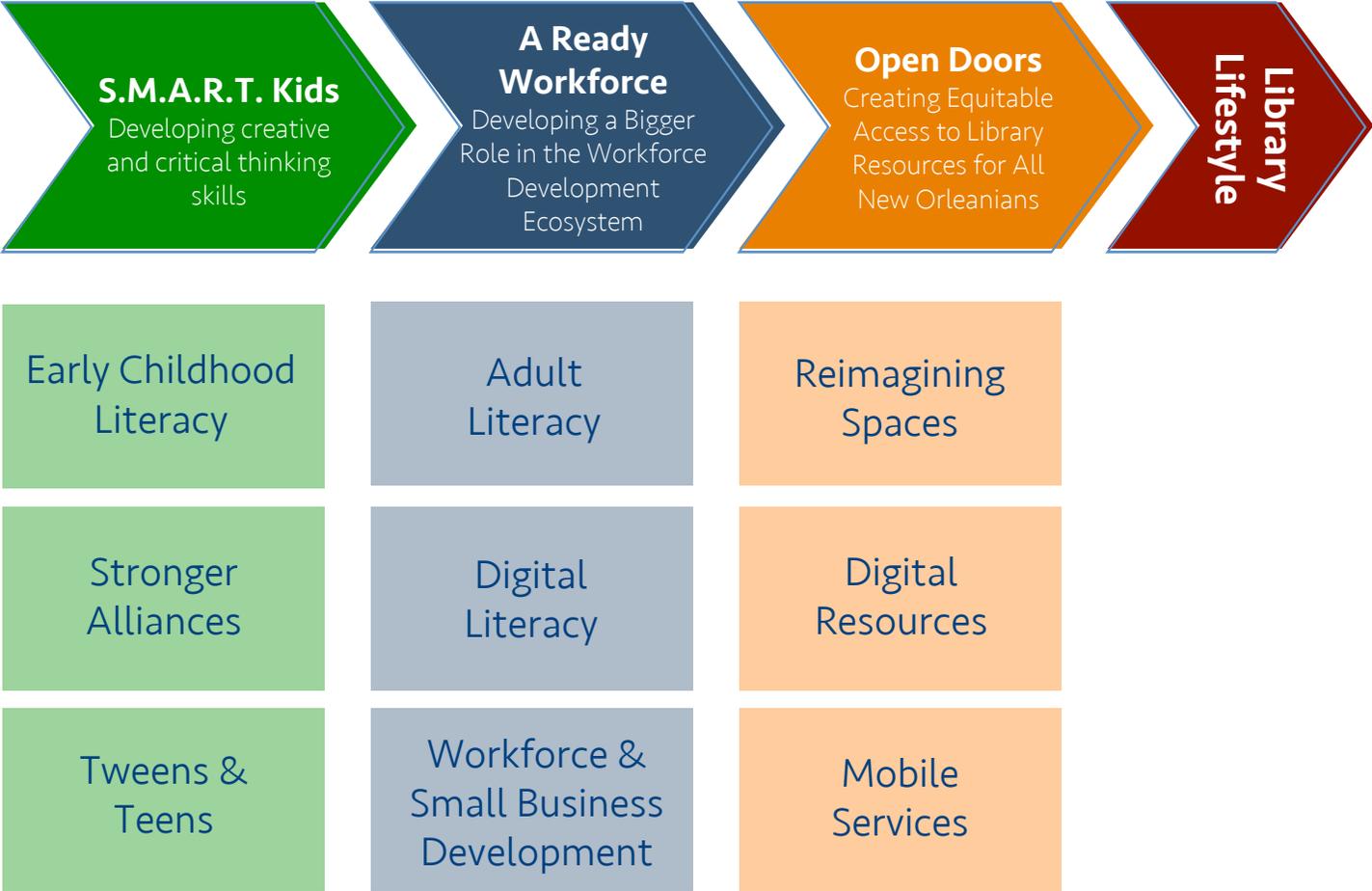


## EQUITY

Equality, in principle, is equal treatment for everyone. While a noble gesture, equality does not consider past acts of inequality, nor does it evaluate privilege born from centuries of inequality. Equity, in comparison, provides everyone with what they need to be successful. The New Orleans Public Library Board and staff have demonstrated their commitment to equity and pointed to this theme as one that needs to be central to all of the work that they do over the course of the implementation of this plan. Some stakeholders pointed to the need for equity in the hiring and promotion of staff, expressing a desire for a workforce that reflects the diversity of the city. Other stakeholders pointed to the need for equitable access to the library's resources, highlighting the neighborhoods across the city that have less access to a library building and the barriers to access, such as transportation. Throughout the various conversations, there was a consistent desire to create not just a seat at the table, but to create opportunities to meet citizens where they are.

# GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The framework for Creating a Library Lifestyle is built on **three pillars**: S.M.A.R.T. Kids, A Ready Workforce, and Open Doors. These three goals were developed based on the feedback provided by both internal and external stakeholders.



# S.M.A.R.T. KIDS

## Developing Creative & Critical Thinking Skills

The S.M.A.R.T. Kids goal encourages the development of creative and critical thinking skills by ensuring that New Orleans children have access to the resources that they need to excel in Science, Math, Art, Reading, and Technology.



## S.M.A.R.T. KIDS

**L**ibraries are essential spaces for learning together. They provide opportunities to expand knowledge, connect with community resources, and enrich school learning. Libraries provide families a welcoming environment in which to learn, to connect with all parents, and to find other community resources that can help them thrive. Libraries are poised to engage families more meaningfully across children’s development. NOPL is equally committed to creating a supportive system for children whose family engagement is absent or limited, or older kids who choose to be more independent. From birth through young adulthood, family engagement is necessary to successfully cultivate children’s literacy, math, and social-emotional development, and libraries are evolving to create more opportunities in which students can develop these skills with the support and encouragement of their families.

