“THE COMMONWEALTH REQUIRES THE EDUCATION OF THE PEOPLE AS THE SAFEGUARD OF ORDER AND LIBERTY.”

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

State of the Library

with BPL President David Leonard

December 3, 2025

BPL BY THE NUMBERS: 2025

VISITS (UP 30%)

3.2 m in-person visits systemwide

CIRCULATION (UP 8%)

7.5m total

5.4m e-content (72%)
1.9m print (26%)

NEW LIBRARY CARDS

130,000 *new* registrations
8,700 special edition Laufey cards ⇨ 3,800 new cardholders
9,700 Books Unbanned registrations

COMPUTER USE

252,000 computer sessions
1.4m WiFi sessions

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

7,900 visits to Special Collections
27,000 visits to the *Revolution!* Exhibition
18,000 items added to Digital Commonwealth
27,000 rare books and music scores catalogued
1,700 rare books, manuscripts, or pieces of art acquired

STAFF

540 Full Time Positions -- plus volunteers and partners

THE CURRENT MOMENT

Constant federal policy + funding changes

- IMLS recently restored
- Will funding challenges trickle down to BPL?

Politicization of libraries nationally

- Book bans and challenges
- MA Senate passed “Freedom to Read” bill

Social fragmentation

- Libraries are among the only places where social strata interact

Collapse of B+T

- Diversifying our suppliers + platforms

Advent of AI

- Being part of the conversation at the outset offers a chance to lead the way

Can some threats become opportunities?

Undeniably essential in a time of threat and uncertainty...

#3 in the Nation for holdings—behind only the Library of Congress and New York Public Library

Serving **700,000+ locally** and **7 million statewide**
— A reach far beyond most municipal libraries

Operating with **24–78% fewer staff** and **up to 187% less funding** than peer libraries

Yet **delivering nationally recognized programs** in literacy, workforce development, preservation, and digital equity

Imagine what's possible with investment that matches our scale and ambition, but coupled with the need to do more in scarcity...

n

Moments to Celebrate!

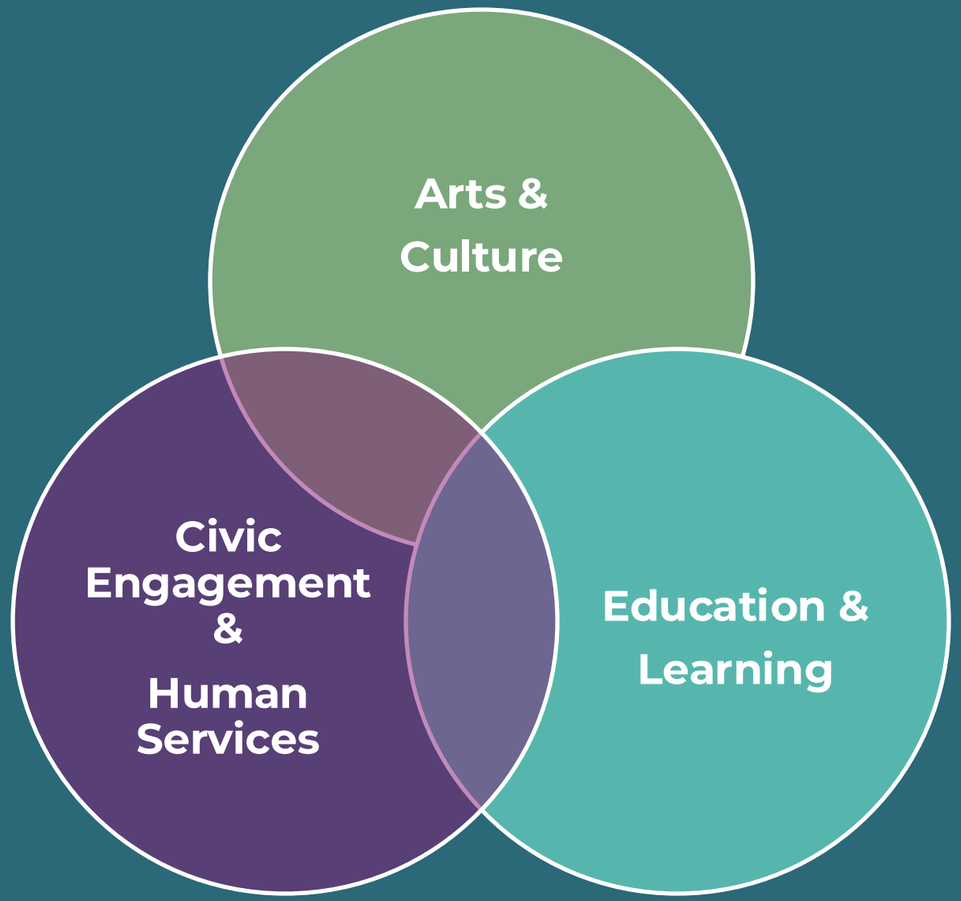
New Partnership with the LEGO Group
$1 million grant to address urgent early literacy challenges and ignite creativity in Boston's youth

