

PART II

BLUEPRINT FOR THE FUTURE



Glen Oaks, Queens. Marble Fairbanks. Photo: Queens Library



Hamilton Grange, Manhattan. Rice+Lipka Architects. Photo: Michael Moran



Stone Avenue, Brooklyn. SeeChangeNYC and Biber Architects. Photo: © Albert Verceka/Esto

NEW YORK CITY NEEDS A BOLD NEW VISION FOR HARNESSING THE POTENTIAL OF ITS BRANCH LIBRARIES.

With roots in nearly every community across the five boroughs, the libraries are uniquely positioned to help the city address several economic, demographic and social challenges that will impact New York in the decades ahead—from the rapid aging of the city’s population (libraries are a go-to resource for seniors) and the continued growth in the number of foreign-born (libraries are the most trusted institution for immigrants) to the rise of the freelance economy (libraries are the original coworking spaces) and troubling increase in the number of disconnected youth (libraries are a safe haven for many teens and young adults).

But the city has not thought strategically about these assets in decades. Although libraries have stepped in to fill community needs in a variety of ways, the vast majority of the city’s branch libraries are struggling to meet the demands of their communities. As we detail in this report, the average branch library in New York is 61 years old and 59 branches have at least \$5 million in state of good repair needs. In addition, too many branches are not well-configured for how New Yorkers are using libraries today. Designed around their book collections, many don’t have enough space to accommodate the growing demand for literacy and after-school programs, computers and quiet spaces to work.

It’s time for Mayor de Blasio and the City Council to work with the three public library systems and develop a comprehensive vision for bringing these incredible assets into the 21st century. In the following blueprint, we detail more than 20 steps that the city and libraries can take to make the most use of these important public facilities, including how to make them responsive to the needs of today’s residents and how to put them on a more sustainable path for the future. The recommendations fall into three broad categories: Funding and Management; Collaboration and Community Engagement; and Design and Development.