Libraries embrace the entire family—from infants and toddlers to teens to grandparents — creating spaces where children and adults can learn together and strengthen their relationships. The rich digital and hands-on resources libraries offer, especially when guided by librarians, can help families steer, guide, and support learning. And with the disparities between how children and youth from high- and low-income homes spend their out-of-school time growing, libraries -- free, trusted, safe, and welcoming places in virtually every community -- can help counterbalance these inequalities.

The pandemic has powerfully exposed huge inequities, but it has also created an opportunity for NOPL to be at the forefront of a more equitable recovery. NOPL stands to maximize this opportunity by building relationships, supporting two-way communication, and linking families to each other for mutual support. By connecting with schools, afterschool and early-childhood programs, and a broad array of community organizations, NOPL can build promising new partnerships and collaborations with the potential to address inequities and pandemic learning loss — and create more equitable anywhere, anytime learning pathways from birth on. These partnerships and collaborations can serve as a runway to a stronger and more resilient New Orleans where our children and families have access to the resources that they need to excel.

**Objective 1: NOPL will curate a diverse set of early learning resources to support the efforts of parents, caregivers, and Early Childhood Centers across the city.**

The overwhelming perception of the New Orleans Public Library system is one of a strong community resource where the staff care about the well-being of the patrons that they serve. This perception creates a strong foundation on which to build pathways to lifelong learning and transform the way of life across the city to one that includes a “Library Lifestyle.” That pathway begins at birth and centers around parents, caregivers, and families.

NOPL is committed to moving beyond the four walls of the library branches and expanding its reach throughout the community in order to engage families and youth service providers to build and support an early learning ecosystem that will prepare our children for a lifelong love of reading. Meeting families where they are will mean expanding the Library’s resources, connecting with and servicing the whole family, and finding new and innovative ways to perform outreach to attract new patrons. This will require enhanced strategies for community outreach, parent engagement and an expansion of training tools and approaches to assist families and caregivers with participating in early childhood literacy development.

