

**FREE LIBRARY OF PHILADELPHIA  
FISCAL YEAR 2027 BUDGET TESTIMONY  
APRIL 1, 2026**

**INTRODUCTION**

Good afternoon, Council President Johnson and Members of City Council. I am Kelly Richards, President and Director of the Free Library of Philadelphia. Joining me today is Sade Olanipekun-Lewis, Chair, Board of Trustees. I am pleased to provide testimony on the Free Library's Fiscal Year 2027 Operating Budget.

**DEPARTMENT MISSION & PLANS**

**Mission:**

The mission of the Free Library of Philadelphia (FLP) is to advance literacy, guide learning, and inspire curiosity as part of the Mayor's vision to provide world-class educational opportunities for Philadelphians of all ages and socioeconomic backgrounds.

**Plans for Fiscal Year 2027:**

Libraries are open doors to opportunity in every neighborhood in Philadelphia. Each of our 54 libraries provides trusted public spaces where people can gain job skills, explore new ideas, connect with neighbors, and participate in the civic life of our city. Every day, Philadelphians come to the Free Library to learn, to grow, and to find opportunity.

We are grateful for the City's continued investment in the Free Library and have been able to expand public service hours across the system. We now offer Saturday service at libraries citywide. This is a major step forward in making our services more accessible to working families, students, and seniors. Building on that progress, we are preparing to launch Sunday hours at several libraries next year, further expanding access to critical community resources.

At the same time, we must continue to invest in the safety and accessibility of our buildings. Many of our libraries are historic and beloved neighborhood landmarks, but they require ongoing investment to address life-safety needs, building systems, and accessibility improvements. Ensuring that every branch is safe, welcoming, and accessible is essential to keeping libraries open and available for the communities that rely on them. We are pleased to see that in addition to this operating budget, the Mayor's capital budget for FY27-32 dedicates \$33 million for replacing HVAC systems to keep our libraries open. This is a big step toward making our libraries more accessible throughout the year.



*An afterschool program at the Northeast Regional Library.*



*Fishtown Community Library has a new HVAC system, thanks to investment from the City's capital budget.*

Equally important is investing in the workforce that keeps our libraries running. Our staff provides the programming, technology assistance, literacy support, and community services that make the Free Library such a vital resource. Continued investment in our workforce allows us to keep library doors open, provide excellent service, and meet the evolving needs of Philadelphians.



*The Free Library's 2026 Lunar New Year celebration at Parkway Central hosted hundreds, enjoying musical performances, dance, and a fashion show. It was one of thousands of cultural celebrations and programs at the library.*

Over the past year, we have also strengthened how we communicate and engage with our community. We have expanded outreach, improved how we share information about programs and building operations, and upgraded internal communications to better support our staff across the system. These improvements help ensure that Philadelphians know about the opportunities available to them at their neighborhood library.

The Free Library does not do this work alone. We partner with hundreds of community organizations, civic groups, schools, and other City departments. Libraries are places where many of the City's priorities come together—from workforce development and afterschool enrichment to cultural programming. We also joined with the Citywide

efforts to provide needed warmth in the winter and cooling centers in the summer to help save lives.



*The Free Library offers many in-person and online job and career resources, including free headshots.*

In this way, the Library helps weave together the social fabric of Philadelphia.

This work aligns closely with Mayor Parker's vision of a safer, cleaner, greener Philadelphia with economic opportunity for all. Libraries provide safe and welcoming spaces in every neighborhood; they are where access meets opportunity. They support educational and economic mobility, encourage people to explore new ideas and hobbies, connect residents with City services, and strengthen communities.

When libraries are strong, our neighborhoods are stronger.

Thank you for your continued partnership and support for the Free Library of Philadelphia. We look forward to continuing this work together on behalf of the people of our city.

