

**A STRATEGIC PLAN TO ADDRESS CULTURAL AND
EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY AT THE BOSTON PUBLIC
LIBRARY BY WAY OF ADVOCACY AND TRAINING**

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Introduction



Casting Out Tradition

A stereotypically image of a library is one that is quiet, filled with books. People walk in the door and assume that anyone behind a desk is a librarian.

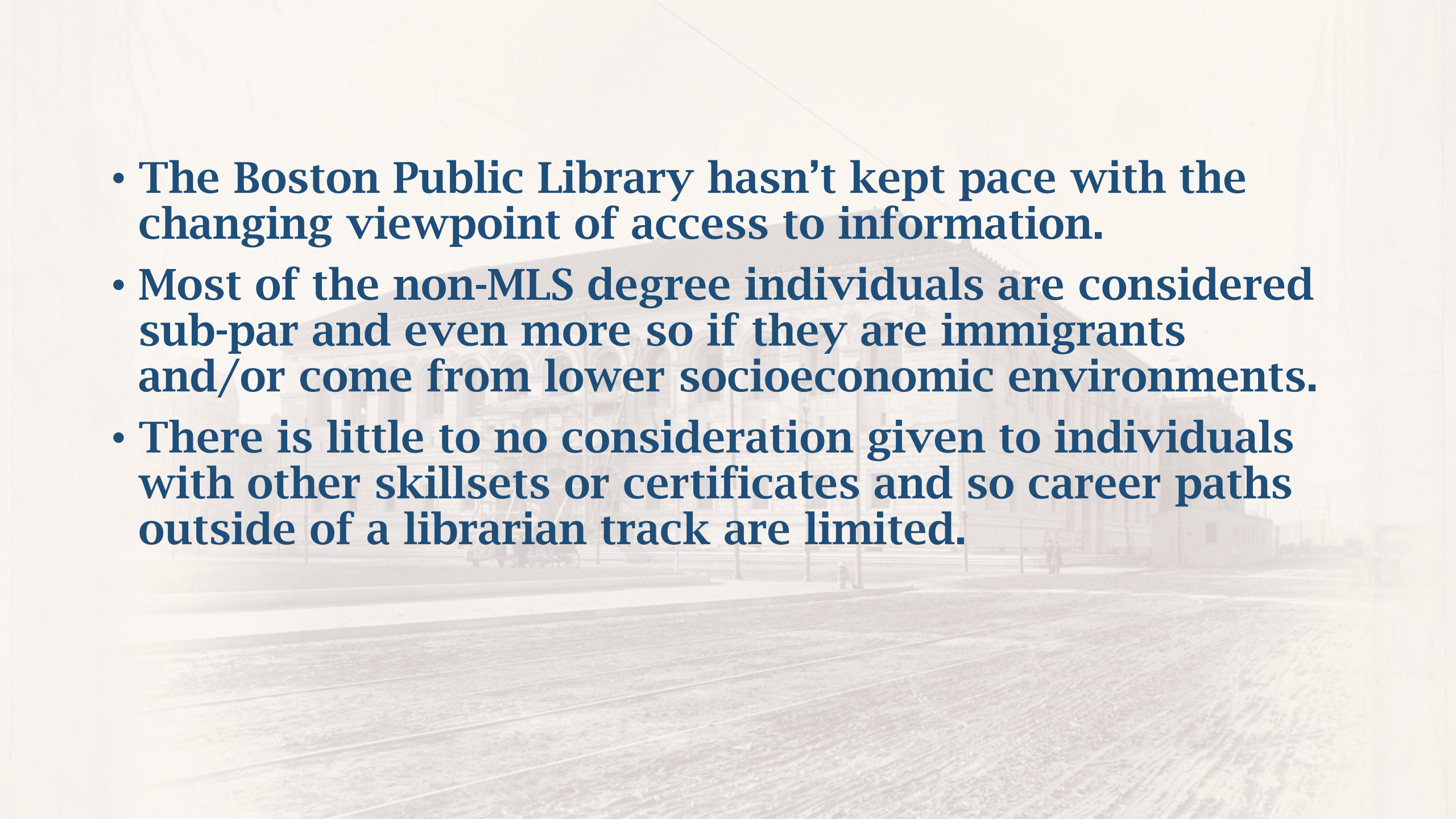
Fast forward to today and the one thing that hasn't changed is the idea that the people behind the desk are all librarians.