National Recognition by Carnegie Corporation
$500,000 grant from Carnegie Corporation of New York to expand programming for patrons seeking both English-language learning and employment support

Summer Reading for all Ages
More than 6,000 children and 5,000 adults enjoyed meaningful summer reading, thanks to 500 donors raising $177,000

NEARLY ONE YEAR IN...

Progress on the Strategic Plan: A learning year

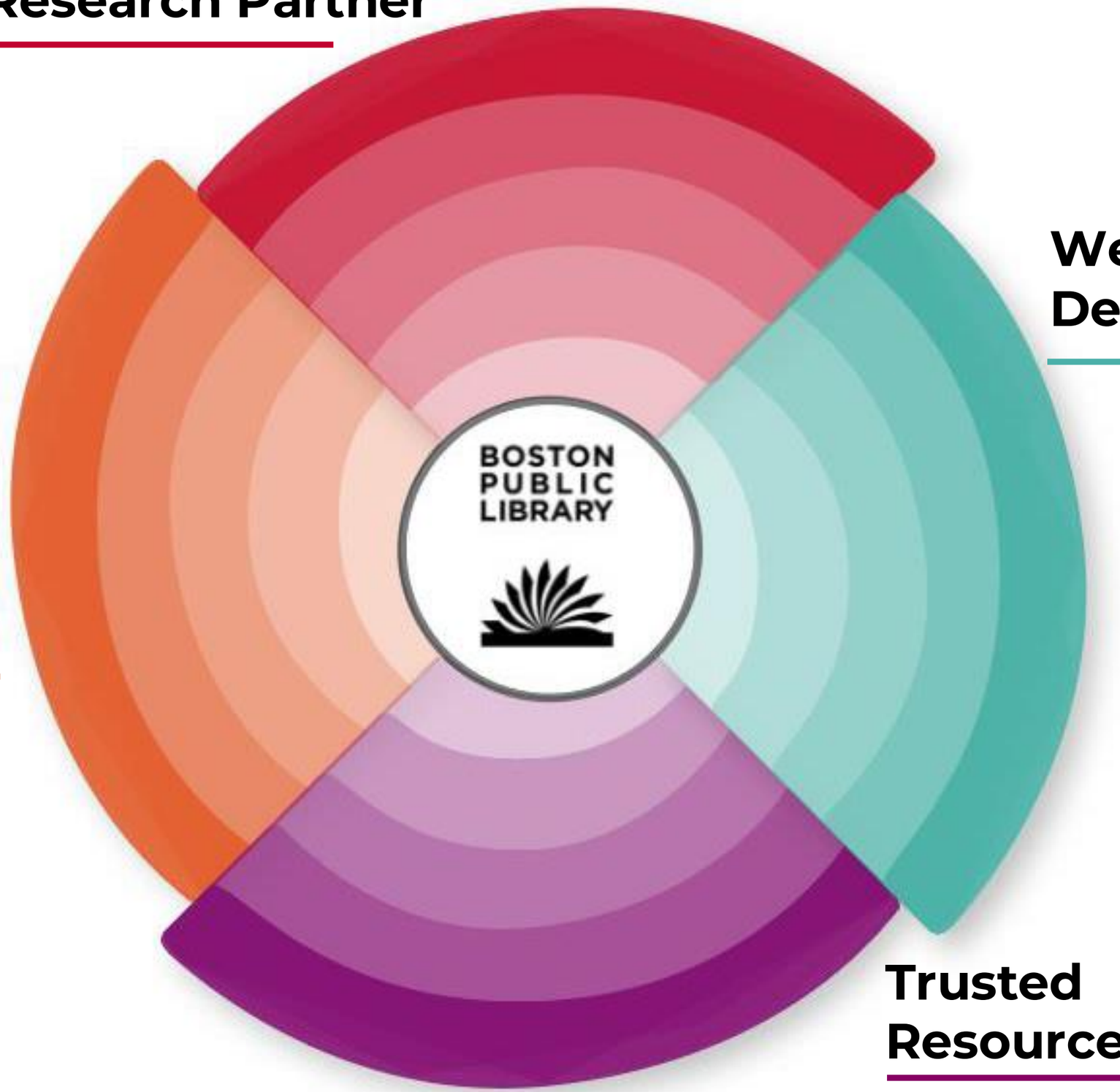


Strategic Roles

Life-Long Learning & Research Partner

Welcoming Destination

Community Engager



Trusted Resource

WELCOMING DESTINATION

CAPITAL PROJECTS

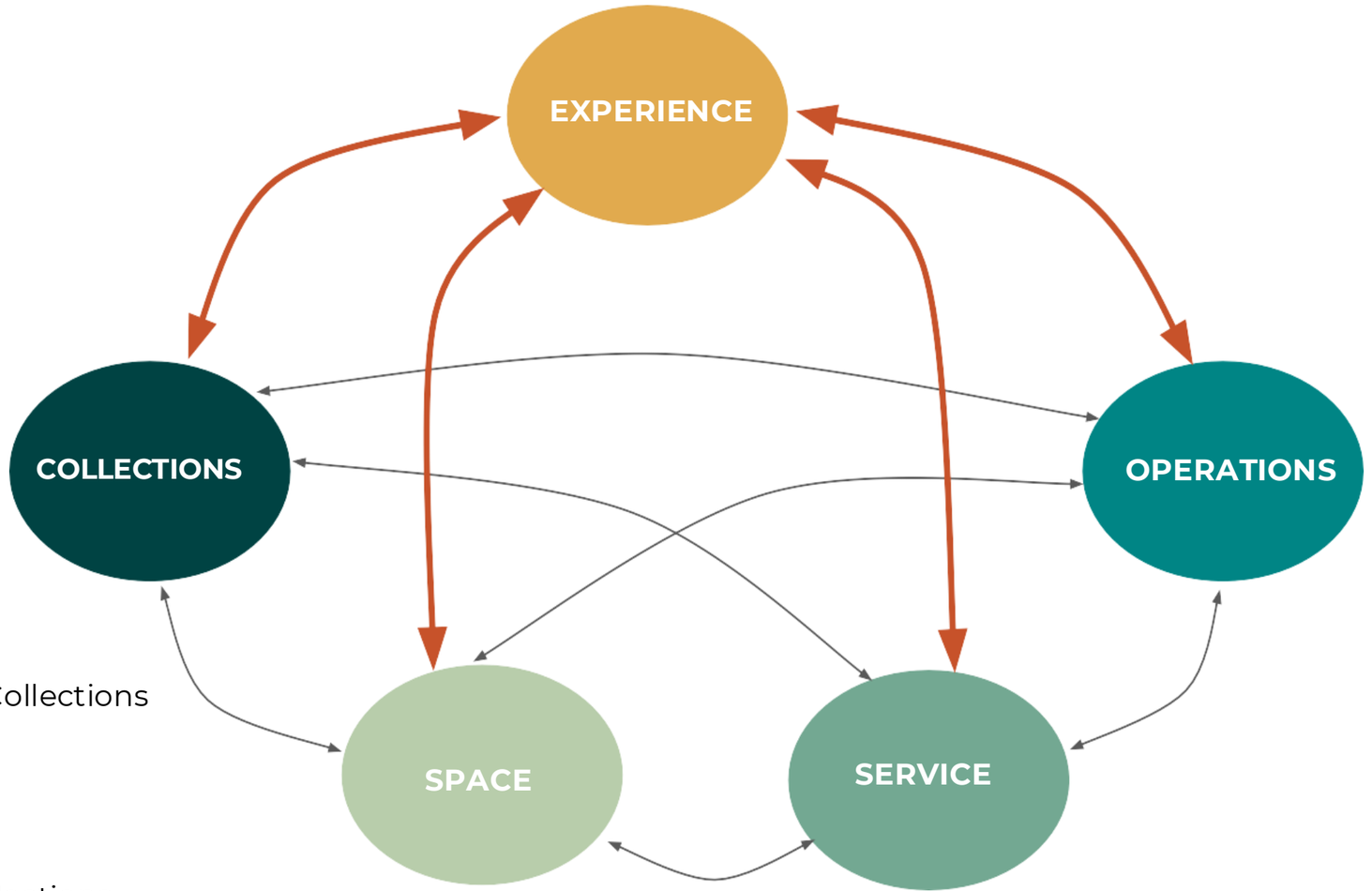
Fields Corner Construction/$31m	• All new, two-story branch building • On track for completion Fall 2026
Egleston Square OBM Review/$31.5m	• All new, two-story branch with large outdoor reading garden • Awaiting update from OBM
Chinatown Design/$32m	• New, two-story branch in an affordable housing development • Finalizing construction documents • Construction has begun on base; fitout estimated in 18 months
South End Design/$32m	• All-new, two story branch building • Finalizing construction documents; waiting for funding update from OBM
Uphams Corner Design | $32m	• New, two-story branch in an affordable housing development • Working on fitout design in collaboration with development team
West End	• New, two-story branch in an affordable housing development • Working on fitout design in collaboration with development team