**PROPOSED BUDGET OVERVIEW & OTHER BUDGET DRIVERS**

<b>General Fund Financial Summary by Class</b>						
	FY25 Original Appropriations	FY25 Actual Obligations	FY26 Original Appropriations	FY26 Estimated Obligations	FY27 Proposed Appropriations	Difference: FY27 Proposed-FY26 Estimated
Class 100 - Employee Compensation	\$59,340,820	\$55,374,187	\$62,094,315	\$65,023,489	\$65,588,857	\$565,368
Class 200 - Purchase of Services	\$4,199,722	\$3,657,025	\$4,224,722	\$4,224,722	\$4,224,722	\$0
Class 300/400 - Materials, Supplies & Equipment	\$8,163,098	\$8,383,626	\$8,345,551	\$8,345,551	\$8,445,551	\$100,000
Class 500 - Contributions	\$0	\$102,008	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
	<b>\$71,703,640</b>	<b>\$67,516,846</b>	<b>\$74,664,588</b>	<b>\$77,593,762</b>	<b>\$78,259,130</b>	<b>\$665,368</b>

<b>Contracts Summary (Professional Services only)</b>						
	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY26 YTD (Q1 & Q2)	FY27 Projected
Total amount of contracts	\$1,437,921	\$1,060,290	\$1,093,513	\$660,730	\$180,000	\$1,938,570
Total amount to S/LBE	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total amount to M/W/DSBE	\$84,000	\$88,000	\$97,500	\$90,000	\$90,000	
S/LBE Participation Rate	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
M/W/DSBE Participation Rate	6%	8%	9%	14%	50%	

*\*S/LBE not yet available as the City works to build the S/LBE registry and begin setting small and local business participation goals.*

Total S/LBE Contract Participation Goal (Public Works; Services, Supplies & Equipment; and Professional Services combined)			
	FY25	FY26	FY27 Projected
S/LBE Contract Participation Goal	N/A	N/A	N/A

*\*S/LBE not yet available as the City works to build the S/LBE registry and begin setting small and local business participation goals.*

**Proposed Funding Request:**

The proposed Fiscal Year 2027 General Fund budget totals \$78,259,130, an increase of \$665,368 over Fiscal Year 2026 estimated obligation levels. This increase is primarily due to wage increases.

The proposed budget includes:

- \$65,588,857 in Class 100, a \$565,368 increase over FY26 estimated obligations. This funding will support contracted wage adjustments and non-represented and exempt employee raises.
- \$4,224,722 in Class 200, level with FY26 estimated obligations. This funding will support contracted services, such as advertising and technology services.
- \$8,445,551 in Class 300/400, a \$100,000 increase over FY26 estimated obligations. This increase in funding will support enhanced cleaning at libraries.

**STAFFING LEVELS**

The department is requesting 1,021 budgeted positions across all fund for FY27, an increase of four grant-funded positions from FY26.

<b>Employment Levels (as of November 2025)</b>			
	FY26 Budgeted	Filled as of November 2025	FY27 Proposed
Number of Full-Time Positions	1,017	899	1,021
Number of Exempt Positions	13	12	13
Number of Executive Positions (deputy level and above)		10	
Average Salary of All Full-Time Positions		\$60,376	
Median Salary of All Full-Time Positions		\$52,338	

**NEW HIRES**

<b>New Hires (from 7/1/2025 to November 2025)</b>		
	Total Number of New Hires	Spanish
Black or African American	10	
Asian	1	
Hispanic or Latino	2	1
White	23	2
Other	7	1
Total	43	4

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New Hires (from November 2025 to March 2026)				
	Total Number of New Hires	Spanish	French	Portuguese
Black or African American	1			
Hispanic or Latino	2	1		
White	9		1	1
Other	6	2		
Total	18	3	1	1

**VACANCY RATE AND ALLOWANCE**

Vacancy Rate Summary (General & Grants Fund)						
	FY25 Actual Vacancy Rate	FY26 Budgeted Vacancy Allowance	FY26 Vacancy Rate	FY26 Budgeted Vacancy Allowance Rate	FY27 Budgeted Vacancy Allowance	FY27 Budgeted Vacancy Allowance Rate
Departmental Total	14.7%	(\$3,055,764)	12.1%	5.3%	(\$5,011,951)	7.9%

**OTHER BUDGETARY IMPACTS**

**Federal and State (Where Applicable)**

Through March of FY26, FLP received approximately \$9.7 million in state funding, which it utilizes to fund all aspects of library operations. Most of these funds are allocated for library materials and some property management projects.