To the public, this doesn't matter as long as they receive the assistance they require. It has no impact if someone has a degree, but rather can they effectively communicate with the person and provide the required resources.

- Most people outside the library community don't realize that librarianship is a degree program.
- It is only when you enter the field, especially in urban areas, that you may begin to understand in order to be a librarian, you need an MLS degree.
- There are not typical scholarships or grants that offset the cost. Unlike teaching, there are very few loan forgiveness programs and the salaries for many positions are not high unless you specialize in legal or similar socioeconomic positions.
- MLS programs cost between \$20,000 to upwards of \$60,000, a cost many individuals in lower socioeconomic groups cannot afford.

- **Library software companies are transitioning away from forcing people to use traditional Boolean searching and instead are creating relevancy and authority algorithms to refine searches.**
- **People can search stream of consciousness and get results similar to Google and Amazon instead of knowing how to use AND, OR, NOT, an asterisk, question mark, or other characters and combinations.**
- **People went to library school to learn how to conduct research and data analysis, things that are now part of routine information technology coursework, no degree required.**

- It was a result of spending this semester thinking about privilege, culture and equity and relating it to my worksite, that led me to my deliberation topic.
- As the AFSCME Union president, I am constantly working on changing the culture at work. Over the years, we have updated job descriptions from saying, “work with professionals” to “work with librarians” to “work with other staff” as a way to cast out the traditional definition in a library setting of who is a professional.
- And while I’ve been successful somewhat on paper, real life is a different story. We have been unable to change the mindset of MLS employees and some managers with respect to that definition.

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- **The Boston Public Library hasn't kept pace with the changing viewpoint of access to information.**
 - **Most of the non-MLS degree individuals are considered sub-par and even more so if they are immigrants and/or come from lower socioeconomic environments.**
 - **There is little to no consideration given to individuals with other skillsets or certificates and so career paths outside of a librarian track are limited.**

Context and Direction



Purpose

- There is an assumption at the Boston Public Library that a non-MLS individual is uneducated and therefore isn't considered a professional.
- Today's library positions no longer require an advanced degree to perform the majority of work and yet individuals with certifications or on the job training are not afforded the same level of respect.
- As the world of information sharing changes, there are very few high level positions and few opportunities for education and professional development at the BPL for those without an MLS.
- This plan will address how to promote training, establish a career path for individuals without MLS degrees and work to redefine the term professional at the BPL. It will extend to the staff the same expectation of equal treatment as the public demands.

Values Statement

- The BPL prides itself on being the first of many things: the first to have a children's room, the first to lend books for free, and the first to have a branch.
- It houses historic collections ranging from the Sacco and Vanzetti death masks to original manuscripts to etchings by Goya.
- Inscribed on the outside of the McKim building is the phrase, "THE COMMONWEALTH REQUIRES THE EDUCATION OF THE PEOPLE AS THE SAFEGUARD OF ORDER AND LIBERTY" and "FREE TO ALL". (Trustees, 1888). This shows in the promotion of free access of materials.
- It has been called the 'people's university' and has adapted to keep up with changing social values making it relevant in today's communities.
- There is an expectation everyone is treated equally, fairly, and respectfully regardless of socioeconomic, cultural, racial, mental, physical, or any other self-defined status

Alignment with institutional mission

- The mission statement of the BPL is, “Boston Public Library provides educational and cultural enrichment free to all for the residents of Boston, Massachusetts and beyond, through its collections, services, programs, and spaces” (About Us: Boston Public Library, 2019).
- The plan aligns with this mission by extending those educational and cultural resources to the staff. By providing access to professional development and gaining a better understanding of the institution, staff will be empowered to provide enhanced service to the patrons they serve.

Vision Statement

- To redefine the term professional at the BPL, create a harmonious and respectful working environment, and develop career paths for culturally diverse, non-degree individuals for advancement to positions with higher degrees of responsibility and/or pay equity.