WELCOMING DESTINATION

THE MCKIM INITIATIVE: VISIONING WORK: CENTRAL LIBRARY USER EXPERIENCE & SERVICES STUDY

GOAL

Create new experiences by looking at five intersecting dimensions of the library.

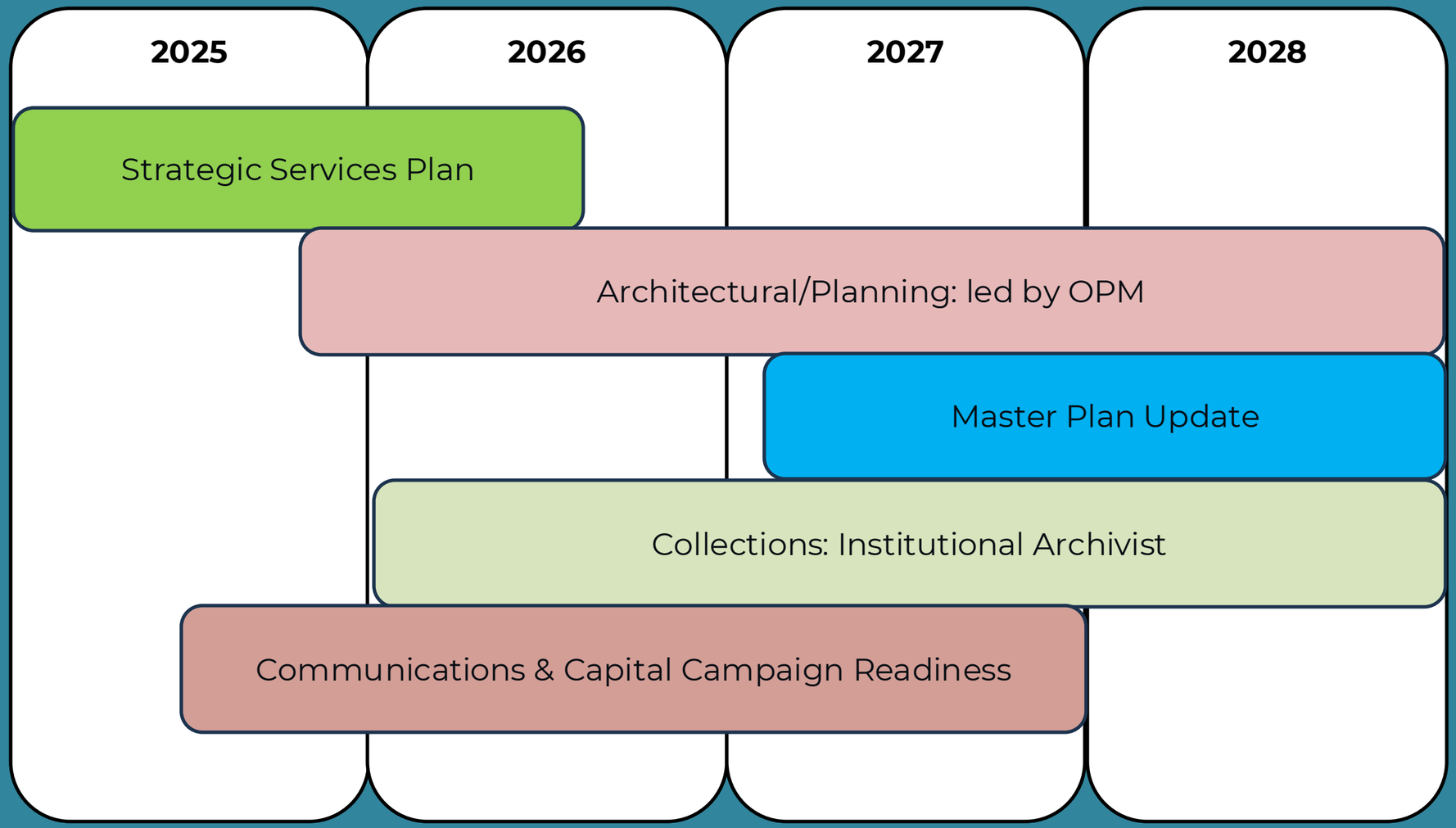


STEERING COMMITTEE

Beth Prindle	Director, Research and Special Collections
Michael Colford	Director of Library Services
Anna Fahey-Flynn	Manager of the Central Library
Nicole Santiago	Manager of Research Services
Jessica Bitely	Assistant Director, Research Collections

BRIDGE TO McKIM

Project Timeline & Key Enablers



VISIONING IS A YEAR-LONG PROCESS

Many ways for staff to be involved, and soon, external stakeholders

Least — **TIME COMMITMENT** — Greatest

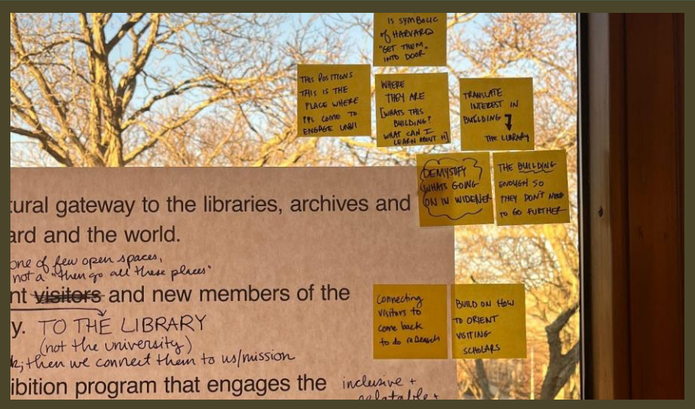
Intercept Interviews	Tabling	Questionnaires	Focus Groups	Visioning Group	Task Forces