**Objective 2: Create stronger alliances with parents, early childhood centers, schools, and community groups to further make a difference in the lives of young people.**

Building upon successes in early childhood literacy initiatives, NOPL will extend its youth services efforts to include Science, Math, Art, Reading, and Technology. New Orleans is home to a vast array of youth service providers with stellar reputations for providing high-quality educational programming. NOPL does not seek to supplant those efforts but will find new ways to support them through collaborative partnerships that are centered on the needs of children and families across the city.

NOPL's greatest assets are its physical spaces and its staff. By centralizing program and partnership development, NOPL will invest in strategic partnerships to allow for the expansion of proven youth serving programming across the city. By opening our doors and providing staff supports, NOPL will expand the scope of programming and resources for children and youth. This will require restructuring some of our workforce to become content specialists while expanding our outreach and partnership development to more effectively engage early childhood centers, schools and community-based service providers. Central to these efforts will be positioning the voices of our young people in a way that gives them input on meaningful program development and creates opportunities for leadership development.

**Boston Public Library**

As part of the renovation of the Boston Public Library (MA) children’s reading room, families and librarians envisioned a fun, engaging space for children and for parent-child interactions. The result is the Boston Public Library’s Sensory Wall. The Sensory Wall offers LED panels and bubble tubes to stimulate senses in a playful, child-directed environment. It also provides a learning environment for children with sensory processing disorders.



# FEEDBACK FROM OUR TEENS

## Strategic Objective:

Build stronger connections with teens by engaging, serving and empowering teens through innovative programming.

## Focus Group Takeaways:

The youth focus group revealed that youth would like to see the library cultivate creative spaces that allow them to connect, both in-person and virtually. Suggestions for services and programming included:

1. **Student Success Program** - During the school year, the library could offer programs and services to help students of all ages succeed in school, including academic coaching, one-on-one tutoring, math and reading skill-building games and activities, service learning hours, college prep resources and more.
2. **Weekly Teen Social Media Challenges** - Every week a new challenge is released. The best we've seen is "Twitter Style Book Reviews" where teens post short reviews about a book that they recently read, and online scavenger hunts designed for teen patrons
3. **Transportation** - NOPL can provide reliable transportation to and from the library for local youth.
4. **Coffee Shop Effect** - NOPL should consider creating areas of the library where food and beverage are offered. These environments attract youth and adults who seek to work in creative spaces.
5. **Cultural Arts Exposure** - NOPL can partner with cultural organizations and culture bearers (i.e. music, Gras Indian masking, visual art, culinary arts).
6. **Employment** - NOPL can provide paid and volunteer opportunities for teens to work in the library.

# A READY WORKFORCE

## Developing a Bigger Role in the Workforce Development Ecosystem

**T**he City of New Orleans has been laser focused on developing and expanding its workforce development services to meet the myriad needs of jobseekers. From retooling low-skilled, under-employed residents to partnering with businesses to provide job specific training that creates pathways to promotions, across the city and for several years there have been efforts underway to develop skills and opportunities for all New Orleanians. NOPL has played an informal role in workforce development over the years as well. Across the library system, patrons have turned to library staff for everything from assistance with improving their digital literacy so that they can apply for jobs, to requesting assistance with resume writing. In order to improve the outcomes of these efforts, NOPL will develop a more formal role in the workforce development ecosystem by strengthening partnerships with Job1 and the YMCA, among others, to enhance the resources and services available to assist with ensuring that New Orleans has a “Ready Workforce”.



In order to accelerate an equitable recovery for New Orleans residents, NOPL will explore innovative approaches to engaging with public and private partners to contribute to preparing a ready workforce. Research has shown that libraries have an impactful role to play in economic development, workforce development and small business development. NOPL will work to develop resources and strategies to assist those hit by job losses with directing their energies into higher-skilled, high demand career paths and helping patrons to develop the skills they need to gain employment. The digital divide has hindered many job seekers from gaining marketable skills, and a steady decline in employer-supported training has challenged even those in the workforce to keep up and advance their careers. The impact of COVID-19 has added urgency to closing the skills gap due to job losses that exceeded the scale of the Great Recession. The biggest brunt of those losses have been borne by people with disabilities, people of color, women, younger workers, and those with less formal education. COVID-19 has also accelerated digital transformation creating a jobs recovery that requires an increasing focus on digital skills. NOPL will contribute to the development of a ready workforce through adult literacy, digital literacy and workforce/small business development initiatives.

