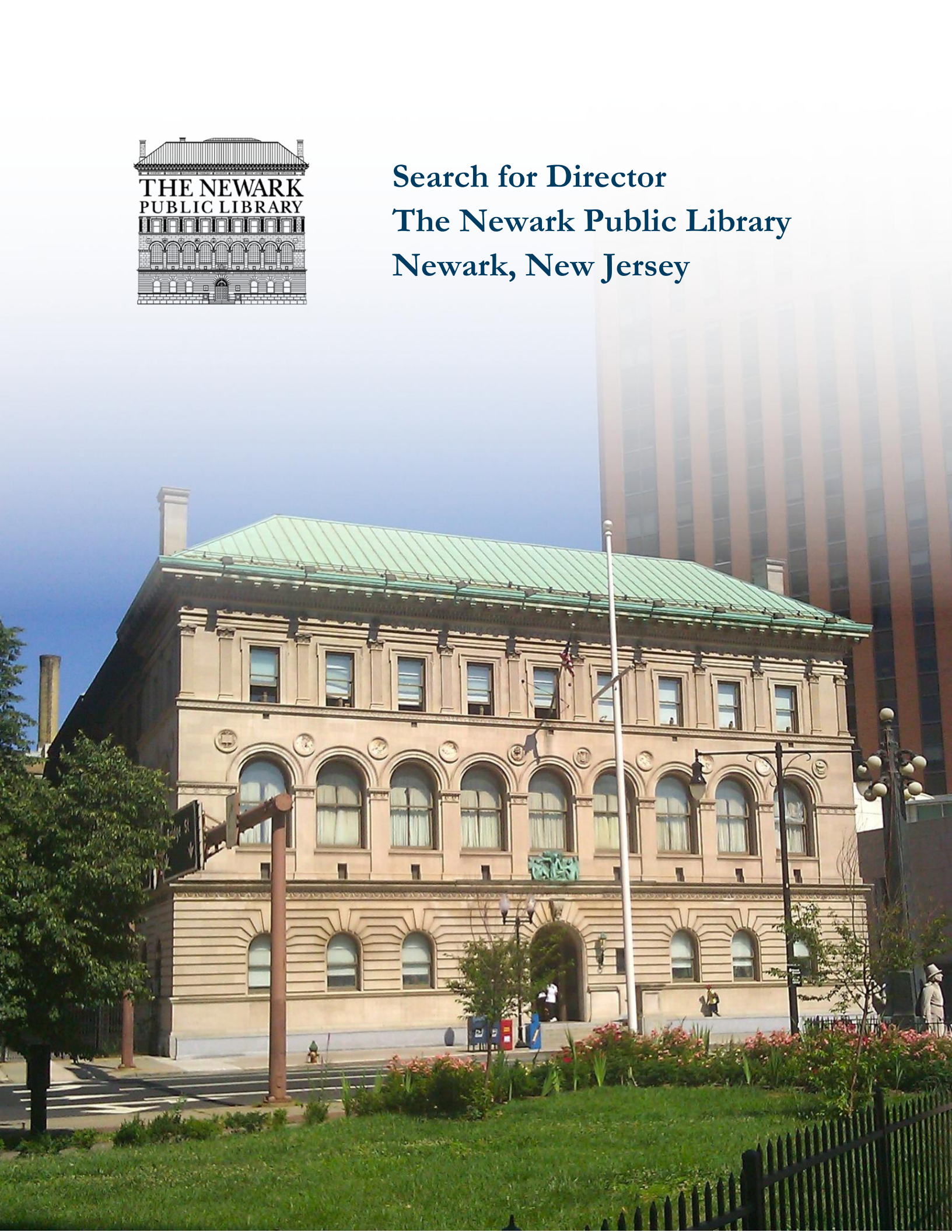
THE NEWARK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Search for Director
The Newark Public Library
Newark, New Jersey



THE SEARCH

The Newark Public Library (NPL), a cornerstone of knowledge, culture, and community life in Newark, seeks a collaborative, strategic, and forward-thinking leader to serve as its next Director. Tracing its origins to the Newark Library Association in 1847 and the establishment of a Free Public Library soon after, NPL is grounded in a rich history while serving a dynamic and evolving urban community. Today, the Library stands as one of Newark's most vital civic and cultural institutions—advancing literacy, expanding access to knowledge, and stewarding extraordinary collections that shape how Newark and its communities are understood.