Objectives

- **Redefine the term professional within the institution**
 - Definition based on work performance and knowledge
- **Create a respectful working environment**
 - One where co-workers accept others cultural, socio-economic, racial, gender, etc. differences and work towards a common goal
- **Eliminate socioeconomic and cultural privilege within the institution**
 - Provide opportunity regardless of background and promote based on accomplishment and knowledge
- **Increase access to education and professional development**
 - Provide increased financial support for low income staff for continuing education
 - Recognize that all educational opportunities are professional development, even ones not related to current position
- **Increase opportunities for advancement within the institution**
 - Positions based on varied qualifications
 - Selections based on qualifications and experience

Goals

- **Implement mandatory training program**
 - All staff to attend required number of work related professional development training sessions, self-selected and required
- **Develop a mentoring program**
 - Allow staff to learn from each other; learn about our research collections; grow as individuals and as an institution
- **Create an income and merit based scholarship program for staff**
 - Fund a program for non-degree/certification staff who are low-wage and want to further their education
- **Establish career tracks**
 - Clearly identify paths for individuals to advance within the institution
- **Create mid-to-high level positions that do not require MLS**
 - Recognize certain career paths may require/desire different educational requirements than an MLS
- **Update job descriptions to reflect cultural shift**
 - Review existing job descriptions and remove demeaning/derogatory phrases; develop new terminology in line with the new definition of professional
- **Create a Staff Development and Training Department**
 - Make staff development and training a priority and establish a department with dedicated staff to support training goals including mentoring program, scholarship program, etc. Expand the FTE count beyond the current 1