**Objective 1: Reading Works: NOPL will improve adult literacy and workforce opportunities for low-skilled and low-literate citizens.**

The correlation between literacy and income inequal-

ity, among other issues of social and economic justice, underscores how literacy intersects with equity, access, and inclusion. NOPL champions learning as a lifelong pursuit and works with families and individuals daily to improve literacy. In partnership with the YMCA, NOPL provides free adult literacy programming at the Main Branch. However, the demand for this programming far exceeds our current capacity to meet it. Further, adult literacy is a key component in the continuum from early childhood literacy to lifelong learning. Research has shown that improving parents' ability to read to their children and help with homework has a direct and positive effect on children's educational outcomes.

The best available data suggests that 27 percent (approximately 63,000 adults) of New Orleans' current working-age population are low-skilled and likely low-literate. Meanwhile, the New Orleans regional economy continues to shift toward knowledge-based industries. These trends will further exacerbate income disparities across our city. Research has proven that as cities become more equitable, they also experience greater economic growth. In order to expand economic opportunities to all of our citizens, a priority must be placed on improving adult literacy.

Outreach efforts performed by TrepWise in the summer of 2019 revealed a strong community interest in expanding adult literacy programming to include numeracy and digital literacy. Several members of NOPL staff, along with the public, suggested expanding partnerships with the university community



to increase access to adult literacy programming. Expanding adult literacy options could also include family literacy programs that bring low-literacy adults together with their children to engage in multi-generational learning. Studies have proven that adults who participate in family literacy programs stay enrolled longer than in most adult only programs. Such programs also strengthen the bonds between adults and children in participating families and motivate the adults to continue on their journey towards being lifelong learners.

**Objective 2: Digital Literacy: NOPL will help to improve economic outcomes by investing in training, technology, and eResources to improve digital literacy and economic opportunity for all New Orleanians.**

According to a 2020 report issued by The Data Center, 17 percent of New Orleanians could only access the internet through a smartphone, while 20 percent had no access whatsoever.

This lack of access negatively affects lower-income New Orleanians and increases economic disparities across the city. Due to technology’s constant and rapid evolution, proactive and aggressive tactics must be employed to improve access to technology and to enhance the digital and technological skills of our citizens.

Over the past decade, job seeking has moved almost completely online. This widens the opportunity gap for those job seekers who lack basic digital literacy skills. In libraries across the nation and across our city, digital literacy services are a vital resource for jobseekers, particularly low-skill and low-wage jobseekers. While NOPL staff perform valiantly to assist with one-on-one supports for jobseekers, there remains an opportunity to develop and deliver more formal approaches to improving digital literacy and not just for jobseekers.

The American Library Association defines digital literacy as “the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills.” This broad definition covers everything from working with jobseekers to apply for jobs to training residents on 3D printing and the latest technology trends. Some define digital literacy as ranging from finding and consuming digital content, to creating digital content. As New Orleans reemerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, many residents are looking to retool and gain new skills in order to pursue higher paying jobs in emerging industries. As New Orleans continues to make great strides in attracting and retaining businesses in the technology and advanced manufacturing industries, NOPL is poised to assist with vastly improving the digital literacy skills of our residents.

Digital literacy programming should begin with more formalized and consistent delivery of basic skills training on computers and handheld devices. NOPL should seek partnerships with local organizations with missions that are focused on closing the digital divide.

The newly formed Office of Digital Equity in the City of New Orleans presents an opportunity to connect library patrons to technology hardware. Further, NOPL should seek partnerships that can provide structured learning on a wide range of digital literacy skills—from basic skills like applying for a job or food stamps, to more advanced digital skills like coding and 3D printing. As the New Orleans region continues to advance efforts to recruit and retain knowledge-based industries, NOPL and its partners have a significant role to play in increasing digital literacy skills to make for a ready workforce.



