



Strategic Development and Advancement Plan 2025 – 2027

The Evanston Public Library is a beloved public institution that offers accessible resources and highly attended programs to Evanston residents of all ages at no cost. The library helps residents discover their passions and build community. **The library’s goodwill in the community presents a strategic opportunity to increase private fundraising efforts.**

Evanston Public Library relies on private fundraising to supplement the property tax revenue and other sources of revenue that make up its \$9.4 million budget. In 2024, private fundraising accounted for 6% of the library’s total revenue and approximately 2% of the city’s population donated to the library.

Evanston Public Library has ambitious goals for growth and expansion as outlined in the library’s 2024 strategic plan. With focused, strategic actions that cultivate existing donors and develop relationships with new donors and institutions, the library can expand its private fundraising efforts to fund that growth and expansion. The following plan outlines how the library will **increase private revenue from nearly \$600,000 in 2024 to \$900,000 by the end of 2027.**

	2024 Actual	2025 Budget	NEW: 2025 Goal	NEW: 2026 Goal	NEW: 2027 Goal
Individual Giving	\$462,180	\$400,000	\$550,000	\$600,000	\$700,000
Grants	\$128,160	\$80,000	\$80,000	\$100,000	\$120,000
Corporate	\$0	\$0	\$20,000	\$30,000	\$40,000
Special Events	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$20,000	\$40,000
Fundraising Total	\$590,340	\$480,000	\$650,000	\$750,000	\$900,000
Year-over-Year Growth		-17%	10%	15%	20%

Growth Strategy 1: Substantially increase **individual giving** through personalized cultivation and new giving strategies.

The Evanston Public Library is fortunate to already have a large and generous individual giving base; donors are personally invested in the library's mission and see the critical role it plays in the community. Combined with the community's high level of civic engagement and relative affluence (median household annual income is close to \$100,000), there is tremendous potential to grow the library's individual giving efforts over the next three years.

With the goal of increasing individual giving, the development team will focus on stewarding and retaining existing donors, creating new opportunities to give, cultivating fundraising ambassadors, and utilizing its data to better engage donors. To supplement limited staffing on the development team, consultants can be retained to support donor strategy and content development. By the end of 2027, we expect individual giving to increase by 50%.

	2024	2025	NEW:	NEW:	NEW:
	Actual	Budget	2025 Goal	2026 Goal	2027 Goal
Individual Giving	\$462,180	\$400,000	\$550,000	\$600,000	\$700,000

Key strategies include:

- **Retain major donors through personalized outreach:** In 2024, 82 major donors (defined as giving \$1,000 or more in a fiscal year) contributed 60% of the total individual giving, or just over \$275,000. Each of those major donors needs a personalized, high-touch cultivation plan to ensure their “stickiness” to the Evanston Public Library and their renewal gift in future years at the same or higher level. The Development Manager and Executive Director, as necessary, should prioritize building personal relationships with these donors.

Measure of Success: 80% of the previous year's major donors retained.

- **Establish a new donor recognition program:** Evanston Public Library is in the process of creating a facilities master plan that will result in either renovation or relocation. Either option presents a unique opportunity to create a new donor program that provides public donor recognition for a substantial gift (either via naming opportunities

or a donor wall). This new giving opportunity provides an opening to make larger, capital asks and engages donors in the library's future.

Measure of Success: New program is developed and at least \$100,000 is raised.

- **Implement three individual giving campaigns per year:** The Development team is over-relying on the end-of-year appeal, which brings in 65% of individual giving and does not sufficiently engage donors throughout the rest of the year. By creating more robust spring and summer campaigns, tied to library impact and donor motivations, the library can expand and shift individual giving. These annual campaigns should be designed to engage new donors, thus building a pipeline of potential mid-level and major donors.

Measure of Success: 10% growth in total number of gifts year-over-year.

