DENVER **PUBLIC** LIBRARY



2025-2030 Strategic Plan



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Letter From the City Librarian

Dear Library Community,

Five years ago, we released our previous Strategic Roadmap. A lot has changed over that time for the world, for our community, and for Denver Public Library. One thing that has remained constant is our commitment to the people of Denver.

Over the last five years, we have achieved so much to make Denver Public Library even better. There are too many accomplishments to name here, but some highlights include securing dedicated funding for the library through *Strong Library, Strong Denver*, supported by the DPL Fund; reopening locations after renovations, including Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library and Denver Central Library; bringing free printing and copying to the community; and adding dedicated teen spaces in our locations to provide youth with their own places to be and belong.

As we evolve along with our community, we are pleased to present you with our *Denver Here*: 2025-2030 Strategic Plan. Like all that we do, this new plan is rooted in our mission, vision, and values and lays out a path for the library for the next six years. Our community is diverse and dynamic, and we hope you can see yourself in this plan and here at the library. We invite you to explore Denver Public Library in person and online and either rediscover a favorite or discover something new that your library has to offer. Be here. Discover here. Engage here.

On a personal note, this is my final strategic plan as City Librarian and Executive Director. It has been a great pleasure to be part of the community, to get to know you—our incredible customers—and to lead Denver Public Library over the last ten years. As I transition from my role, I will not be far away as I continue to be the library's biggest supporter. Thank you for believing in us, and cheers to the next six years. This is the right path forward to ensure this library serves its community now and well into the future.

Sincerely,

Michelle Joshe

Michelle Jeske City Librarian & Executive Director

Vision

A strong community where everyone thrives.

Mission

Together, we create welcoming spaces where all are free to explore and connect.

Values

WELCOMING: We make our resources, services and expertise accessible for all, recognize the inherent dignity in each person, and provide safe places where everyone can be themselves.

CURIOSITY: We foster a culture of exploration, innovation and forward thinking by creating environments that support learning and growth.

CONNECTION: We are neighbors. We foster relationships, listen and act to build and strengthen our community. We bring people together to share information, ideas and experiences.

EQUITY: We work to change inequitable practices, structures and policies, and attitudes that drive them, to provide opportunities for every person in our community to thrive. As we do so, we actively examine our roles in perpetuating oppressive systems.

STEWARDSHIP: We are accountable to our community, using our resources responsibly. We lead with honesty and integrity, protect privacy and preserve and share the full history of our Denver community.



Our Service Philosophy

Our service philosophy outlines the library's desired impact, defines our unique assets, and articulates what we believe those resources can make possible for Denver residents. Our service philosophy also helps evaluate our work, maximize value for Denver residents, and enhance partnerships with organizations that complement our strengths.

OUR DESIRED IMPACT:

As a result of our resources and services, everyone in Denver will have access to information, technology, spaces, and experiences—and support using these resources—so that they can pursue their own unique interests and connect to others in ways that are meaningful to them.

OUR UNIQUE ASSETS AND WHAT THEY ENABLE:

Our unique assets are how we can best serve our community, and we define them by centering Denver residents.



Our Core Services

OUR SPACES

Help Denver residents access free, welcoming, clean, public, and reservable spaces across the city that they can use for many kinds of activities: individual and communal, structured and unstructured, creative, loud and quiet.



Enabling relaxation, reading, creating, participating in experiences, accessing resources, socializing, and connecting with others in comfortable and welcoming spaces.

OUR COLLECTIONS

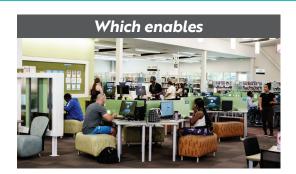
Help Denver residents easily access materials in multiple formats and languages that reflect diverse perspectives and identities.



Enabling the agency, freedom, and information access to explore whatever interests them.

OUR TECHNOLOGY AND INTERNET

Help Denver residents connect to information through the internet and computer/device access and learn digital and information literacy skills.



Enabling the access, tools, and skills necessary to connect and create in our digital world.

OUR STAFF

Allow Denver residents to work with kind, adaptable staff skilled in welcoming all, helping people use our resources, providing meaningful experiences, and facilitating connections.



Enabling individualized support to maximize our resources, explore information, learn new skills, participate in meaningful experiences, and connect with others.

