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Walsh to announce private fund for the Boston Public Library

By **Milton J. Valencia** Globe Staff, Updated May 29, 2019, 12:01 a.m.



The Fund for the Boston Public Library will generate the resources needed to ensure that the entire library system operates at the highest level possible, meets the needs of every person and community in Boston, and remains free to all," Mayor Martin J. Walsh said in a statement. (LANE

TURNER/GLOBE STAFF)

The city is set to launch this week a privately sponsored campaign, Fund for the Boston Public Library, the first major philanthropic endeavor of its kind for the 171-year-old civic institution.

It's part of an effort, officials said, to build on the library as an integral community resource in an age of fast-paced technological advances and increasing income inequality.

“The realization is that to respectively do everything our residents are asking of us, and we can live up to, really requires more funding and resources to do that,” David Leonard, the library’s president, said in an interview ahead of the planned announcement Wednesday, adding that fund-raising efforts were never before “at the level the library, as one of Boston’s treasured cultural institutions, truly deserved.”

Though the city funds most of the library’s nearly \$50 million budget, Mayor Martin J. Walsh said the new money will go toward investments in the civic and cultural work of the central facility and its 25 branches. The fund will specifically be used for the library’s programming and services, technology, the preservation and restoration of the historic library facilities, and the care and expansion of its rare collections.

With \$2.8 million in donations already in hand, organizers said they hope to raise an additional \$3 million at an inaugural fund-raising gala on June 7.

ADVERTISING





Kwalik Heath, Bobby Brown, and Edgar Paredes, students at nearby Snowden International School, hung out in Teen Central. The new fund will help support programming in the library's Tech Central. (LANE TURNER/GLOBE STAFF)

“The Fund for the Boston Public Library will generate the resources needed to ensure that the entire library system operates at the highest level possible, meets the needs of every person and community in Boston, and remains free to all,” Walsh said in a statement.

Walsh will also name Mary Flynn Myers, formerly the president of the Campaign for Catholic Schools, as the fund's executive director during a press conference at the McKim building, where officials plan to announce the fund's launch.

Jeff Hawkins, deputy managing partner of Bain Capital and a recently appointed library trustee, will chair the fund's new board of directors. They will both serve as part of Leonard's leadership team, library officials said.

The fund is meant to help expand services at a time, officials said, that the role of libraries has evolved.

“People are recognizing, and the philanthropic community is recognizing, that we have a jewel

amongst our midst that deserves supporting,” Hawkins said, pointing to the majestic Johnson building in the library’s central branch.

The fund is being launched at a transitional time for the library. Leonard was appointed — first as an interim in 2015, and then permanently in 2016 — with a directive to lead the library into a new frontier, following a trying time for the institution, including the temporary misplacement of two priceless works of art. Meanwhile, the Walsh administration had invested \$68 million to rehab the central Johnson building, and the mayor has committed another \$127 million over the next five years under the city capital budget.

The library’s projected budget for the next fiscal year is \$49.8 million, including a 6 percent increase in funding from the city. The city covers much of the cost for the library’s operations and infrastructure maintenance and repairs.

Nearly a fifth of the library’s budget also comes from outside sources, including charitable donations from Friends’ groups, or from private trusts set up on behalf of the library. Those outside sources cover much of the library’s programming.

Leonard said a truly ideal spending plan would near \$60 million. He hopes the new fund will begin to raise an additional \$5 million to \$10 million a year.

The Fund for the Boston Public Library would succeed the Boston Library Foundation, which had a narrower task three decades ago — raise money for restorations, specifically the historic McKim building in Copley Square. But those restorations were never completed, due to time and a lack of resources, and the fund had gone inactive in recent years.

The new fund is slated to take a broader, more prominent role in raising the public profile of the library and its services, while seeking support for its work.

Hannah Grove, chief marketing officer at State Street, one of the inaugural donors to the fund, said her organization was devoted to supporting the library’s cause as a civic and cultural institution. Library officials said many of their 12,000 programs, including free Wi-Fi hot spots for members, and an on-staff social worker, would not be possible without outside support.

“I think libraries are in fact more important than ever before, particularly to prepare our residents for the future in a much more equitable way,” Grove said. “It’s creating better inclusion and access for communities, so that was the compelling draw for us.”

The other inaugural donors are Bank of America, Liberty Mutual, the Barr Foundation, and the Boston Foundation, as well as an anonymous donor.

Myers said people are generally excited about libraries, but are rarely asked to support them in such a direct way. She cited a recent Pew Research Center study that found that 53 percent of millennials who were polled said they had used library services in the past year; Another Pew study found that libraries and librarians earned the highest score of public trust among any other public institution.

That trust in libraries, Myers said, is critical in an era when distrust is often spread on the Internet.

“The fact that it’s free for all, that anybody can walk through the door and be welcome here in the library,” she said. “In this world with growing inequality, it’s a place to bring communities together.”

Milton J. Valencia can be reached at milton.valencia@globe.com. Follow him on Twitter [@miltonvalencia](https://twitter.com/miltonvalencia).

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