- **Develop a robust volunteer fundraising operation:** Evanston Public Library is fortunate to have an energized and committed volunteer base (including the Board of Directors, Partners for Evanston Public Library or PEPL, and fundraising campaign volunteers) that are willing to play a more active role in fundraising. The development team will harness this energy by creating structured opportunities for volunteers to serve as fundraising ambassadors and aides, providing the support and direction to ensure their success. Opportunities may include peer-to-peer fundraising, special event planning, and/or donor stewardship.

Measure of Success: Volunteers will fundraise \$20,000 annually.

- **Increase donor targeting via improved data management:** Donor data should be able to tell us who is donating, who we are missing, and how we can deepen donor engagement. Evanston Public Library needs to improve its usage of Raiser's Edge in order to easily and regularly pull reports on appeal success rates, donor engagement, donor history, lapsed donors, new donors, and more. By ensuring data is entered in a way that makes these reports possible and reviewing the data on a regular basis, the development team will be able to better target fundraising efforts and adjust its fundraising strategy in real time.

Measure of Success: 20% of lapsed donors will make a gift annually.

Growth Strategy 2: Recalibrate **institutional giving** to reduce reliance on federal funding and explore new corporate and foundation funding.

Institutional giving strategies are changing across the country as nonprofits and other public-serving organizations grapple with the sunset of APRA (American Rescue Plan Act, the COVID-relief package), the massive budget cuts proposed by the Trump administration, and the shifting priorities of philanthropy. For example, over half of the library revenue raised by grants in 2024 originated from federal government agencies (just over \$72,000) and those programs are at risk of being cut.

The Evanston Public Library is not alone in seeing a decrease in grant funding (down by 23% since 2022), but it does require a shift in focus. As the development team works to rejuvenate the grant portfolio and prioritize larger funding opportunities, we will also expand to build sustainable relationships with companies that do business in and want to support Evanston. To supplement limited staffing on the development team, consultants can be retained to support prospect research and grant writing. By the end of 2027, we expect institutional giving to increase by 25%.

	2024 Actual	2025 Budget	NEW: 2025 Goal	NEW: 2026 Goal	NEW: 2027 Goal
Grants	\$128,160	\$80,000	\$80,000	\$100,000	\$120,000
Corporate	\$0	\$0	\$20,000	\$30,000	\$40,000

Key strategies include:

- **Update grant forecast quarterly based on probability and return on investment:**
In this fast-changing environment, it is critical for the Development team and key program leaders to reevaluate the grant forecast every three months, making strategic decisions on where to prioritize time and energy. Prospective grant applications should be ranked by probability of success (based on history of funding and external factors), return on investment (grant size vs. application effort), and alignment with the library's program priorities. Priority should be given to well-aligned, likely, and larger renewals, freeing up staff time to focus on prospecting new foundations and corporations.

Measure of Success: Average grant size increases to \$10,000.

- **Solicit new foundations:** With the uncertainty in government funding, this is a great time to start exploring grant opportunities from private foundations. Evanston Public Library can fit into several common giving priorities including literacy, digital literacy, early childhood education, youth development, senior services, civic engagement, and more. The Development Team will start researching, prospecting, and building relationships with new foundations in order to expand institutional giving.

Measure of Success: 3 new foundation applications submitted and 1 new grant award per year.

- **Solicit new corporations:** The library has not solicited corporate donations in the past, representing a whole new sector to explore and cultivate. With the help of the Board, PEPL, and fundraising volunteers, the Development team will create a robust list of corporate prospects that meet one of the following criteria: 1) are located in or do business in Evanston; 2) fund other cultural institutions in the area; or 3) are aligned with the library's mission and goals. Based on their giving mechanisms, companies will be solicited for grants, program or event sponsorships, in-kind donations, or capital gifts.

Measure of Success: 5 new corporate applications submitted and 2 new awards per year.

Growth Strategy 3: Increase the library's **public fundraising presence** with more impactful messaging and direct patron engagement, and by piloting special events.

Libraries are one of the last remaining trusted and celebrated institutions in American society. While only 22% of Americans say they trust the government to do what is right and 31% report confidence in the news media, a remarkable 78% of Americans trust their local library. In Evanston in particular, the library is a treasured civic institution that provides a nonpartisan public good.