Analysis



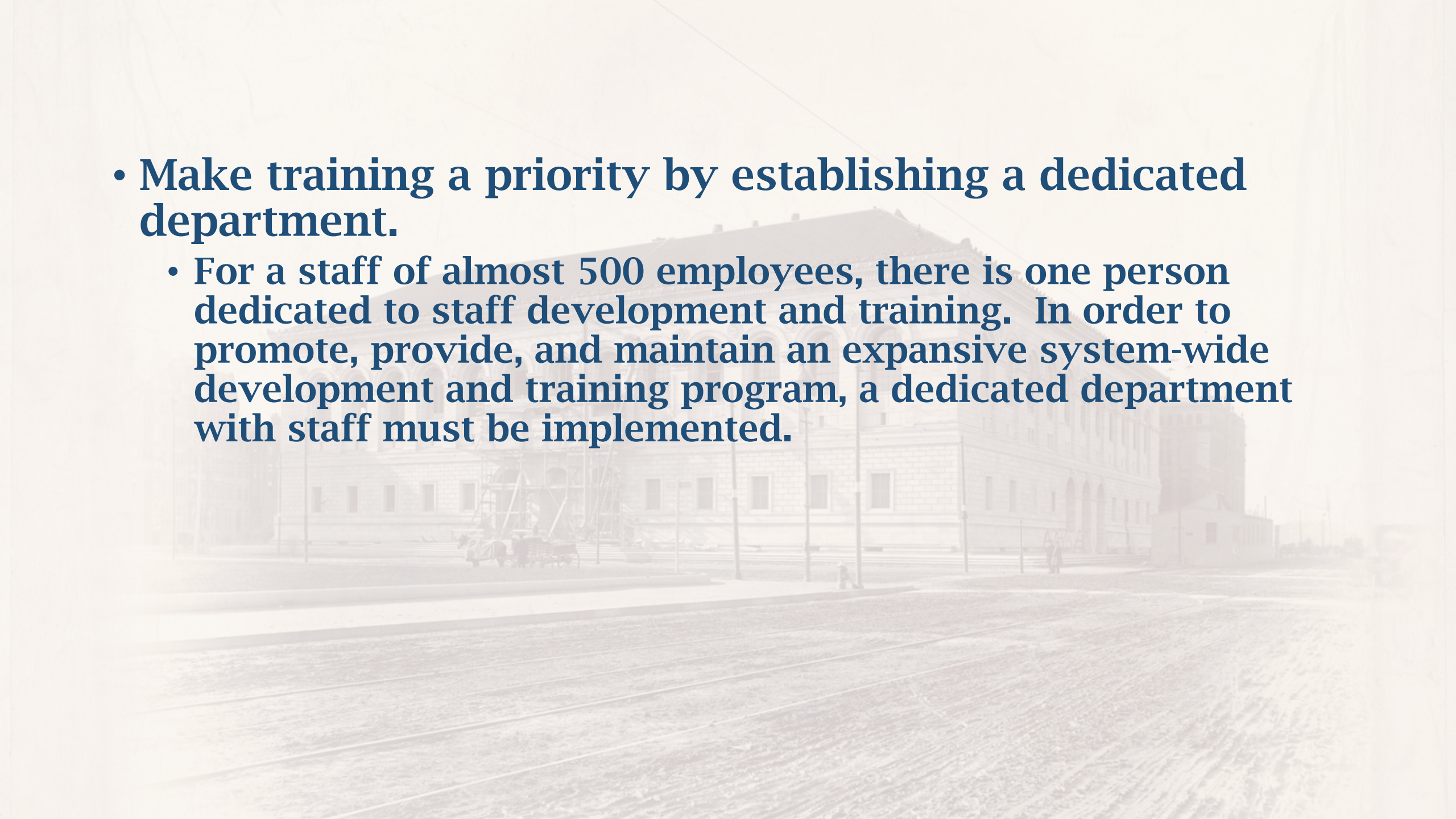
SWOT

- **Strengths:** A large, cultural diverse group of knowledgeable and dedicated staff. An institution with access to multiple funding sources and the respect of the community.
- **Weaknesses:** Lack of diversity in management. Respect based on education instead of knowledge and experience. Discrimination.
- **Opportunities:** Surrounded by institutions of higher learning and like-minded community organizations. Specialized unique collections of materials.
- **Threats:** Undervalued staff, entrenched values, and external policies (City Hall). Potential loss of funding.

Gap Analysis

- We need to increase the number of persons of color in top positions.
 - While the staff of the BPL is culturally diverse, there is a lack of diversity reflected in positions of authority. Out of the top 31 positions, only 6 are persons of color with only 1 breaking the top 10.
- Increase the number of high level positions within the institution without requiring an MLS degree.
 - With respect to qualifications, an MLS is prevalent in mid-to-high level job descriptions as required or desirable even for non-typical library jobs such as the Director of Marketing and Communications position.
- Value the diversity, knowledge and experience of our staff.
 - Those individuals with advanced degrees are treated with more respect and have established career paths than those without formal education.
- Commit to recognizing all types of education as contributing value.
 - Individuals with certifications have high levels of responsibility and may be charged with keeping us functioning daily and yet do not have the same level of respect as those with an advanced degree.

- **Provide financial access to higher education.**
 - Individuals in lower positions have lower incomes and are not able to finance higher education on their salaries. Many have residency requirements and must live in Boston, the 3rd most expensive place to live in 2018 (Cohen, 2018).
- **Provide a path to learn more about our collections and allow for movement within the institution.**
 - A career path is lacking for non-degreed individuals to move up into positions of authority. There are few areas for staff to learn more about the research collections, cultural relevance, and organization. The institutional knowledge is eroding and will soon be lost.
- **Create a respectful working environment.**
 - Derogatory and demeaning terms are sprinkled through job descriptions continuing to undervalue non-degree, non-MLS employees.

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- **Make training a priority by establishing a dedicated department.**
 - **For a staff of almost 500 employees, there is one person dedicated to staff development and training. In order to promote, provide, and maintain an expansive system-wide development and training program, a dedicated department with staff must be implemented.**

Implementation and Assessment



Goal: Implement mandatory training program

Steps	Resources	Time	Assessment
Develop mandatory training program and implementation plan and schedule presentation to Senior Management	Training Coordinator	Jul.-Aug. 2019	Completed outline and rollout by August 31, 2019. Scheduled presentation for established timeframe
Present program and implementation plan to Senior Management for comments	Training Coordinator and Senior Management	Sept. 2-6, 2019	Presentation to Sr. Management
Updates, revisions to plan	Training Coordinator	Sept. 9-20, 2019	Edits incorporated within timeframe
Notice to Unions	HR, Senior Management, Union Leadership	Sept. 23-27, 2019	Letter sent and meeting schedule established during this time
Hold impact bargaining sessions	HR, Identified BPL Leadership, Union Leadership	Sept. 30-Nov. 8, 2019	Impact bargaining concluded
System-wide announcement	President of BPL, Communications Department, HR	Nov. 11-15, 2019	Notice sent out during this time
Launch mandatory training program	All staff	Jan. 1, 2020	All staff will follow program rules and guidelines and begin submitting documentation to support attendance requirements