NPL seeks an accomplished and community-centered leader with a demonstrated ability to guide an organization to stability in a vibrant and complex city. The next Director will have the opportunity to articulate a clear strategic vision that builds on the Library's legacy while positioning it for the future, strengthening its role as an inclusive, innovative, and responsive public institution. Working in close partnership with staff, city leadership, board members, and community stakeholders, the Director will lead a dedicated team whose deep experience, creativity, and openness to innovation drive impactful programs, services, and partnerships across Newark's neighborhoods.

The ideal candidate will bring a keen understanding of public library trends and best practices, along with a commitment to equity, inclusion, and community voice. This leader will combine strategic insight with operational acumen, ensuring fiscal responsibility while cultivating new resources and expanding support for the Library's programming and initiatives. With strong political and interpersonal savvy, the Director will foster collaborative relationships across stakeholders, positioning the Newark Public Library as a hub of civic life and a model of excellence, innovation, and community-centered leadership.

The Newark Public Library has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in this important search. All applications, inquiries, and nominations will remain confidential and should be directed to the search firm as indicated at the end of this document.

ABOUT THE CITY OF NEWARK

Newark, located in Essex County, is the largest city in New Jersey and a principal city of the New York metropolitan area. With a population of approximately 323,800, Newark is a dynamic urban center that continues to grow and evolve while serving as a major hub for transportation, commerce, and culture in the region.

Founded in 1666, Newark is one of the oldest cities in the United States and has played a central role in the nation's industrial and cultural development. Its strategic location along the Passaic River and proximity to Newark Bay helped establish it as a key port city; today, the Port Newark–Elizabeth remains one of the busiest shipping hubs on the East Coast, and Newark Liberty International Airport continues its legacy as a major gateway to the region. Newark is known for its rich cultural heritage, historic neighborhoods, and vibrant arts scene. Visitors and residents alike are drawn to landmarks such as Branch

Brook Park—home to the largest collection of cherry blossom trees in the United States—as well as the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC), the Newark Museum of Art, and a thriving network of local galleries, music venues, and cultural institutions. Downtown Newark has experienced significant revitalization in recent years, with new developments, restaurants, and public spaces contributing to a renewed sense of energy and investment in the city.

Newark is also one of the most diverse cities in the region. According to U.S. Census data, approximately 45.7% of residents identify as Black or African American and 37.6% as Hispanic or Latino, with over one-third of residents born outside the United States. This diversity is reflected in the city's neighborhoods, languages, cuisines, and cultural traditions, making Newark a place of rich community life and global connections. More than half of households speak a language other than English at home, further underscoring the city's multicultural character.