Donors, patrons, and residents are hungry for the joy, learning, and sense of community that the library provides. Through this plan, we will create an external affairs strategy that capitalizes on this goodwill and provides new messages and venues through which the public can connect to the library. To supplement limited staffing on the development team, consultants can be retained to support content development and event planning. This is a new revenue stream that has the potential to raise \$40,000 annually by 2027.

	2024 Actual	2025 Budget	NEW: 2025 Goal	NEW: 2026 Goal	NEW: 2027 Goal
Special Events (Net)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$20,000	\$40,000

Key strategies include:

- **Create a new case for support (and update annually):** The Evanston Public Library has relied on the same deficit-based fundraising pitch for at least the last five years. It's time for a refresh that is asset-based, emphasizing all the benefits the library brings to the community and staying relevant to the current times. In the first quarter of every year, the Development team, in conjunction with Marketing and Communications and potentially content development consultants, will develop an annual case for support and a compelling fundraising message that can be used for individual and institutional solicitations throughout the year.

Measure of Success: Case for support updated annually.

- **Build new audiences for fundraising pitch:** In 2024, there were nearly 30,000 library card holders and 440,000 visits to the library. To capitalize on that traffic, the Development team will brainstorm and execute new, creative strategies to engage library patrons as donors. Options may include new signage and collateral, targeted emails to library super users, direct pitches to program participants, pop-up donation stations, and more. These strategies can also be a great way to engage PEPL and other volunteers as fundraising ambassadors. (It is also recommended that the monthly donor e-newsletter be evaluated for its effectiveness as a donor stewardship tool.)

Measure of Success: 10% annual increase in the number of new donors.

- **Pilot a fundraising special event:** The library has not hosted a fundraiser previously, so it is worth exploring whether special events can be a revenue generator and community builder. Fundraising events can be labor intensive, and the Evanston calendar is already full of events for a good cause, which is why we recommend piloting a spring event in 2026 and reevaluating the strategy after that. Again, this strategy could be a great way to engage PEPL and fundraising volunteers on a planning committee and as solicitors of in-kind donations and ticket sales. The library might consider hosting the event at the library itself to save on venue fees and to bring donors and prospects into the space.

Measure of Success: Execute at least one fundraising special event and evaluate.

Annual Scorecard
Strategic Development and Advancement Plan

Growth Strategy	Measure of Success	2025 Outcome	2026 Outcome	2027 Outcome
Individual Giving	Retain 80% of the previous year's major donors			
	Develop new donor recognition program and raise \$100,000			
	10% growth in total number of gifts year-over-year			
	Volunteers fundraise \$20,000 annually			
	20% of lapsed donors make a gift annually			
Institutional Giving	Average grant size increases to \$10,000			
	3 new foundation applications submitted and 1 new grant award per year			
	5 new corporate applications submitted and 2 new awards per year			
External Affairs	Case for support updated annually			
	10% annual increase in the number of new donors			
	Execute at least one fundraising special event			

Suggested Annual Calendar

January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write annual case for support • Quarterly grant review • Personalized thank you notes or calls to winter appeal donors • Collect annual list of in-kind and sponsorship needs
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan spring fundraising event • Set annual volunteer fundraising goal and develop engagement plan
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prep for spring appeal • Complete biannual prospecting of foundations and corporations
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch spring appeal for National Library Week • Test out a new patron-facing engagement opportunity • Quarterly grant review
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host spring fundraising event • Prep for summer appeal • Personalized thank you notes or calls to spring appeal donors
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch summer appeal for Summer Reading
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quarterly grant review • Test out a new patron-facing engagement opportunity
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personalized thank you notes or calls to summer appeal donors
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete biannual prospecting of foundations and corporations
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prep for winter appeal • Quarterly grant review
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch winter appeal • Test out a new patron-facing engagement opportunity
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a big splash for Giving Tuesday