How We Got Here

We follow a strategic cycle to plan, implement, and hold ourselves accountable as we strive to confidently advance the value of public libraries for Denver residents. In addition to other strategically aligned planning work we undertake, each phase of our strategic cycle corresponds with three levels of accountability—personal, operational, and community.

1. Planning

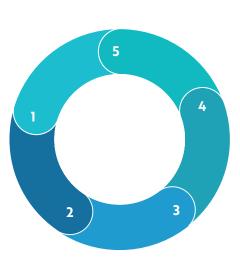
Identifying the project team and community engagement methods.

2. Environmental Scan

Synthesize learnings from the last plan and identify critical community level information to formulate our next plan.

3. Engagement

Listen and learn from our staff, community, partners, and leaders to inform what the strategic plan needs to be relevant to Denver residents over the next six years.



5. Adoption

Activate the systems and resources necessary to implement following approval by the Library Commission.

4. Formulation

Review all the inputs in the context of operational capacity, public value, and alignment with our mission, vision, and values to create a fully fleshed out strategic plan.



Who We Engaged

The time spent on engagement for the last and this strategic plan is our starting point for DPL to continue building more robust and long lasting relationships with the community, our partners, and historically missing voices.

- 293 Missing voices engaged and provided feedback from historically hard to reach groups.
- **1,452** Customers offered general feedback, supplementing our 2022 community survey.
- 15 Strategic partners engaged in focus groups on providing their community insight and communication strategies.
- **9** Human Rights & Community Partnerships commissions set the groundwork for ongoing partnership.
- **46**% of DPL staff provided feedback to refine the library's role, leverage strengths, and address future community changes that may impact the library's future role.



What We Learned

Denver Public Library is a learning hub, a hangout spot, a solace for family time, a social connector, and a reading oasis. Here's how the community views our core services:



Spaces

Our free, public spaces are welcoming and clean.

The community values that our spaces are comfortable, open and accessible, private, quiet, and safe. Our spaces should have plentiful individual and meeting spaces, and be well maintained.



Collections

Our freely available materials in multiple formats and languages reflect diverse perspectives and identities.

The community values audiobooks, books, magazines, movies, materials covering various topics, and improved wait times. Our collections should include diverse formats and languages, and be better highlighted.



Technology

Internet access, computers, and other devices are necessary for Denver residents to connect and create.

The community values internet and WiFi access, the Library of Things, and public computing. Our technology should be circulating, plentiful, updated regularly, and focused on user experience including printing services and cutting-edge technologies like AI.



Staff

The kind, adaptable, and skilled people who provide a welcoming environment to all, and help Denver residents use our resources, provide meaningful experiences, and facilitate connections.

The community values that our staff have the knowledge and skills necessary to enable creativity in makerspaces, offer technology education, and provide immigrant services. Staff skills should be equity oriented and continuously developed in customer service, outreach, and expanded technology education.

Denver Community Snapshot

Since our last strategic plan, Denver has seen changes in housing, humanitarian aid, an aging population, neighborhood stressors, and literacy gaps. We have considered the below data and more to create a meaningful plan for Denver.



Population

- Denver's population is expected to grow from 712,637 to 771,678 by 2030.
- +40% of Denverites are ages 25 44.
- Residents 65+ are the fastest growing group due to aging in place, not net migration.
- 5,818 of the 9,065 people experiencing homelessness in the metro area are in Denver.
- In 2024, Denver welcomed nearly 40,000 immigrants.



Economy and Affordability

- Leading industry employers are professional services, trade/ transportation, utilities, government, education, and health services.
- Denver's median income of \$88,213 ranks 7th among the 25 largest U.S. cities.
- Denver housing holds a larger share of household expenditures than in average U.S. metropolitan areas.



Education and Literacy

- Denver Public Schools (DPS) has a 71% graduation rate.
- Only 27% of Black and 24% of Latino DPS students in grades 3-8 meet state literacy standards, compared to 73% of white students.
- On Colorado Measures of Academic Success tests, 17.9% of DPS students in grades 3-8 failed, and 19.9% partially met expectations.
- 37.8% of DPS students tested below expectations (State avg.: 32%).
- 23% of Denver residents aged 16+ fall short of the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies standards for literacy.
- Denver has fewer adult literacy services than other cities—focused primarily on Latinos and children.
- 54.25% of Denverites have a bachelor's degree or higher (State avg.: 43.73%, National avg.: 34.8%).

Denver Here Overview

Our *Denver Here:* 2025-2030 *Strategic Plan* is structured around three strategic themes that directly correspond with our core services, emphasizing operational excellence by centering customers.