**CONTRACTING EXPERIENCE**

<b>M/W/DSBE Participation on Large Professional Services Contracts</b>											
<b>Top Five Largest Contracts, FY26</b>											
Vendor Name	Service Provided	Dollar Amount of Contract	RFP Issue Date	Contract Start Date	Ranges in RFP	% of M/W/DSBE and SBE Participation Achieved	\$ Value of M/W/DSBE and SBE Participation	Total % Participation - All DSBES	Total \$ Value Participation - All DSBES	Local Business	Waiver for Living Wage Compliance?
Copy Systems, Inc	Cash Management	\$90,000	4/25/2025	1/1/2026	MBE: BGFE	0%	\$0	0%	\$0	No	No
					WBE: BGFE	0%	\$0				
					DSBE: BGFE	0%	\$0				
					S/LBE: BGFE	0%	\$0				
Fifteen Minutes	Advertising Campaign	\$90,000	3/3/2023	3/8/2023	MBE: BGFE	0%	\$0	100%	\$90,000	No	No
					WBE: BGFE	100%	\$90,000				
					DSBE: BGFE	0%	\$0				
					S/LBE: BGFE	0%	\$0				
Verizon Business Network	Wide Area Network	\$147,200	12/12/2024	7/1/2021	MBE: BGFE	0%	\$0	0%	\$0	Yes	No
					WBE: BGFE	0%	\$0				
					DSBE: BGFE	0%	\$0				
					S/LBE: BGFE	0%	\$0				

<b>Non-Profit Vendor Demographics</b>		
Project Home	Minority %	Female %
Workforce	100%	71%
Executive	100%	60%
Board	100%	60%

**Program Name:** Administration

**Program Number:** 10

**FY27 Proposed General Fund:** \$5,366,190

**Program Description:** The Administration program includes all internal activities that guide the work of the Free Library, such as executive and strategic planning functions; inclusive staff development through education and trainings; human resources; finance; and marketing.

**FY27 Strategic Goals:**

- With the strategic planning process complete, the Free Library and its Foundation will focus on publishing its outcomes and engaging stakeholders and partners across the library, arts, and cultural sectors. This engagement will share key learnings and outline a path forward, informing a comprehensive plan that strengthens alignment, visibility, and impact citywide.
- Building on the significant growth in onboarding new staff and strengthening retention efforts, the FLP is implementing a human resources (HR) ticketing system. This system will streamline requests, improve response times, and enhance overall staff support, a major step in sustaining workforce stability and ensuring employees have the resources they need to succeed.
- The Free Library will launch several major projects to increase awareness, celebrate Philadelphia’s cultural heritage, and highlight the Library’s impact and role as a vital cultural and educational anchor for Philadelphia. These initiatives include a refreshed digital and print presence to support 2026 initiatives and public-facing programs; “Free for All / All for Free,” a marketing effort showcasing the extensive no-cost resources and services available with a Free Library card; Library Love Stories, a multimedia storytelling initiative capturing patrons’ personal stories—both written and video—about the Library’s life-changing influence; and coordinated outreach for Black History Month, Hyperlocal Heritage and Book Complaints exhibits, Pride Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, Jewish Heritage Month, Asian-American History Month, Lunar New Year celebrations, One Book One Philadelphia, summer reading, and a celebration of Parkway Central’s 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2027.

**FY27 Performance Measures:**

Measure	FY25 Actual	FY26 Target	FY27 Target
Social media followers: Facebook, X, Instagram, YouTube <sup>1</sup>	103,345	120,000	125,000

<sup>1</sup> This is a point-in-time measure.

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**Program Name:** Customer Experience

**Program Number:** 11

**FY27 Proposed General Fund:** \$55,314,104

**Program Description:** The Customer Experience program encompasses public-facing services, such as administration of the Parkway Central Library, all neighborhood libraries, and the Library of Accessible Media for Pennsylvanians (LAMP).