**The correlation between literacy and income inequality, among other issues of social and economic justice, underscores how literacy intersects with equity, access, and inclusion. NOPL champions learning as a lifelong pursuit and works with families and individuals daily to improve literacy.**

# LITERACY FOR ALL

### **Objective 3: Workforce and Small Business Development: Enhancing opportunities for jobseekers and job creators**

The City of New Orleans has a very well-developed and coordinated workforce development ecosystem. Coordinated by the New Orleans Business Alliance, several local agencies facilitate five Workforce Opportunity Centers in Orleans Parish. Despite the success of this programming, libraries across the NOPL system experience large numbers of jobseekers and entrepreneurs requesting assistance with accessing opportunities. As anchor institutions in neighborhoods across the city, NOPL branches serve as a lifeline for re-entering citizens, under-employed workers, patrons without access to technology in their homes, and budding entrepreneurs who need help with business plan development and market research.

The one-on-one assistance provided by library staff should be expanded to a more formal role in the workforce and small business development ecosystem. NOPL can expand access to its facilities, technologies and eResources through workforce and small business partnerships that would create more structured programming to assist new and existing patrons. Bringing in experienced workforce and small business development partners will be critical to broadening access to opportunities. Library staff indicated being overwhelmed by working to be responsive to the growing needs of their patrons. With the economic downturn result-

ing from the COVID-19 pandemic, this demand has only grown.

Library systems across the country have created successful models for this type of programming. The New York Public Libraries partnered with the City's Department of Small Business Services to launch career centers within several branch locations. In addition to providing experienced staff to operate programs, the NYPL model also provided customized training from Workforce Professionals Training Institute to ensure appropriate referrals to program partners. Library staff were also trained on how to engage and assess the needs of jobseekers, provide resume, cover letter and interview preparation, and assist jobseekers with navigating around barriers to employment. In order for NOPL to replicate a program such as this, operational changes would be required in order to create a dedicated group of workforce and small business specialists who could provide these enhanced services.

Developing a ready workforce will require a collaborative effort with NOPL having a formal seat at the workforce and small business development table. Library staff, community volunteers and community partners could work collaboratively to develop and enhance ESL (English as a Second Language), HSE (High School Equivalency), reading literacies, digital literacy, job readiness, and small business development resources.



# OPEN DOORS

## Creating Equitable Access to Library Resources for All New Orleanians

Public libraries have a longstanding reputation for being anchor institutions in communities. The New Orleans Public Library system is no different. One community leader who was interviewed for this project stated that “the Library is one of the last public commons.” Both internal and external stakeholders frequently characterized the library as a “community asset.” However, there are neighborhoods and communities across the city for whom access to the library is beyond their reach. Barriers to access include transportation and proximity. Further, as technology advances at warp speed and patrons continue to transition towards digital resources, NOPL must begin to reimagine library spaces and service delivery models in order to remove barriers and ensure access for all.



## Reimagining Space

As the city emerges from a yearlong lockdown and public spaces begin to reopen, it is important to consider how social distancing and public health guidance may require modifications of public spaces. Consideration should be given to how, for example, the public accesses a library's technology resources. Is it prudent to continue to have computer laboratories with terminals spaced six feet apart or could more patrons be served if they could check out a laptop with wifi and work from any socially distanced location within the building?

As NOPL moves towards expanding digital assets and automating certain functions, there is an opportunity to redesign the physical spaces in a way that creates more flexibility for new and diverse uses. The strategic initiatives that will result from this strategic plan may require multi-use spaces that are easily convertible. Stakeholders who were interviewed for this planning process expressed a need to beautify branch interiors and modernize the layout of library buildings to create distinct spaces for meetings, quiet reading, and loud activities.

## Digital Resources

NOPL has made great strides in removing physical barriers that can impede access to library resources

by greatly expanding its eResources. With this expansion there is opportunity to provide new services to advance the goal laid out in this plan. For example, one stakeholder suggested that NOPL could assist with improving early childhood reading by partnering with the curriculum staff in neighborhood schools and curating special collections of digital materials that teachers can use real time in their classrooms. Similarly, NOPL could partner with health centers to identify the most common and chronic health issues facing New Orleanians and then curate digital resources that could educate the public following a diagnosis. These types of services would further cement NOPL as a go-to resource for access to high-quality information.