Our Spaces

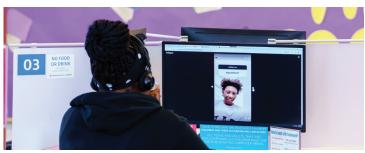


Our Collections and Technology



Our Staff







Each strategic theme is also supported by:

- Objectives The efforts we'll focus on throughout the lifecycle of the plan.
- What Success Looks Like The desired outcomes to achieve by 2030.
- Examples of What You'll See The work and milestones that will demonstrate progress along the way.
- **Community Indicators** The metrics of success by which we plan to measure the impact and alignment of our work.
- **Equity Focus** How we intend to address systemic barriers, promote inclusion, and foster equitable access.

Enabling the work described in each theme is our dedication to operational excellence and the required organizational shifts for implementation.

Two Year Priorities and Outlook

We will advance this strategic plan using biennial action plans to specify how we will make progress towards the objectives identified in each strategic theme throughout the plan's six year lifecycle. The two year priorities provide an optimal timeframe to address substantial and impactful initiatives while maintaining the flexibility required to navigate our dynamic and evolving operational landscape.

B E HERE

Denver is a large, growing city with a variety of inhabitants across cultures, neighborhoods, and languages. Public libraries are the last free space for all people to meet, spend time, and use resources. As Denver expands both geographically and culturally, the library recognizes its charge to grow and adapt.

We are part of our community fabric with all of our physical locations nested in neighborhoods throughout the city, and our robust Mobile Services that strive to create library spaces in areas without convenient access to a branch.

Library spaces are activated through the imagination and needs of our customers; whether that be by connecting with others, using a private study room to work remotely, escaping the elements, or just stopping by to pick up materials—we want you to see yourself here.



Denverites have free, clean, comfortable places to access across the city where they feel seen, welcomed, and a sense of ownership over their community spaces.

Objectives:

- Library spaces are accessible, clean, and comfortable for all visitors.
- Spaces are designed to be adaptable and relevant to customer needs.
- Customers will see the unique culture and history of their neighborhoods at DPL.



What Success Looks Like

By 2030, we will ensure that our spaces reflect customers' needs providing access during relevant hours, including evenings and weekends.

We strive to create spaces in our buildings that reflect the identity of each diverse neighborhood, showcasing local and historical art and designing attractive, multifunctional spaces that reflect the accessibility and use of our dynamic community.

Examples of What You'll See

- Enhanced design features and layouts to improve accessibility within locations.
- Clear and intuitive multilingual signs to enhance navigation in our spaces.
- · Improvements to the exterior landscape of our branch spaces.

Community Indicators	Metrics	What this tells us
A Welcoming Environment	% of Denver residents who agree/strongly agree that the library is a welcoming place for people of all backgrounds and identities.	The extent to which our customers and service area population believe the library is an inclusive space for all people.
Relevant Place to Be	Average # of times a Denver resident visits a library location or the DPL website annually.	One way of understanding the significance of our online presence and spaces to the community.
Perception of Library Spaces	% of Denver residents who rate the quality of library spaces as good or excellent.	Self reported rating of institutional quality directly from Denver residents across geographical areas, ethnicities, and ages.
Facilities Condition Index	The percentage of the total cost to repair DPL's facilities divided by the cost to replace them.	The overall condition of DPL's buildings.

Equity Focus

We are committed to creating inclusive, welcoming, and universally accessible spaces that reflect and serve the community surrounding each location. Recognizing that certain identities have historically been excluded from community institutions, we are dedicated to fostering environments of compassion and respect for all people.

DISCOVER HERE

Denverites have access to relevant, engaging, and diverse resources that reflect their interests and empower them to explore, read, and grow.

Objectives:

- The library collection is relevant, engaging, and diverse.
- Technology is available that allows everyone to connect and thrive in a digital world.
- Customers have access to resources that meet their informational and entertainment needs.

The library's collection includes everything from children's board books to circulating Wi-Fi hot spots to sewing machines—all free to our customers. Visiting one of our makerspaces provides you with access to unique technology assets like laser cutters and 3D printers and, whether you're prototyping the next big innovation in your industry or experimenting with printing your own dinosaur figurines, you're encouraged to create.

We commit to ensuring all customers have agency, freedom, and information access without judgment. We embrace our value of curiosity and support each customer's journey of inquiry by ensuring equal access and respecting customer privacy and confidentiality.