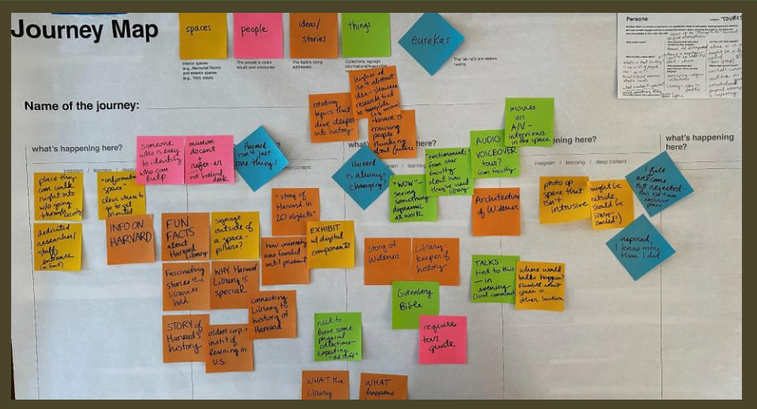
ONE TOUCHPOINT

Informal

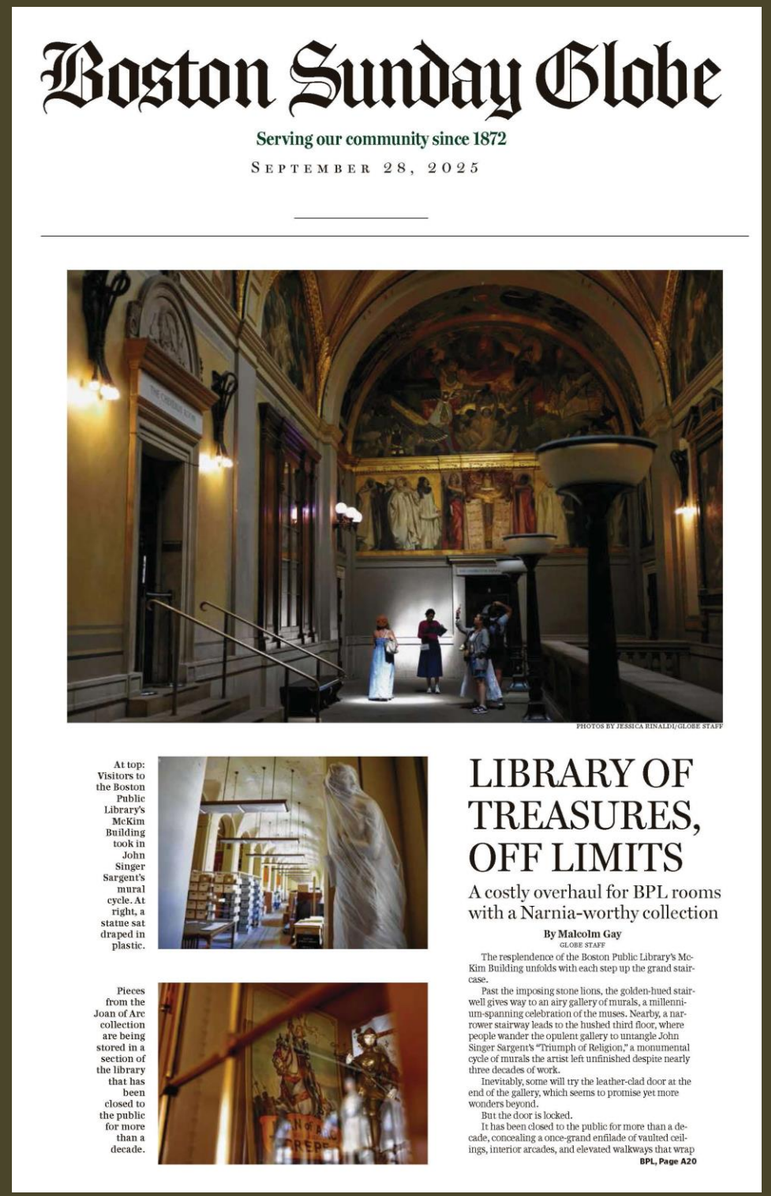
MULTIPLE TOUCHPOINTS

Structured





WELCOMING DESTINATION



Boston Sunday Globe

Serving our community since 1872

SEPTEMBER 28, 2025

PHOTOS BY JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF

At top: Visitors to the Boston Public Library's McKim Building took in John Singer Sargent's mural cycle. At right, a statue sat draped in plastic.

Pieces from the Joan of Arc collection are being stored in a section of the library that has been closed to the public for more than a decade.

LIBRARY OF TREASURES, OFF LIMITS

A costly overhaul for BPL rooms with a Narnia-worthy collection

By Malcolm Gay
GLOBE STAFF

The resplendence of the Boston Public Library's McKim Building unfolds with each step up the grand staircase.

Past the imposing stone lions, the golden-hued stairwell gives way to an airy gallery of murals, a millennium-spanning celebration of the muses. Nearby, a narrower stairway leads to the hushed third floor, where people wander the opulent gallery to untangle John Singer Sargent's "Triumph of Religion," a monumental cycle of murals the artist left unfinished despite nearly three decades of work.

Inevitably, some will try the leather-clad door at the end of the gallery, which seems to promise yet more wonders beyond.

But the door is locked.

It has been closed to the public for more than a decade, concealing a once-grand enfilade of vaulted ceilings, interior arcades, and elevated walkways that wrap

BPL, Page A20

BRIDGE TO MCKIM

OPM Contract (Jan 2026)

- Existing conditions documentation & gap analysis
- Technical studies
- Storage plan
- Tie everything together to start master plan update (2027)

Fundraising Campaign Communication Study

- Communication strategies for an unprecedented effort to build community support

Hire institutional archivist (early 2026)

LIFELONG LEARNING & RESEARCH PARTNER

Expanding the **Social Work** team

ESOL – investment in workforce development thanks to Carnegie grant

Cataloging the **Founding Research Collection**

First ever **Children's Musician-in-Residence**

Hello Hatchlings: launching 2026, thanks to LEGO Group

Programming highlights:

Ruth Carter:	275 in-person attendees | 100 virtual
Ken Fulk:	250 in-person attendees | 78 virtual
Branch Catalyst grants:	41 programs across all 25 branches *$76,000 investment*