Goal: Develop mentoring program

Steps	Resources	Time	Assessment
Establish mission statement and guidelines for Mentorship Program	Training Coordinator, Chief of Adult Library Services, Director of Library Services, CTO, HR Manager	Jan. 1-Mar. 15, 2020	Framework for program will be completed during this time.
Notice to Unions re: impact	HR Manager, Union Leadership	Jan 1 - Apr. 8, 2020	Impact bargaining concluded
Establish Oversight Committee	Employees from each bargaining unit, management and various levels and departments	Mar 15-Apr. 8, 2020	Oversight Committee established
Communicate program to staff and ask for participants	Communications Dept, Standing Meetings, schedule informational sessions	Apr. 9-24, 2020	All staff will be knowledgeable about the program and registration forms will be filed
Review participants and establish mentoring teams	Oversight Committee, participants	May 1-30, 2020	Mentor teams will be established and program launched
First Mentoring Round	Participants	Jun. 1-Sept 30, 2020	First round completed
Begin second mentoring round enrollment	Oversight Committee, participants, staff	Sept. 1-30, 2020	Second round selections underway
Evaluation of first round	Participants	Oct. 1-15, 2020	Evaluations complete
Second Mentoring Round	Participants	Nov. 1- Feb. 28, 2021	Second round launched
Develop/modify ongoing schedule and review of programs	Oversight Committee	Oct. 16, 2020- Jan 15, 2021	Schedule developed and posted on staff intranet and publicized
Evaluation of second round	Participants	Mar. 1-Mar. 15, 2021	Evaluations complete
Rolling program	all staff	Mar. 15, 2021-	Program continues

Goal: Create an income and merit based scholarship program for staff

Steps	Resources	Time	Assessment
Establish and task a working committee to determine feasibility of program	Director of Strategic Partnerships, Board of Trustees representatives, Chief Financial Officer, community partners	Jan. - Apr. 2020	Report to the President of BPL on feasibility and next steps
If determined to be feasible, identify funding and community partners	Working committee members	May - Sept. 2020	Funding and partnerships established
Establish Scholarship Committee	Key stakeholders, individuals from all levels	Once funding/partners have been secured, no later than Oct. 2020	Eligibility criteria established and committee formed
Establish program eligibility criteria, guidelines, deadlines, enrollment protocols, monetary amounts, etc	Scholarship Committee	Oct. 2020-Dec. 1, 2020	Plan provided to President, Trustees, stakeholders
Notification to staff of new program	Communications Dept, Standing Meetings, schedule informational sessions	Dec. 1-5, 2020	Attendees at sessions
Launch application process for scholarship(s)	Scholarship Committee	Dec. 1-24, 2020 with first award Jan. 2021	Applications received, reviewed and awarded
Yearly review	Scholarship Committee and Working Committee	ongoing	New partners and funding identified, scholarships awarded
Evaluation	Scholarship Committee	Jul. 2021 -	Individuals successfully obtaining additional formal education including certifications
<i>*If determined not feasible at this time, develop long-range plan for implementation</i>	<i>Working committee members</i>	<i>May - Sept. 2020</i>	<i>Long-range plan developed</i>