What Success Looks Like

By 2030, we seek to expand customers' access to a variety of popular and historically underrepresented narratives in different formats and languages—and reduce wait times—by developing a collection of freely available materials. We will also continue to help customers find and explore materials that spark new curiosities by expanding and increasing the visibility of our advisory and reference support services.

We strive to have both new and existing technology in our collection and makerspaces for all community members to enjoy, as well as provide the support they need to engage with it.

Examples of What You'll See

- · Intentional programming to encourage all ages to engage with the library.
- Expanded collections across the library system in various languages.
- · Thoughtfully placed digital resources at branches for convenient use.

Community Indicators	Measure	What this tells us
Material Use	Materials circulation, by collection.	One way to understand the variety of materials accessed and the volume of materials consumed by the Denver population.
Find What You're Looking For	% of Denver residents who report finding what they are looking for in the library or on its website.	How relevant the materials and ways to access them are to the community.
Learning & Growth	% of Denver residents who agree/strongly agree that the library helps me grow and learn.	The community's perception of DPL as a place where they can fully explore and exercise their curiosity.
Intentional Service Delivery	Service availability to service usage in target neighborhoods.	How well DPL aligns our resources to deliver neighborhood centric library services.

Equity Focus

We are committed to reflecting a wide spectrum of human experiences so that people of all backgrounds may see their identities represented —and become immersed in the lives and perspectives of others—with the authorship and content of our collections. We are also committed to providing access to free, reliable, and impactful technology while equipping individuals with the necessary knowledge and skills to succeed in a digital world by promoting digital literacy for all ages, needs, and skill levels.

ENGAGE HERE

When you visit a library location, you're met with kind and knowledgeable staff who are equipped to support you in making the most of our resources, exploring information, learning new skills, participating in meaningful experiences, and connecting with others.

Denverites trust the library to provide responsive and inspired service, meaningful experiences, and relevant connections with resources and partners.

Objectives:

- Library staff have the knowledge and skills for high quality service.
- · Library partnerships will be strategically aligned.
- Customers will know about and take advantage of all library services.





What Success Looks Like

By 2030, we will form intentional teams capable of high quality interactions with customers, helping them to identify and respond to their inquiries, and engage in their preferred languages. We are also driven to inform Denver residents of our services through outreach and marketing.

We help make the complex landscape of social and community services easier to navigate by bringing critical partners to customers and facilitating connections to outside resources.

Examples of What You'll See

- · Revised website navigation to simplify access to library services and resources.
- · New, dedicated feedback opportunities to ensure we are meeting the needs of Denverites.
- Expanded opportunities for multilingual program offerings.

Community Indicators	Measure	What this tells us
Connection to Community	% of Denver residents who agree/strongly agree that the library helps me to feel more connected to my community.	How well DPL creates connecting experiences for Denver residents.
Trust in the Library	% of Denver residents who agree/strongly agree that the library is a trustworthy institution.	How well DPL lives up to our values by honoring public trust/stewardship.
Customer Service Index	% of Denver residents who positively rate specific aspects of their most recent interaction with a library staff member.	The quality and effectiveness of DPL's relationship to community members.
Awareness	% of Denver residents who report being knowledgeable about the programs and services provided by the Denver Public Library.	Helps to assess the community's awareness of DPL's programs and services.

Equity Focus

We are dedicated to creating a diverse, inclusive, and equitable environment for our staff as well as the Denver community. We believe that an educated, empowered, and resilient workforce is our greatest asset. By continuing to integrate our values into the support of staff wellbeing, we can foster a culture that benefits our customers and community partners.

OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Dedicated teams will shepherd the library system with efficient, effective, and forward thinking operational support structures.

There are four foundational pillars of operational excellence necessary for the realization of each strategic theme—Infrastructure, Fiscal Stewardship, Human Capital, and Strategic Direction.

For each pillar of Organization Excellence, we will leverage multiple measures to assess our progress against our articulated goals. Each pillar will have four measures, emphasizing industry standard approaches where appropriate, and will provide insights into the different ways our operations support the entire organization.



Pillars of Operational Excellence

Infrastructure	Fiscal	Human	Strategic
	Stewardship	Capital	Direction
Ensure maximum efficiency, safety, and reliable community access to the library's physical and technological resources.	Secure the long term sustainability of library services with a balanced budget, managed liabilities, new revenue, and optimized reserves and resources.	Employ effective talent management practices, continuous learning and development, future planning, and enhanced employee engagement.	Align our structure, resources, and actions with the desired impact of our core services and strategic plan.