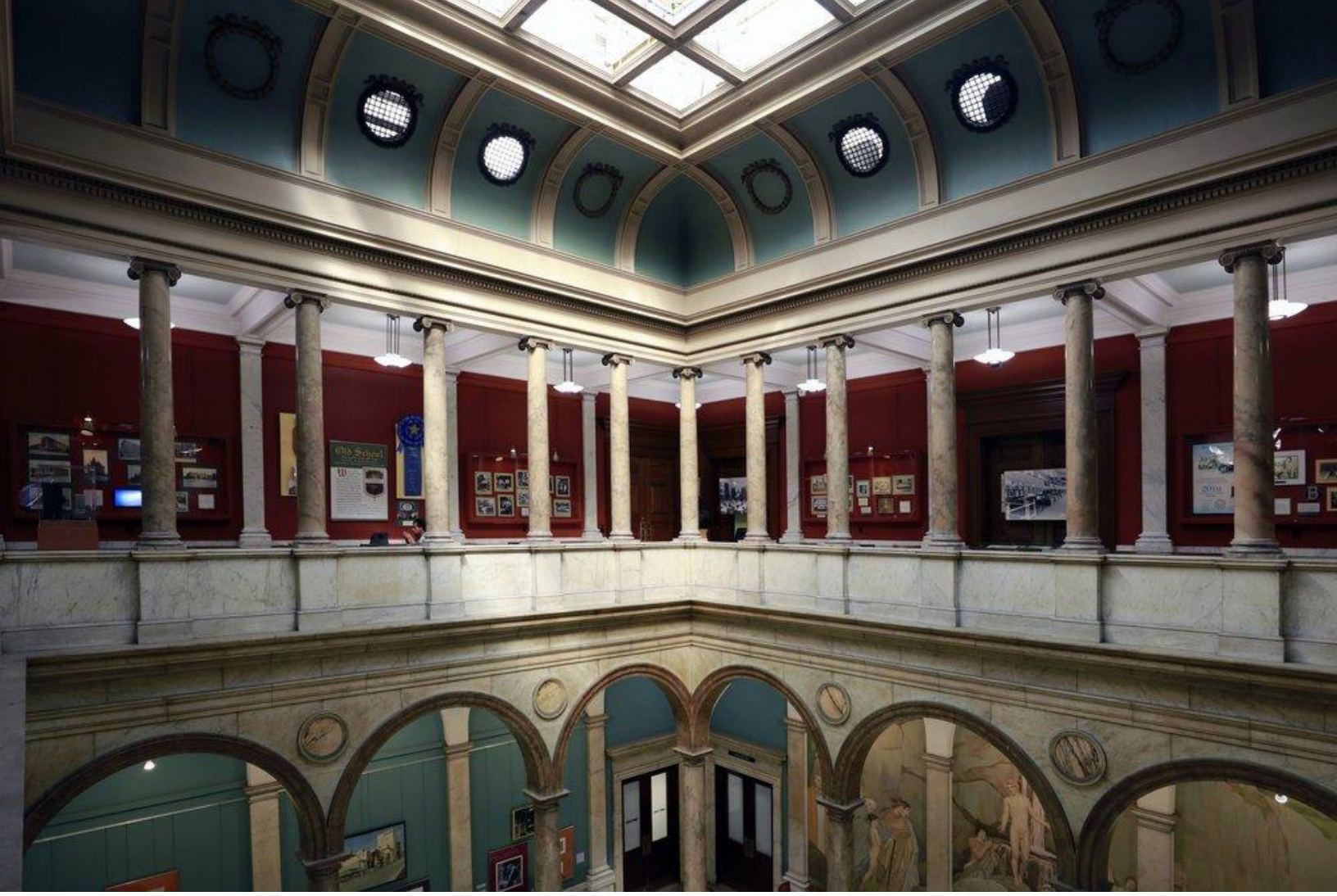
Today, Newark stands as a city of both deep history and forward momentum, where historic assets and cultural legacy intersect with growth, innovation, and opportunity.

ABOUT THE NEWARK PUBLIC LIBRARY

The Newark Public Library stands as a cornerstone of knowledge, culture, and community life in Newark, tracing its origins to the Newark Library Association, established in 1847, and the city's founding of a Free Public Library forty years later. Grounded in this rich legacy, the Library stewards collections of extraordinary depth and significance, holdings that not only document the past but actively shape how Newark and its communities are understood today. These collections reflect decades of care, scholarship, and stewardship, and remain central to the Library's continued commitment to excellence, enrichment, and public service.

Among its most distinguished resources is the **Charles F. Cummings New Jersey Information Center**, a nationally recognized research collection dedicated to the history of Newark, Essex County, and the state of New Jersey. This expansive archive includes books, newspapers, maps, government records, and archival materials spanning centuries, serving scholars, genealogists, and the public alike. It stands as an example of the Library's long-standing commitment to preserving local history, ensuring that the stories, documents, and civic memory of the region are not only protected but also actively made accessible and relevant.

The James Brown African American Room (JBAAR) is a welcoming, resource-rich space dedicated to the exploration of African American life, history, and culture. Featuring a thoughtfully curated collection of fiction, non-fiction, and reference materials, the JBAAR offers visitors a quiet, newly renovated environment for reading, study, and reflection. The space also provides personalized research support, public computers, free Wi-Fi, and engaging programming, including lectures, exhibits, and cultural events. Through signature initiatives such as the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Commemorative Lecture and Black History Celebration, the JBAAR fosters meaningful dialogue and highlights the contributions, creativity, and resilience of the African Diaspora.



