

Perkins Braille & Talking Book Library



Building a stronger Commonwealth: **one person at a time**



FY 2025 Legislative Funding Increase Background Fact Sheet

Line Item 7000-9406 (Watertown)

The Perkins Braille & Talking Book Library enables people who are unable to read conventional print due to a disability to experience the joy of reading, and lifelong learning, through free accessible library services and resources.

Nearly 25% of the general population of the United States has a disability of some type and experiences some degree of isolation or marginalization. An investment in the Perkins Library in FY25 will continue to allow Massachusetts and the Perkins Library program to lead the nation as the preeminent braille and talking book library, delivering the highest quality of services and diversity to meet the vast range of accessible reading and information needs of borrowers.

Need for services continues to increase

By 2025, the Perkins Library will serve approximately 25,000, both individuals and institutions, from all parts of Massachusetts, a 25% increase over FY24 service levels. This expanded patron base will reflect the diversity of this community of people with disabilities in age, race, ethnicity, gender, geographic location, and disability type for the population eligible for accessible library services.

Perkins initiative for serving an expanded population: IDEAS



Inclusion & Engagement:

Goal: Identify and eliminate barriers that keep people with disabilities from accessing and participating in accessible activities and using specialized reading materials provided in digital audio, braille, large print, audio described DVDs including books, magazines, newspapers, online electronic resources and other materials.

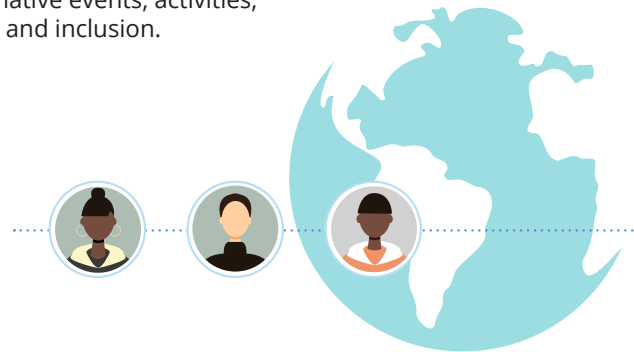
To allow people who are blind, have low vision, as well as people with physical and reading disabilities to participate in reading and accessing information, join book discussion groups, and other programs of interest, the infrastructure needs to be in place programmatically to support their specialized needs.

The Perkins Library will continue to grow its outreach activities to ensure that people with disabilities are aware of, and are able to, register and utilize accessible library services in the Commonwealth. People with disabilities continue to be marginalized from participation in all aspects of our culture and society due to barriers including transportation, geographic location, lack of accessible information about programs and services, and economic circumstances.

We'll increase staffing for programs and outreach to include a Coordinator of Content and Program Outreach responsible for identifying and conducting the Perkins Library's programs and activities. Staffing will also be identified to expand geographic outreach strategies to increase opportunities for participation in specific areas and communities of Massachusetts. Increased participation will take place through informative events, activities, and Zoom-based programs for borrowers that encourage engagement and inclusion.

Diversity:

Goal: Expand targeted outreach activities to include initiatives directed toward people with disabilities who are part of communities of color, urban or other isolated areas, and people who speak languages other than English. These efforts would be conducted in collaboration with existing community service agencies and organizations serving marginalized communities and people with disabilities.



Education:

Goal: Increase services to public and private K-12 schools, community colleges, universities, and independent living and day programs, to initiate services and support for students in the educational system and adult learning. Support family literacy programs for parents, guardians, and caregivers to learn how to engage children with disabilities in learning and reading. Increase support to identify and locate accessible educational materials for students, work with school and media librarians, special education professionals, and other school personnel, to support the educational needs of students with a wide range of disabilities. Collaborate with publishers to obtain accessible electronic book files to give broader access for students using assistive technology to read their books and other materials. Engage in promotion of, and research and development initiatives in utilizing assistive technology to grow and expand the availability of accessible electronic format materials with students with disabilities for learning and continuing education. Production of accessible braille and audio materials will continue to take place through the Perkins Library recording studio and braille production services.

Accessible Services:

Goal: Grow the Perkins Library's capacity to deliver accessible audio and braille materials, services, training, and access initiatives. Staff will continue to work on, and develop the initiatives listed as follows:

- Continue innovation on the "next generation" talking book player
- Identify and grow opportunities for patrons to connect, learn, and engage as a community through Zoom technology to deliver a wide range of content and programming;
- Continue to focus on raising awareness among potential users of the Perkins Library's existing physical, digital, braille and large print materials;
- Grow and continue access to same-day text-to-speech streamed audio of newspapers and magazines through our Newsline Program;
- Grow and sustain the selection of audio described DVD movies with audio description which makes video content accessible by including added narration of key visual elements;
- Provide long-term equipment loans of talking book machines and both handheld and desktop digital audio players and magnifying devices;



- Continue to sponsor in-person and virtual book clubs, museum passes, Bookshare services, Aira Access, speakers, program activities, art appreciation, crafts, and more;
- Continue provision of in-home and remote assistive technology training for borrowers;
- Conduct a needs assessment and engage in user research and testing to identify other needs of our 20,000-plus borrowers – determining how we can better serve them within our mission.



Uppermost with such a transformational request is our goal of ensuring the continuation of responsive and quality library services for borrowers with disabilities in Massachusetts. Through all of these initiatives, the Perkins Library will continue to lead the way in the development of new technologies, promising practices, programs, and reliable services to meet the accessible reading needs of our borrowers. Every day the Perkins Library continues to be a champion of access and inclusion, and represents an evolving 21st century library program.

About Perkins

The Perkins Library has a long tradition of providing accessible library services beginning in 1837, making it one of the first library programs in the country to serve people with vision loss. Today, through our collaboration with the Library of Congress' National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled, and the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners, we offer accessible services circulated by postage-free U.S. mail and online via the Braille and Audio Reading Download (BARD) service.

The ability to read a book, magazine, or newspaper is something most people take for granted. But when vision loss or physical limitations make it impossible to read the printed word any longer, the Perkins Braille & Talking Book Library is there – ready to restore the ability to read in a new way.

Any resident of Massachusetts who has a disability that prevents them from using regular printed materials is eligible for free accessible library services. With an extensive collection of more than 250,000 audio and braille books and magazines, Perkins is committed to meeting the needs of as many people as possible across the state, including thousands of potential patrons who aren't yet aware of the Library's services.

The Perkins Library continues to serve patrons by providing access to a full spectrum of services and materials in a wide range of accessible formats – audio, braille, large print, audio described DVDs, and electronic and downloadable audio and braille materials. There also needs to be increased emphasis on technology solutions to reduce or eliminate barriers to reading for people with disabilities, and to make these technological advances available to the target population.

For more information, Contact:

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