What Success Looks Like

Infrastructure	Fiscal	Human	Strategic
	Stewardship	Capital	Direction
We will gauge improved efficiency and future planning with an infrastructure funding gap measure.	We will evaluate best practices like the return on investment of library services and long range financial stability projections.	We will enhance our working environment by measuring the turnover rate and creating an employee engagement index.	We will measure the alignment of our work with our service philosophy and how we've improved.

Examples of What You'll See

Infrastructure	Fiscal	Human	Strategic
	Stewardship	Capital	Direction
More accessible and resilient buildings that support a variety of uses.	Streamlined service between the library and other City agencies.	Skilled staff regularly expand their skills to improve service delivery.	Greater shared understanding of the alignment of library offerings and community needs.

Organizational Shifts

As the library and our community continue to grow and evolve, we have thought deeply about what it will take to deliver on our vision and mission through the lens of our 2025-2030 Strategic Plan. Many of these shifts are already underway and we remain committed to fully embracing them as we navigate the next six years.

Building Capacity for Executive Leadership through reimagining the library's organizational structure and recruiting and growing experienced professionals to lead us into the future.

Defining our Service Philosophy to articulate the library's core services and what we believe they make possible for our customers.

Enhancing Partnership and Collaboration to sustain and amplify connectivity among the network of invaluable resources that aim to support Denver residents.

Developing a Culture of Safety that balances our unique role as a public space where all are welcome while promoting the wellbeing of library staff and community members.

Investing in Our People by creating a development framework that enables library staff to thrive in their current roles, contribute to the library's strategic commitments, and pursue their career aspirations.



Embedding Equity

By applying a systems thinking approach that intentionally considers all of the interconnected parts of our organization, we are evolving to better incorporate equity into all annual and long range planning.

We aim to address systemic barriers, promote inclusion, and foster equitable access for staff and community members. We plan to examine critical factors that shape internal and external access to library resources, services, and opportunities such as demographic, linguistic, and/or sociographic characteristics.

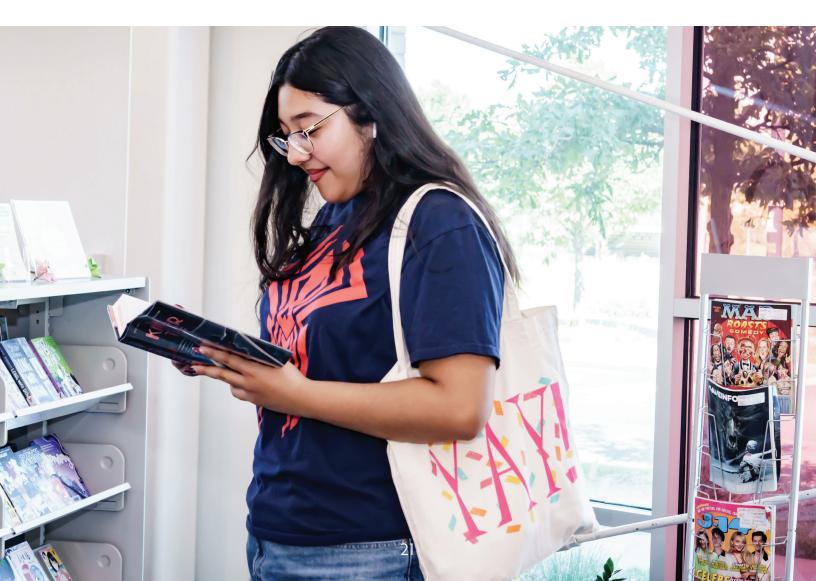
We are committed to fostering an inclusive library experience by maintaining a diverse and relevant collection, prioritizing accessible technologies, designing spaces to meet diverse needs, and reviewing policies to address biases and ensure equity.

Internal Orientation:

- Equip staff at all levels for equitable, inclusive, and culturally responsive service delivery.
- Model staff development, leadership, and decision making with equity principles to foster belonging.
- Assess and enhance systems to ensure systemic transparency and accountability.

External Impact:

- Align library services, programming, and resources with community needs.
- Build relationships with underrepresented and multilingual communities to ensure access.
- Meet community needs by addressing gaps and refining strategies based on data.