The Library also serves as the home of the **Philip Roth Personal Library (PRPL)**, a remarkable literary collection gifted by one of Newark's most celebrated authors. Comprising more than 7,000 volumes accumulated over a lifetime, the collection offers a rare window into Roth's intellectual world, with many books containing his handwritten notes and reflections. More than a static archive, the PRPL is a living literary destination, hosting exhibitions, programs, and educational opportunities that inspire creative expression and connect audiences to Newark's profound literary legacy.

Equally essential is the **New Jersey Hispanic Research and Information Center (NJHRIC)**, a pioneering resource dedicated to preserving and sharing the histories of New Jersey's Latino communities. Established through deep collaboration with community partners, the Center includes the Sala Hispano-Americana, the largest collection of Spanish-language library materials in the state, as well as extensive research collections and the Puerto Rican Community Archives. Through its collections, programming, and outreach, the NJHRIC ensures that the voices, histories, and cultural contributions of Hispanic communities are documented, celebrated, and accessible to all.

Also vital to the Library are the dedicated staff, whose experience serving Newark residents is reflected across both the Main Library and its six neighborhood branches—Branch Brook, North End, Springfield, Vailsburg, Van Buren, and Weequahic. Together, these locations serve as essential community anchors,

extending the Library's presence into neighborhoods across the city and ensuring equitable access to programs, resources, and services.

While the current network plays a critical role in reaching residents where they live, work, and gather, the system has also experienced the closure of several branches over time due to past budget cuts and facility challenges. The Clinton branch recently closed, but its staff and community members are actively working towards reopening in the near future. Across all locations, staff share a deep commitment to community engagement, prioritizing listening and collaboration to ensure that residents' voices shape the Library's offerings. Through creativity, innovation, and a willingness to experiment, teams at both the central Library and branch locations continue to develop responsive programs and services that meet the evolving needs of Newark's diverse communities.

As the Library looks ahead, there is a clear opportunity to further elevate this work: to shine a brighter light on its remarkable collections, to celebrate and support its staff, and to amplify its impact across Newark and beyond. The Newark Public Library stands as a place where history is honored, collections inspire discovery, and community thrives.

Community Impact and Programming

The Newark Public Library is committed to fostering an environment where people come together to learn, connect, and engage in meaningful dialogue, strengthening the bonds that sustain Newark's diverse communities. The Library serves as a vital civic resource for the public while supporting key constituencies, including educators, community partners, and students.

Through a wide range of programs and services, the Library meets the needs of Newark residents across all ages, from early childhood through adulthood, offering dynamic opportunities for learning, creativity, and personal growth. Its programming portfolio reflects a deep commitment to access, equity, and community engagement, with offerings spanning youth development, lifelong learning, cultural enrichment, workforce support, and civic participation. Some of the programming the library offers across its branches include:

Education, Literacy, and Workforce Development: The Newark Public Library offers a comprehensive suite of education, literacy, and workforce development programs across all its branches, designed to support residents at every stage of learning and career advancement. These include multi-week ESL classes for adult learners, GED preparation programs in partnership with the Newark Board of Education, and digital literacy training that builds skills in areas such as computer use and smartphone navigation. The Library also provides job search and career support, including resume assistance and access to tools for career exploration, as well as workshops to guide students and families through the FAFSA process and college scholarship opportunities.

Social Services and Community Resource Support: The Newark Public Library provides a robust network of social services and community support designed to meet the needs of Newark residents. Through on-site social work services and multilingual drop-in hours, individuals can access guidance and support in a

welcoming environment. The Library also assists patrons with navigating SNAP and other public benefits and hosts community resource programming that connects residents with local organizations and service providers. In addition, it offers library skills workshops and specialized services for individuals with disabilities, ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities across the community.

Arts and Culture Programming and Youth Programming: The Newark Public Library offers a wide range of youth, teens, and family programming alongside robust arts and cultural initiatives that foster creativity, learning, and community connection. Early childhood story times and literacy programs support infants and young children, complemented by family-oriented offerings that include arts, crafts, and play-based learning activities. For teens, the Library provides dynamic spaces for engagement through gaming clubs, e-sports-style programming, LGBTQ+ events such as Teen Pride, and other creative and social opportunities, as well as intergenerational programs including "Mommy & Me" that strengthen family bonds.