Expanding digital services and curating/updating special collections for target audiences will require NOPL to also reimagine its current staffing structure. Several internal stakeholders recommended that there be additional opportunities for career advancement without having to manage a branch. National trends in hiring indicate that more and more libraries are hiring specialists to meet the needs of their communities (e.g. Early Childhood Specialists, Workforce Development Specialists, or Small Business Specialists). Expanding the range of titles available to the library would allow for career advancement for existing staff while also providing greater flexibility to responding to the needs of patrons.





## Mobile Services

While the 15 buildings that make up the New Orleans Public Library system are anchor institutions in their neighborhoods and communities, there are several parts of the city in which there is not convenient access to a library building. Stakeholders often cited transportation as a barrier to library access and some stakeholders suggested various ways to bring the library to the people. Those community recommendations included hosting library pop-ups at schools and NORDC centers, increasing the number of book mobiles and establishing e-Branches without a permanent book collection in rented spaces.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced NOPL staff to develop innovative ways to provide programs and services while the physical buildings were closed.

These new approaches included curbside pickup, virtual programs, appointments for one-on-one services, and expanded eResources. These types of services could be further expanded to meet patrons where they are and bring the services directly to them. Libraries across the country have responded to the pandemic by expanding outreach services and taking library resources out into the community. Traditional book mobiles have spawned into mobile services that range from traveling computer labs with wifi that can be accessed within the community, to book delivering drones and robots that deliver books to a patron's home. As NOPL reimagines service delivery and the spaces in which services are delivered, it is important to think beyond the four walls of the 15 buildings and consider ways to expand access to all New Orleanians across the city.

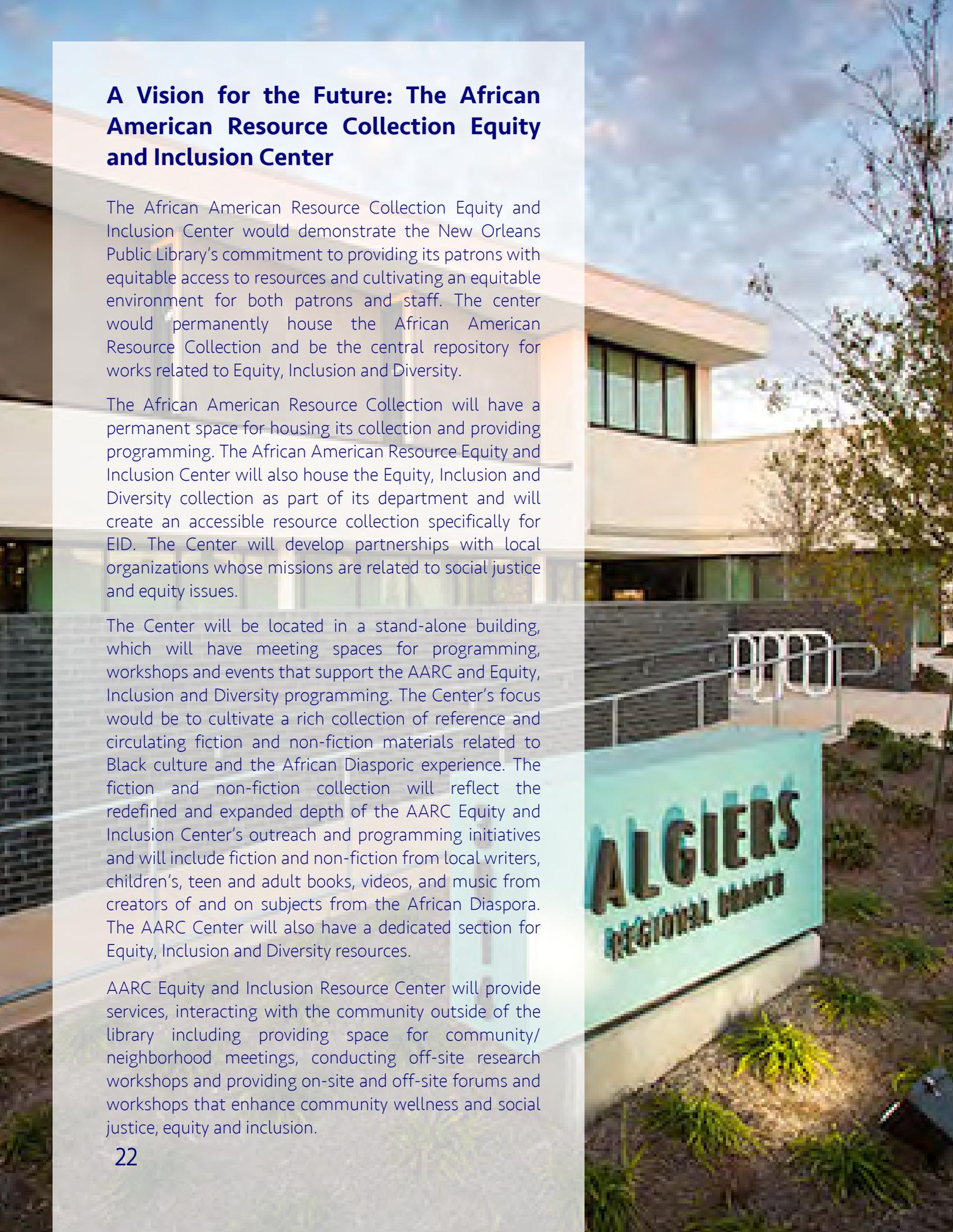
## **A Vision for the Future: The African American Resource Collection Equity and Inclusion Center**