Denver Here Summary

We are committed to centering the different identities, neighborhoods, interests and informational needs of Denverites.

Spaces

BE HFRF

Free, clean, comfortable places to access across the city where they feel seen, welcomed, and a sense of ownership over their community spaces.

Collections and Technology

DISCOVER HERE

Access to relevant, engaging, and diverse resources that reflect their interests and empower them to explore, read, and grow.

Staff

ENGAGE HERE

Trust in the library to provide responsive and inspired service, meaningful experiences, and relevant connections with resources and partners.

What we're focused on

OBJECTIVES

- Accessible and comfortable spaces
- Relevant to customer needs
- Reflect Denver cultures and histories

OBJECTIVES

- Language access
- Engaging and diverse collection
- Technology to eliminate barriers

OBJECTIVES

- High quality service
- Strategic partnerships
- Knowledge of library services

How we'll measure success

COMMUNITY INDICATORS

- A welcoming environment
- · Relevant place to be
- Perception of library spaces
- Facilities condition index

COMMUNITY INDICATORS

- Material use
- Find what you're looking for
- Learning and growth
- Intentional service delivery

COMMUNITY INDICATORS

- Connection to community
- Trust in the library
- Customer service index
- Awareness of library services

How you'll know it's working

WHAT YOU'LL SEE

- Enhanced designs and layouts
- Multilingual signage
- Exterior improvements

WHAT YOU'LL SEE

- Intentional programming
- Expanded collections
- Thoughtful digital resources

WHAT YOU'LL SEE

- Revised website navigation
- New feedback opportunities
- Multilingual programming

Where we'll embed equity

EQUITY FOCUS

 Activations for diverse needs like quiet, sensory friendly

EQUITY FOCUS

- Diverse and relevant inventory
- · Assistive technologies

EQUITY FOCUS

Regular policy reviews

Our Two Year Outlook



- **B1** Adjust open hours and staffing levels at new, refreshed, and existing library locations.
- **B2** Enhance safety and accessibility with improved sightlines, lighting, multilingual signage, and entryways.
- **B3** Highlight neighborhood and cultural history through collections, art, archives, and exhibits.
- **B4** Create welcoming and comfortable public spaces with improved landscaping and exteriors.

DISCOVER HERE

- **D1** Improve records, website design, systemwide readers' advisory, and reparative cataloging.
- **D2** Empower customers to utilize library collections, digital resources, and technology.
- **D3** Reintroduce the unique offerings of Denver Central Library—the largest in Colorado.
- **D4** Prioritize diverse voices, perspectives, and identities to enhance all collections.

ENGAGE HERE

- **El** Emphasize customer experience with interactive platforms that facilitate intuitive feedback.
- **E2** Increase awareness of library offerings with a marketing communication strategy.
- **E3** Tailor core library services to community needs using community data and insights.
- **E4** Equip library staff to support customers navigating today's complex technology landscape.

OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

- OI Build resilient physical and technological infrastructure with efficiency, safety, and community access.
- O2 Steward a balanced budget, liabilities, and new revenue, optimizing reserves and resources.
- O3 Enhance talent management, learning and development, and employee engagement.
- O4 Align existing structure, resources, and actions with strategic direction.

Acknowledgments

2024 Executive Leadership Team

Michelle Jeske, City Librarian and Executive Director Valencia Culbreath, Chief Equity and Strategy Officer Theresa Liguori, Chief Public Services Officer Natriece Bryant, Chief Operating Officer

2024 Denver Public Library Commission

Sonya Garcia Ulibarri, President Laurie Mathews, Vice President Patty Salazar, Secretary Cedric Buchanon Cathy Lucas Sean Montoya Michael Niyompong Jennifer Wolf

Denver Here Planning and Design Contributors

Strategy & Evaluation Communications & Community Engagement

2024 DPL Leadership

Kirsten Decker, Director of Organizational Strategy and Development Jina Dunn, Director of Finance Chris Evjy, Interim Director of Information Technology Rachel Fewell, Director of Central Library Sara Hale, Director of Human Resources Anthony Kaufmann, Director of Facilities Management Anne Kemmerling, Director of Neighborhood Services Bob Knowles, Manager of Security Zeth Lietzau, Director of Service Design and Coordination Erika R. Martinez, Director of Communications and Community Engagement Fabiola Mora, Director of Equity Diversity and Inclusion Rachel Vagts, Director of Special Collections and Archives Stacey Watson, Director of Collection Services