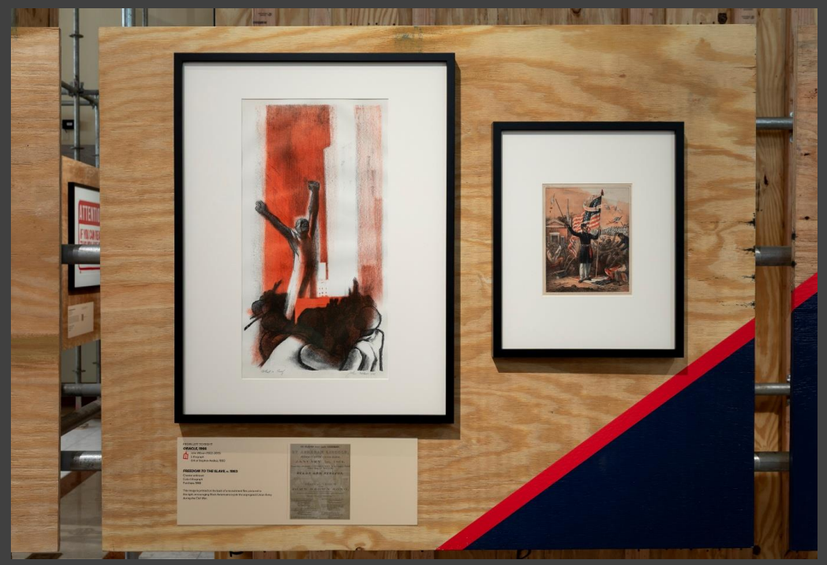
Nearly 20,000 visitors welcomed since October 23rd

Exhibition runs through April 21, 2026

Featured in

Boston Globe 10/31

WCVB Chronicle **tomorrow (11/19)**



COMMUNITY ENGAGER

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Definitional work underway; launching staff-driven **Civic Engagement Interest Group**

- Discuss, develop, and recommend programs, services, and partnerships

BRANCH CATALYST GRANTS FINALIZED

- 41 programs across all 25 branches
- $76,000 investment

RELAUNCH OF PASSPORT PROGRAM

- Participation at all locations with new prizes
- First ever MBTA ad campaign: 1,000 new cardholders
- Kicked off with “Book it Around Boston” – 100 participants

TRUSTED RESOURCE

Training all staff on **Intellectual Freedom**:

- 75% of staff trained to date; all new staff to receive training within first 60 days

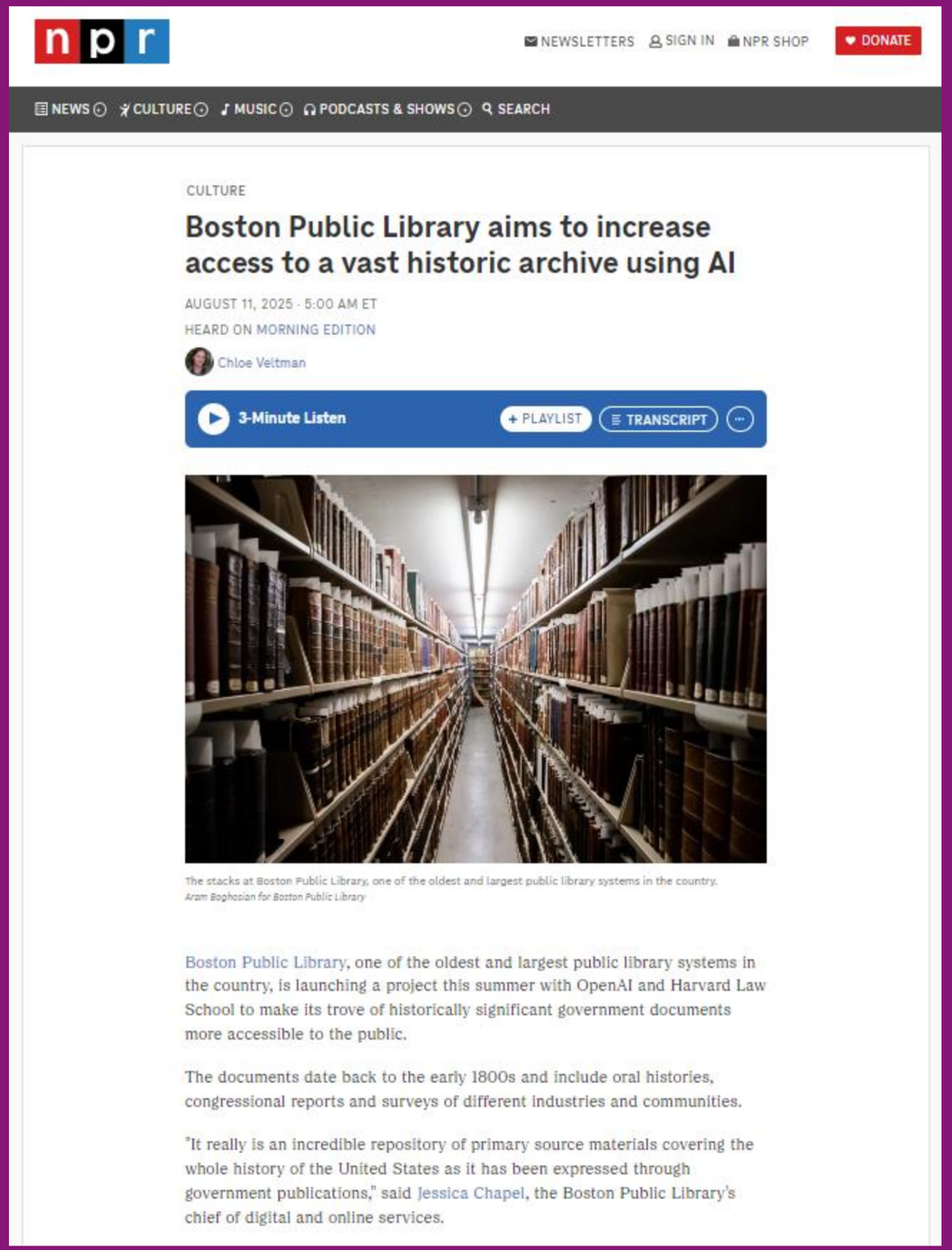
New **Chromebook lending** -- supported by a grant from Comcast