To learn more about The Newark Public Library's programs, you can visit their website.

Organizational Structure

The Newark Public Library operates as a public library system serving the City of Newark, with a central library and a network of neighborhood branches. Governed by a Board of Trustees appointed by the Mayor, the Library works in close partnership with the City of Newark, which provides essential public funding and operational support.

The Library is led by the Director, who oversees a senior leadership nine-member team responsible for public services, collections, programs, operations, finance, and development. Close to 100 staff members are deployed across the main Library and branch locations to deliver a broad range of services that advance literacy, education, workforce development, and community engagement. This structure balances centralized leadership with neighborhood-based service delivery, enabling the Library to remain responsive to the needs of Newark's diverse communities.

Finances

Newark Public Library operates with an annual budget of approximately $13 million, supported primarily through public funding alongside philanthropic and grant-based revenue streams. The City of Newark

serves as the Library's principal funding source, recently amending its municipal budget to allocate approximately $12 million to the Library, including a $1.06 million increase championed by union leaders and community advocates in response to concerns around branch closures and staffing vacancies.

Additional support comes from the State of New Jersey through recurring network aid, as well as targeted capital investments. The Library has been awarded more than $1.45 million through the New Jersey Library Construction Bond Act, supporting capital improvements, space renovations, and technology upgrades across the system.

The Friends of the Newark Public Library

Philanthropy plays an important role in extending the Library's reach and impact. Notably, Philip Roth established two endowments for the Library: a $2 million fund dedicated to the acquisition of books and materials, and a $9 million bequest to support library operations. These funds are held and stewarded by the Community Foundation of New Jersey, and the annual income they generate, approximately 4–5%, is available to the Director for strategic use. This additional, flexible revenue stream further strengthens the Library's ability to invest in priorities, respond to community needs, and advance its mission.

The Friends of the Newark Public Library, a separate 501(c)(3) governed by its own Board, raises private support from individuals, foundations, corporations, and government agencies. As a key advocacy and community partner, the Friends mobilizes public support for the Library, champions equitable municipal funding, and provides flexible resources for collections, programs, and special projects.

ROLE OF THE DIRECTOR

The next Director of the Newark Public Library will join the institution at a pivotal moment. With renewed investment from the City of Newark, growing community advocacy, and an ongoing commitment to serving the city's diverse populations, the Library is well-positioned to build on its long-standing role as a vital civic and cultural anchor.

Supported by municipal funding and expanded state and philanthropic resources, the Library is poised to stabilize and to enhance services across its branches while reimagining its spaces, programs, and community impact. The next Director will have the opportunity to protect and stabilize a historic Library and guide it to its next chapter by strengthening operations, advancing strategic priorities, and ensuring the Library continues to meet the evolving needs of Newark residents.

The Director will bring a deep commitment to Newark and to serving its diverse communities, along with a strong understanding of public library systems and their role in advancing access, education, and community well-being. As a visible and trusted leader, the Director will be an active listener and transparent communicator who fosters collaboration across the organization and cultivates a strong, inclusive internal culture.

Serving as both a strategic and community-facing leader, the Director will act as a bridge across key stakeholders, including Library staff, the Board of Trustees, the City of Newark, state partners, philanthropic entities, and community-based organizations. The successful candidate will be a compelling advocate for public libraries, championing their essential role in advancing literacy, education, workforce development, and civic life, while positioning the Newark Public Library for sustained growth, innovation, and impact.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE DIRECTOR

The Director of the Newark Public Library role presents a compelling opportunity to lead a vital civic institution and expand its impact across the city. Building on renewed public investment, strong community advocacy, and growing philanthropic support, the next Director will be well-positioned to strengthen the Library's role in serving Newark's residents and neighborhoods. To do so, the Director will be called to address a set of interconnected opportunities and challenges:

Craft and advance a strategic vision to elevate the library's public presence and reposition Newark Public Library as a leading urban library

As the largest city in New Jersey, Newark, is widely recognized for its innovation, cultural vitality, rich history, and deep civic pride. Newark Public Library has both the foundation and the potential to stand at the forefront of public libraries in the state and across the region, supported by its strong collections, dedicated staff, and vital role within the community. The next Director will have a unique opportunity and responsibility to craft and lead a bold strategic vision that elevates the Library's overall presence, enhances the breadth and quality of its offerings, and unifies its branches under a cohesive and forward-looking system.

