

PUBLIC LIBRARIAN'S GUIDE TO GOAL-SETTING

Public libraries are everything to everyone, which can make it hard to focus. Goal setting helps you move from reactive service to intentional impact.

Strong goals help you:

- Align your work with community needs and library priorities.
- Make the case for funding, staffing, and support.
- Measure and communicate your impact.
- Stay focused in a constantly shifting environment.

Start with Your Community

Your goals should reflect the people you serve. Ask yourself:

- Who in my community is underserved or underrepresented?
- What needs are we uniquely positioned to meet?
- What patterns am I seeing (program attendance, questions, requests)?
- Where could we make a deeper impact?

Tip: Use informal data. What people ask for often tells you more than formal surveys.

Choose a Focus Area

Keep it manageable by selecting 1-3 priority areas. Common focus areas for public librarians:

- Lifelong Learning & Literacy
- Community Engagement & Programming
- Digital Access & Technology Support
- Outreach & Partnerships
- Marketing & Visibility
- Data & Impact Tracking

Write a Strong Goal

Keep your goals clear, actionable, and tied to outcomes.

Goal Formula: I will [action] so that [community impact], as measured by [evidence].

Examples:

- I will develop monthly adult programs so that community members engage in lifelong learning, as measured by attendance and participant feedback.
- I will expand outreach efforts so that underserved populations access library services, as measured by new library card registrations and program participation.
- I will provide weekly technology help sessions so that patrons build digital skills, as measured by session attendance and repeat visits.

Make It Doable (Not Perfect)

Public library work is unpredictable, so your system needs to be flexible. Break your goal into:

- Quarterly priorities
- Monthly actions
- Weekly touchpoints

Example: Increase community engagement

- Monthly: Plan 1 targeted program or event
- Weekly: Promote 1 service/resource in a new way

Track Your Progress

Consistent tracking is better than complex systems.

Easy ways to track:

- Program attendance logs
- Library card registrations
- Circulation and usage stats
- Anecdotal stories (these are powerful!)
- Quick patron feedback (verbal or written)

Remember: Stories + data = a compelling impact narrative.

Build in Visibility

If people don't see your work, they don't understand your impact.

Share your work:

- Social media posts (highlight people, not just programs)
- Library newsletters
- Displays and in-library signage
- Reports to boards or city leadership
- Community partnerships and events

Shift the mindset: from “We offer this” → to → “Here’s how we’re making a difference.”

Reflect & Adjust

At regular intervals, ask:

- What is gaining traction?
- What isn't connecting with the community?
- What feedback am I hearing?
- Where should I pivot?

Quick Start Template

Focus Area: _____

Goal: I will _____ so that _____
as measured by _____.

Monthly Actions:

- _____
- _____

How I'll Track Progress:
