



City of Lawrence
Brian A. DePeña
Mayor



THE LIBRARY AS A

CIVIC HUB

How Lawrence Public Library Drives
Community Connection & Democratic Access

Janelle Abreu | Director, Lawrence Public Library

MMA Webinar: Public Libraries as Community Hubs | May 2026

Massachusetts Municipal Association

City of Lawrence, MA





ABOUT LAWRENCE PUBLIC LIBRARY

88,000+

Residents Served

in Lawrence, MA

569

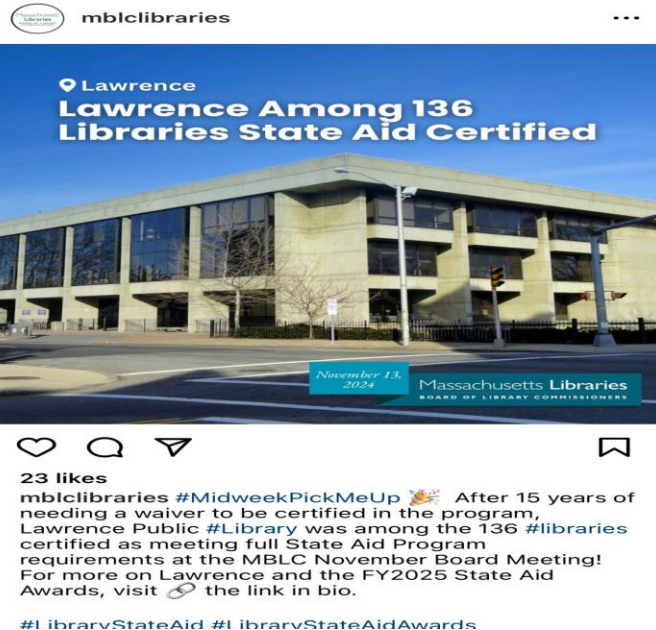
Programs Per Year

14,231 total attendees

79,684

Annual Visits

50,238 sq ft facility



A Story of Transformation

- A Lawrence native leads our library — this work is personal
- After 15 years on waiver, Lawrence achieved full State Aid Certification in 2024
- 97% of our 10,644 registered borrowers are Lawrence residents
- 46 public computers | 43,788 annual Wi-Fi connections
- 9 meeting rooms | 6 study rooms | meetings used 1,015 times/year
- Mission: Connect, Inspire, Empower



THE LIBRARY AS DEMOCRACY

"The public library is one of the last truly democratic spaces — free, open, and belonging to everyone."



Equity & Access

Knowledge, technology, and opportunity for every resident — regardless of income



Community Connection

Deep partnerships, authentic engagement, bridging generations and cultures



Innovation & Creativity

New ideas, digital equity, maker spaces, and technology that expand possibilities



Stewardship

Responsible caretakers of community resources and public trust



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN ACTION



Music & Early Literacy Programs



Community Events & Activating New Spaces



Resource Fairs and Speaker Series

More Than Programs — We Are a Community Infrastructure

- Health literacy, digital literacy & small business education
- Multilingual outreach in English and Spanish to underserved communities
- Pop-up programs across Lawrence's neighborhoods
- School partnerships connecting families to learning year-round
- Courtyard Concert Series & outdoor programming — the Library as gathering place



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INNOVATION: LPL TELEHEALTH KIOSK



Where Healthcare Meets Civic Space

Free Telehealth Access

Residents connect with healthcare providers directly from the library — removing barriers for uninsured and underinsured community members

Privacy + Dignity

Private LPL Telehealth booths provide a confidential, dignified space for health consultations

Civic Health = Civic Strength

A healthy community is a civically engaged community. We bridge healthcare access and civic participation in one trusted space

Award-Winning Innovation

Ribbon cutting celebrated by Mayor's Office, community partners, and state officials — library as a model for urban innovation



THE LIBRARY MEETS COMMUNITY WHERE IT IS



Street Festivals & Community Events



Intergeneration — Library Serves the City



Meeting Rooms: A Community Living Room



Supply Drive Partnership, Street Festivals & Community Events



\$232,000 MOD ADA Grant — Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Recognition & Resources



Full MBLC State Aid Certification — first time in 15 years



\$232,000 ADA Grant from Commonwealth of Massachusetts



Digital Equity Implementation Grant — expanding community tech access, 300 New Devices for the community, and a \$100,000 Implementation Grant. (MBI)



LeadHumano Collective Leadership Recognition



FY27 Capital Improvement Budget — 1.5MIL Massachusetts Energy Renewal Funds



Telehealth Kiosk — model for urban library innovation nationwide

INVESTING IN TOMORROW'S CIVIC LEADERS



Collaborative Ecosystems and Stewards in Citizenship



Community Workshops & Collaborative Learning

"Civic engagement begins at the storytime rug. Every child who walks through our doors learns they belong here — and that belonging is the root of civic participation." — Janelle Abreu



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2026–2030 STRATEGIC PLAN: A VISION FOR LAWRENCE

FY26

Foundation & Engagement

Inclusive outreach

6 new programs launched

School liaisons & K-12 partnerships

FY27

Innovation & Digital Equity

200+ loanable devices

Digital navigator program

Maker space & 3D printing

FY28

Sustainability & Stewardship

Cultural preservation

Energy efficiency

Diverse funding pipeline

FY29

Expansion & Access

3rd branch feasibility study

Legal & financial literacy days

Transportation partnerships (MVRTA)

FY30

Technology & Global Connectivity

AR/VR immersive learning

Civic engagement hub

5-year impact report

Elected officials: the library budget IS a civic investment.



FUND IT

- Protect library operating budgets — they are non-negotiable infrastructure
- Support capital improvements for safety, accessibility & technology
- Champion state aid compliance as a municipal priority
- Library funding = community health, workforce readiness, literacy



SEE IT

- Visit the library — attend a program, meet the community
- Include the library in economic development conversations
- Recognize the library in municipal reports & communications
- The library is your community's living room — visit it



CHAMPION IT

- Speak about the library publicly — your voice moves budgets
- Include the library in policy conversations on digital equity
- Help the library build partnerships with city departments
- Be visible — attend ribbon cuttings, grant announcements



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WHY THIS MATTERS: THE LAST FREE PUBLIC SQUARE

"In a world where public spaces are shrinking and trust in institutions is fragile, the public library remains — free, open, and belonging to everyone. It is where democracy is practiced every single day."

— Janelle Abreu, Director, Lawrence Public Library

01

The library is FREE — no income test, no ID check required. That is radical in today's world.

02

The library serves EVERYONE — infants in storytime to seniors in computer classes. It is truly intergenerational.

03

The library is TRUSTED — especially in communities that have been historically underserved by institutions.



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Thank You.

Janelle Abreu
Director, Lawrence Public Library
Lawrence, Massachusetts

*The library connects, inspires, and empowers.
Every day. For everyone.*

Lawrence Public Library
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lawrencepubliclibrary.org

Questions? Let's talk during Q&A →