The Director will be charged with reshaping the Library's public image, strengthening its visibility, and positioning it as an essential anchor institution for knowledge, culture, learning, and community life. Central to this work will be the development and execution of a clear, compelling strategy that aligns programs, services, and resources across all locations, ensuring consistency, innovation, and impact systemwide.

Achieving this vision will require an energetic, outward-facing leader who serves as a visible and credible ambassador for the Library, deeply present in the community, actively engaged with civic and corporate leaders, connected to Newark's broader ecosystem, and highly effective in cultivating key external relationships. The ideal candidate will articulate an ambitious and aspirational vision, elevate expectations

internally and externally, and advocate persuasively for Newark Public Library as a premier urban library system worthy of significant public, philanthropic, and corporate investment.

Strengthen internal operations, systems, and organizational infrastructure

The next Director will inherit an institution with significant strengths, alongside a distinct need for stronger operational systems and greater organizational consistency. The Director will develop a plan to improve budgeting processes, including preparing a transparent annual budget for all departments and branches; developing a clear, consistent performance management process; bolstering communication channels and asset tracking; and establishing a plan for systemwide coordination across the Main Library and the branches. As the Library revisits and revises key policies, the next leader will bring order, rigor, and transparency to internal operations while ensuring practices reflect the needs of a modern public library.

The Director will establish stronger management systems and clearer organizational processes, including more consistent communication across departments and branches, improved staff meeting structures, formal performance evaluation practices, and greater clarity around decision-making. They will also work to strengthen branch inclusion in planning and budgeting, address operational inefficiencies, and help staff better understand how systemwide priorities connect to day-to-day work. The ideal candidate will be both strategic and practical, able to assess what is working, identify gaps, and implement structures that support accountability, transparency, service excellence, and organizational health.

Lead a resilient and mission-driven library system with clarity, accountability, and care

The Newark Public Library seeks a Director who can lead a passionate and deeply committed staff through a period of stabilization, renewal, and renewed ambition. Across the system, staff are recognized for their resilience, creativity, public service ethic, and deep commitment to Newark's residents. Many bring years of institutional knowledge, strong relationships with patrons, and pride in the Library's mission, collections, and history.

More recently, the organization has experienced leadership turnover that has resulted in low morale, uneven communication, and a lack of trust in some areas of the system. The next Director must be a steady, visible, and emotionally intelligent leader who can rebuild confidence, set a clear tone, and establish high standards for performance, professionalism, and collaboration.

The successful candidate will listen carefully, communicate consistently, and engage staff at all levels. They will value the expertise of librarians and frontline employees, ensure that staff voices inform decision-making, and create meaningful structures for input, communication, and shared problem-solving. The Director will be comfortable making decisions, holding people accountable, and setting expectations with consistency and fairness.

The next Director will understand that Newark Public Library is more than a workplace; it is a vital civic institution with a staff that cares deeply about its future and seeks leadership that is present, respectful, and committed for the long term.

Cultivate transformational partnerships, expand visibility, and advance fundraising

The Director will play a central role in building and deepening strategic relationships that enhance Newark Public Library's visibility, influence, and impact. This includes strengthening communication and partnerships with the Board of Trustees, city and state leaders, schools, community-based organizations, higher education institutions, corporate partners, and neighborhood stakeholders throughout Newark. While the Library benefits from a strong network of existing connections, there is a significant opportunity to expand its civic presence and position it more prominently within the city's cultural and educational landscape.

The Director will recognize the urgent need for partnership-building and external engagement that are critical to advancing both mission and resources. They will actively cultivate champions, broaden relationships across New Jersey and beyond, and pursue new collaborations with ambition and intentionality to ensure the Library not only participates in conversations about Newark's future but helps shape and lead them. At the same time, the Director will serve as a compelling fundraiser and advocate, advancing a more ambitious and strategic approach to philanthropy.

Working closely with the Board and key stakeholders, they will strengthen a culture of fundraising, expand corporate and philanthropic partnerships, and identify new opportunities to invest in collections, programming, facilities, technology, and branch services. Central to this work will be the ability to articulate the Library's value, elevating its distinctive assets, including its special collections and historical legacy, and making a powerful case clearly and persuasively for why a bold, well-resourced Library is essential to Newark's future.