**FY27 Strategic Goals:**

- In FY27, a key priority will be continuing to expand public service hours by introducing Sunday service at the Central Library, three regional libraries, and up to five additional neighborhood libraries. This expansion will maximize accessibility by providing 7-day service at select locations, strengthening community engagement, and increasing the Library's visibility and reliability as an essential public resource.
- FLP will deliver inclusive programming, including civic engagement initiatives, lectures, exhibitions, creative workshops, cooking demonstrations, and musical performances with community partners and artists. Branches will highlight Philadelphia's history and its ongoing pursuit of freedom and equality in creative ways that resonate with all of the city's diverse communities.
- By broadening outreach and programming, the Library is creating pathways for youth development, workforce readiness, and business growth. These initiatives celebrate Philadelphia's cultural heritage while delivering practical supports that prepare young people for future opportunities, strengthen workforce skills, and foster entrepreneurship.

**FY27 Performance Measures:**

Measure	FY25 Actual	FY26 Target	FY27 Target
In-person visits <sup>1</sup>	1,695,907	1,700,000	1,800,000
Percentage of Philadelphians who have Library cards <sup>2</sup>	31%	≥ 30%	≥ 30%
Percentage of staff completing core trainings <sup>3</sup>	96%	≥ 75%	≥ 75%
Hours of service	82,619	83,000	85,000
Program attendance	460,680	460,000	550,000
Circulation counts (collection use statistics)	10,004,035	10,000,000	10,000,000

<sup>1</sup> The FY27 target reflects an increase in hours of operation and the reopening of branches that were closed for renovations.

<sup>2</sup> The Free Library purges old and inactive accounts at the start of each fiscal year, and works to reach the target of at least 30% at the end of the fiscal year.

<sup>3</sup> Core trainings are identified by FLP's Training Team and are trainings offered either multiple times in the year or to a larger percentage of staff. This includes special training initiatives and key focus areas of trainings annually, but eliminates one-off trainings only taken by individual staff. The results in FY25 reflected an unusually high number of mandatory trainings for all job classes. The training team is not anticipating that this will repeat in FY26 and FY27.

**Program Name:** Performance Management and Technology

**Program Number:** 12

**FY27 Proposed General Fund:** \$4,613,501

**Program Description:** This program is responsible for performance management and technology functions, which include the maintenance of library computer systems (hardware and software), digital and network services, digital security, audiovisual and communications services, the FLP website, research, and data analytics.

**FY27 Strategic Goals:**

- FLP will implement an intranet, upgrading its staff system to provide stronger communication tools and seamless collaboration across departments. This modern platform will streamline workflows, enhance security, and ensure staff can easily share resources and align priorities.
- FLP will upgrade the network hardware infrastructure throughout the library system, installing switches, routers, and access points systemwide.

**FY27 Performance Measures:**

Measure	FY25 Actual	FY26 Target	FY27 Target
Virtual visits via Free Library of Philadelphia website	4,661,008	4,900,000	5,500,000
Digital access <sup>1</sup>	9,306,461	10,000,000	10,000,000

<sup>1</sup> This measure includes digital reach and activities, including Wi-Fi usage, eBook circulation, electronic resource/database use, and public PC use. This measure captures the sum of each instance of the aforementioned categories.

**Program Name:** Property Management

**Program Number:** 13

**FY27 Proposed General Fund:** \$12,965,335

**Program Description:** The Property Management program is responsible for building maintenance, security, and environmental services for the Free Library’s 54 libraries, with an emphasis on life-safety best practices.

**FY27 Strategic Goals:**

- Property Management will address urgent life-safety risks and fire-protection deficiencies while conducting building condition assessments — safeguarding patrons and collections, preventing costly emergencies, and guiding smarter investments in modernization across neighborhood branches.
- FLP will develop a comprehensive asset management system, maintain aging electrical switchgear, and enhance cleanliness and indoor air quality — ensuring reliable operations, reducing service disruptions, and creating healthier, more compliant environments for patrons and staff.
- FLP will strengthen security and emergency preparedness by expanding gunshot detection systems, upgrading monitoring in Special Collections, implementing computerized records management, upgrading its radio system, and conducting active shooter drills with law enforcement.

**FY27 Performance Measures:**

Measure	FY25 Actual	FY26 Target	FY27 Target
Median turnaround time (days to completion) for building service requests	8	≤ 10	≤ 9