The African American Resource Collection Equity and Inclusion Center would demonstrate the New Orleans Public Library's commitment to providing its patrons with equitable access to resources and cultivating an equitable environment for both patrons and staff. The center would permanently house the African American Resource Collection and be the central repository for works related to Equity, Inclusion and Diversity.

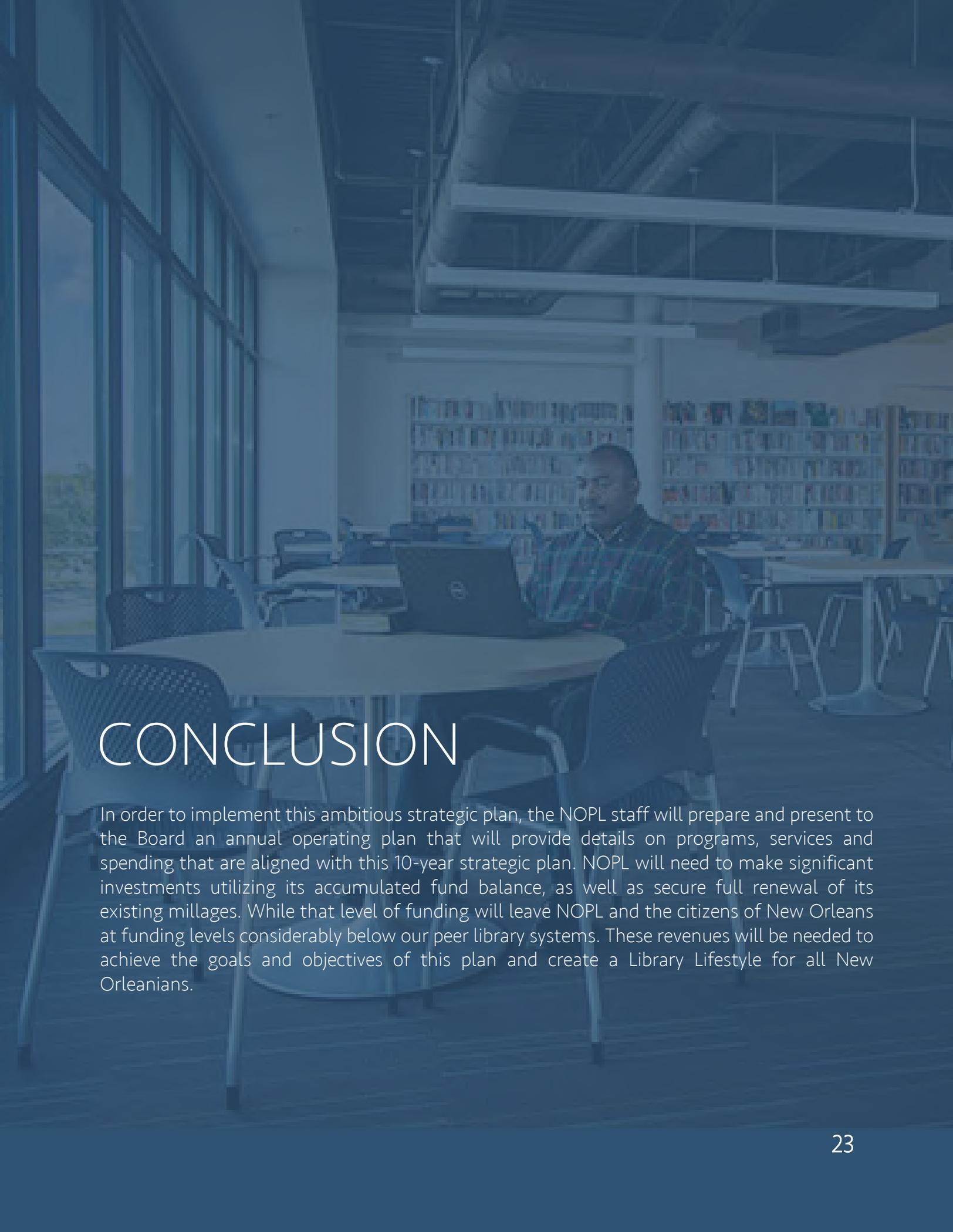
The African American Resource Collection will have a permanent space for housing its collection and providing programming. The African American Resource Equity and Inclusion Center will also house the Equity, Inclusion and Diversity collection as part of its department and will create an accessible resource collection specifically for EID. The Center will develop partnerships with local organizations whose missions are related to social justice and equity issues.

The Center will be located in a stand-alone building, which will have meeting spaces for programming, workshops and events that support the AARC and Equity, Inclusion and Diversity programming. The Center's focus would be to cultivate a rich collection of reference and circulating fiction and non-fiction materials related to Black culture and the African Diasporic experience. The fiction and non-fiction collection will reflect the redefined and expanded depth of the AARC Equity and Inclusion Center's outreach and programming initiatives and will include fiction and non-fiction from local writers, children's, teen and adult books, videos, and music from creators of and on subjects from the African Diaspora. The AARC Center will also have a dedicated section for Equity, Inclusion and Diversity resources.

AARC Equity and Inclusion Resource Center will provide services, interacting with the community outside of the library including providing space for community/neighborhood meetings, conducting off-site research workshops and providing on-site and off-site forums and workshops that enhance community wellness and social justice, equity and inclusion.



ALGIERS  
REGIONAL BRANCH

A photograph of a man sitting at a round table in a library, working on a laptop. The background shows bookshelves and other study tables. The image is overlaid with a blue tint.

# CONCLUSION

In order to implement this ambitious strategic plan, the NOPL staff will prepare and present to the Board an annual operating plan that will provide details on programs, services and spending that are aligned with this 10-year strategic plan. NOPL will need to make significant investments utilizing its accumulated fund balance, as well as secure full renewal of its existing millages. While that level of funding will leave NOPL and the citizens of New Orleans at funding levels considerably below our peer library systems. These revenues will be needed to achieve the goals and objectives of this plan and create a Library Lifestyle for all New Orleanians.



New Orleans Public Library 219  
Loyola Avenue  
New Orleans, Louisiana 70112  
(504) 596-2570  
[www.nolalibrary.org](http://www.nolalibrary.org)