Assess and develop a plan to modernize the library's physical infrastructure

The next Director will inherit a system with a deeply valued civic presence, alongside facilities that in many cases reflect years of deferred maintenance and aging infrastructure. The deteriorated condition of elements of the physical footprint across the Main Library and branches presents both an immediate operational challenge and a significant long-term opportunity. The Director will lead a comprehensive assessment of building conditions and develop a strategic, phased plan to address critical repairs, improve accessibility, and modernize spaces to support contemporary library services.

The Director will play a central role in building the case for public and philanthropic investment, overseeing planning and execution, and ensuring projects are delivered effectively and transparently. This leader will bring experience navigating complex capital initiatives, aligning stakeholders, and stewarding resources, combining strategic vision with practical expertise to transform the Library's physical footprint in ways that strengthen service delivery, expand community impact, and reflect the aspirations of Newark's residents.

Partner with the Board of Trustees to create a strategic plan, improve operational strategies, and examine governance

The next director of the Newark Public Library should have experience and professional savvy working with a Board. The Director will partner closely with the Board of Trustees to create a strategic plan, to assess organizational structure, and to refine operational policies. It will be important to work with the Board on matters of governance, strategy, oversight, advocacy, and fundraising initiatives.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The Newark Public Library seeks a dynamic and visionary leader to guide the institution at a time of transformation and renewed investment in public libraries. The next Director will be deeply committed to serving Newark's diverse communities and energized by the Library's mission and potential as a vital civic resource. While no individual will embody every quality outlined below, the ideal candidate will bring many of the following professional and personal characteristics:

- A Master of Library Science (MLS) or A Master of Library Information Science (MLIS) degree from an ALA-accredited library school;
- A minimum of seven years of progressive responsibility and leadership experience in library management, preferably in a public library setting;
- Experience cultivating and stewarding donor relations to further the mission of non-profit organizations;

- A genuine passion for the mission of NPL, understanding the pivotal role NPL plays in the local and broader community;
- Management style that is transparent and prioritizes active listening, visibility, and emotional intelligence;
- Leadership experience supporting and serving a diverse, passionate, and energized team; working knowledge of leading in a unionized environment preferred;
- Experience with capital planning, management of physical plants, and navigating an organization with multiple physical locations;
- A high level of financial acumen, financial management, and budget oversight experience;
- Strategic thought and vision to assist in developing and implementing a strategic plan;
- Demonstrated respect for diversity, equity, access, and inclusion that prioritizes an understanding of the evolving demographics of the city of Newark;
- Commitment to diverse community programming;
- Leadership that embraces new roles for the library in the community and welcomes broadening the impact of the modern public library; and
- A firm dedication to intellectual freedom and public service.

COMPENSATION AND LOCATION

This is a permanent, full-time position in Newark, New Jersey with a starting salary range of $195,000-$215,000 and will be commensurate with experience.

APPLICATIONS, INQUIRIES, AND NOMINATIONS

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the completion of the search process. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and CVs with cover letters should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website: https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/newark-public-library/director

Karen Avery, Partner
Quizayra Gonzalez, Senior Associate
Isaacson, Miller

The Newark Public Library encourages, recognizes, and affirms that it will, in all its activities and operations, respect each individual regardless of age, ancestry(genetics and geography), body type and/or physical appearance, color, culture, disability or medical condition (physical, mental, and genetic), ethnicity, gender, gender expression, language, marital status, military status, national origin, pregnancy, race, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or any other characteristic protected by applicable law. The sum of our individualities is what creates our environment, collections, and programs. The Newark Public Library is committed to encouraging each administrator, trustee, staff, volunteer, contractor, patron, visitor, and/or donor to respect and welcome our differences in order to create better, more responsive Library services. The Newark Public Library is the center of the community, and invites everyone who comes through its doors or uses its online services to work, learn, create, relax, and/or take pleasure in our resources.

This document has been prepared based on the information provided by The Newark Public Library. The material presented in this leadership profile should be relied on for informational purposes only. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this information, the original source documents and information provided by The Newark Public Library would supersede any conflicting information in this document.