Goal: Establish career tracks

Steps	Resources	Time	Assessment
Review all job titles, categorize and perform gap analysis for positions	HR staff, AFSCME Leadership, key managers of divisions	Jan. - Apr. 2020	Existing job titles would be classified by category and gaps determined
Develop structure to fill in gaps with AFSCME jobs	HR staff, AFSCME Leadership, key managers of divisions	Apr. - Aug. 2020	Broad areas of scope of responsibility determined and outlined
Determine fiscal impact per position	CFO, Business Office	Aug. - Oct. 2020	Budget developed to support new/redefined positions and presented to HR staff, Union Leadership, key managers of divisions
Establish priority of new/redefined positions	Key Stakeholders	Oct. - Nov. 2020	Timeline for creating/redefining positions by fiscal year
Internal Position Review Committee (PRC) review of positions and budget	BPL PRC	concluded by Jan. 2021	Positions identified, approved and placed in next budget
Job descriptions developed and bargained with the Union	HR, Union Leadership, key stakeholders	Jul. 1-10, 2021	Job descriptions signed off by Management and Union
Jobs posted internally and filled	HR, hiring managers and AFSCME members	Aug 1-Sept. 1, 2021	New positions filled and others identified for next fiscal year
Reassess yearly	Key Stakeholders	ongoing	Report submitted by Jan 5 of each year thereafter

Goal: Create mid-to-high level positions that do not require a MLS

Steps	Resources	Time	Assessment
Develop criteria to determine when an MLS is required as a result of the primary functions of the position.	Leadership Team and HR Manager with input from key stakeholders; MGL150E§1	Jan - Aug. 2020	Criteria established and provided to Leadership
Review of qualification and scope of responsibility of all mid-to-high level positions to determine if they meet pre-established criteria.	Leadership Team and HR Manager, MGL150E§1	Aug. - Dec. 2020	All mid-to-high level positions reviewed and recommendations developed. Reassign or propose new ones in place of existing positions that no longer fit the established criteria
Create new mid-to-high level positions	Leadership Team and HR Manager	Jan. - Jul. 2021	New positions created and funded
Update existing non-union positions if necessary	Leadership Team and HR Manager	Jan. - Jul. 2021	Positions reclassified
Notice the Union of impact bargaining changes to job descriptions if necessary	HR Manager, Union Leadership, key stakeholders	Jan. - Jul. 2021	Notices sent and impact bargaining session held
Reclassify positions no longer requiring an MLS into the appropriate unit, if necessary (may have impact bargaining implications)	HR Manager, Union Leadership, key stakeholders	Jan. - Jul. 2021	Notices sent and impact bargaining session held

Goal: Update job descriptions to reflect cultural shift

Steps	Resources	Time	Assessment
Develop a list of all culturally biased, demeaning, unprofessional, privileged terminology to be removed from job descriptions	HR staff, AFSCME members, key stakeholders	Jul.-Oct. 2019	A glossary of terms to avoid would be created and provided to HR and any individual who creates job descriptions
Review all existing job descriptions for outdated terminology	HR staff	Oct.-Dec. 2019	Positions identified for updating to meet new cultural standards
Update identified job descriptions	HR staff, Union Leadership	Jan.-Dec. 2020	Positions would be updated
Review all proposed job descriptions for outdated terminology and adjust	HR staff, individuals developing job descriptions	ongoing	Positions would not have outdated terminology

Goal: Create a Staff Development and Training Department and increase the headcount

Steps	Resources	Time	Assessment
Conduct a study of similar institutions relative to their training department	Training Coordinator	Jan. - Aug. 2020	Prepare a report detailing what similarly sized institution have for FTE/PTE for training and budget
Develop list of areas of responsibilities that new position(s) would support and make recommendations re: increased headcount	Training Coordinator	Sept. - Dec. 2020	Prepare a report to submit to BPL PRC and CFO
Create new job description(s)	HR, Training Coordinator, key stakeholders	Jan. - Jul. 2021	New position(s) put in budget and cleared for posting and filling
Notice to AFSCME	HR, Senior Management, Union Leadership	Jul. 1-5, 2021	Letter sent and meeting schedule established during this time
Hold impact bargaining sessions	HR, Identified BPL Leadership, Union Leadership	Jul. 10 - Aug. 15, 2021	Impact bargaining concluded
Jobs posted internally and filled	HR, hiring managers and AFSCME members	Aug 15-Sept. 1, 2021	New position(s) filled

Conclusion

The plan outlined would put BPL on the path towards a more inclusive workplace and workforce. By recognizing the differences among individuals and embracing them, the institution would become more culturally relevant and demonstrate these values to the outside world. It's not just the BPL who needs to redefine professional, and by doing so, we would be continuing our mission of educating the public.

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