Reader's Advisory Interest Group

- Staff-driven; provide collaborative professional development in readers' advisory best practices and promote a reading culture among library staff that extends to the public

Books Unbanned

- **17,307** registrations from all 50 states plus Puerto Rico, Guam, and American Samoa ages 13-26
- **40,683** checkouts



npr

NEWSLETTERS SIGN IN NPR SHOP DONATE

NEWS CULTURE MUSIC PODCASTS & SHOWS SEARCH

CULTURE

Boston Public Library aims to increase access to a vast historic archive using AI

AUGUST 11, 2025 · 5:00 AM ET

HEARD ON MORNING EDITION

Chloe Veltman

3-Minute Listen + PLAYLIST TRANSCRIPT

The stacks at Boston Public Library, one of the oldest and largest public library systems in the country.
Aram Boghosian for Boston Public Library

Boston Public Library, one of the oldest and largest public library systems in the country, is launching a project this summer with OpenAI and Harvard Law School to make its trove of historically significant government documents more accessible to the public.

The documents date back to the early 1800s and include oral histories, congressional reports and surveys of different industries and communities.

"It really is an incredible repository of primary source materials covering the whole history of the United States as it has been expressed through government publications," said Jessica Chapel, the Boston Public Library's chief of digital and online services.

TRUSTED RESOURCE

Expanding access using AI

- Launched summer 2025 with **OpenAI and Harvard Law School**
- Historically significant government documents will become more accessible to the public.
- Documents date back to the early 1800s and include oral histories, congressional reports and surveys of different industries and communities.

AI Interest Group

- Staff driven group to build organizational literacy around artificial intelligence technologies in libraries
- Primary focus on generative AI.
- Will also support development of public-facing AI education and programming.

ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS

Simmons Fellowship program

- One fellow currently
- Selection underway for 2026 candidate

Brown Bag Lunch series

- Leverages expertise and lived experiences of staff
- Internal community building

Identified **project management tool;** adoption in 2026

Trauma-informed Approaches

ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS - Funding

City Of Boston

- Operating
- Capital

Library for The Commonwealth

Trust Funds & Enterprise Revenue

Philanthropy

- BPL Fund
- Associates & Friends Groups

NIGHT IN THE STACKS

Young people really do care about the Library!

- Fourth year
- 900+ guests filled the McKim Building on Halloween night
- Raised $383,000 in support of programs, services, and collections.

Be Ambassadors

Help us spread the word. Share the Library's vision and impact with your networks—colleagues, communities, and partners.

Be Advocates

Champion public libraries as essential infrastructure. Support funding, access, and innovation at the city, state, and national levels.

Fund the Future

Invest in our bold goals—from early literacy and workforce development to digital equity and preservation of history.

Partner With Us

Collaborate on programs and help pilot new initiatives.

Vote for Libraries

Support ballot initiatives and policies that advance library services and equitable access to information.

Stay Engaged

Attend events. Visit branches. Keep the dialogue going as we implement this vision together.

We believe in

Free to All

Free to...

Free to **Discover**
Free to **Learn**
Free to **Explore**

Free to **Imagine**
Free to **Connect**
Free to **Create**

Free to **Read** Free to **Think** Free to **Choose**

Free to **Be**
Boston Public Library

Q&A

THANK YOU!