

Strategic Plan 2021 to 2026

"Create Connection. Ignite Imagination."

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"Giving the current financial situations surrounding the income of Robeson County, it's important for the youth to realize they have so many more opportunities than they live through. Generational curses are real, but with the right tools and an education they can break them all." (*Robeson County Community Member, December 29, 2020*)

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Community:

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Executive Summary

Overview

The Robeson County Public Library community needs assessment took place from July 2020 to February 2021. Data collected included 10 years of performance statistics, a statistical comparison with other county libraries, interviews (n=17), focus groups (n=4), and both paper and online surveys disseminated to the community divided into two samples. The first was a random sample involving a 1,000-person mailing with 78 responses or 7.8% response rate and a general sample that anyone in the community could complete with 382 responses. Finally, the staff completed a staff-only survey (n=19). The total sample size was approximately 500 participants involving community leaders, patrons, non-users, and library administration and staff. The target sample size was for a population of 130,265 with 22% of the population being registered library users was 264 participants to have a 95% confidence level that the sample was representative within $\pm 5\%$ margin of error. This study's results can be considered statistically valid and reliable.

National Public Library Trends

A 2019 Gallup study found that libraries were by far the most popular leisure activity in America; people were twice as likely to go to a library (10.5 visits) than go to a movie (5.3 visits) or a sporting event (4.7 visits), almost three times as likely than going to a park (3.7), and four times as likely than visiting a museum (Gallup, 2019). This finding held true across age groups, gender, household income, families with and without young children, and even region of the country. Libraries are also starting to expand their footprint in terms of what they do, who they serve, and what they circulate and lend out. ALA's State of America's Libraries 2020 noted that libraries are starting to evolve into a "library of things" that include lending non-traditional items that users need including suits and ties, bikes, trail cams, kayaks, binoculars, telescopes, dolls, etc. Libraries are also starting to take a greater leadership role in addressing literacy in their communities by focusing more on learning and parent engagement and training. Other areas of emerging focus include health and wellness, social services, and continuing to support workforce development. Nationally, libraries are responding to COVID-19 in three major ways – assisting their community's response to the pandemic, expanding virtual/phone and curbside pickup, delivery, and appointment services, and anticipating demands for access for when libraries begin to re-open fully. This includes renewed access to the collections, access to technology, helping students catch up, supporting faculty and teachers, and application support for employment, education, and government services.

North Carolina Public Library Trends

A review of five years' worth of statistics continue to show consistent trends and also lead to the conclusion that libraries are being used more and not less and also differently than in the past. Print book circulation is decreasing (-23%) while e-book, e-audio, and e-video circulation and overall electronic materials usage continues to increase exponentially (161%) at much higher levels leading to increases in total collection use (10%) and collection use per capita (7%). **It is important to recognize, however, that circulation of print books is still four times as popular as e-book circulation: in 2020 the print book to e-book circulation ratio was 4.8 to 1.** Local income and support continue to grow (14% increase) while state and federal aid has decreased slightly. The overall cost of operating a library has also increased, emphasizing the point that the move to electronic resources (monthly subscriptions) has made operating libraries more, and not less, expensive. Personnel costs per capita has increased by 11%, materials per capita by 14%, and total per capita by 9%.

Libraries are being used differently in the modern era with physical library visits declining per capita by 38% and public computer usage declining by 51%, but the onset of the pandemic has of course greatly impacted these numbers. Reference questions (13% increase), reference questions per capita (10% increase), and registered borrowers (12% increase) have actually been steadily increasing from 2015-2019. Total programs and program attendance has continued to increase statewide but due to COVID decreased in 2020. Looking at 2015-2019, however, total program attendance increased by 12% and attendance per capita increased by 9%. A big data study by Chow and Tien (2019) found statistical support that indeed libraries serve as community anchors in positively impacting quality of life. A public library's per capita print book circulation had predictive, positive, and statistically significant relationships with five quality of life factors including a community's level of educational attainment, per capita and median household income, and number of jobs.

Robeson County Public Library System Trends Over the Past Decade – 2011 to 2020

Over the past decade RCPL has experienced a number of changes – reduction in public service hours and overall physical items in the collection, increases in funding and total operating income, increases in expenditures for salaries and wages, benefits, staff expenditures, and electronic materials. In terms of circulation, all print circulation decreased except for juvenile fiction. Analog audio and video circulation also increased. Total circulation for all types of materials as well as use of the collection increased. In terms of programming both adult and young adult in-library programs decreased significantly while children's programs grew exponentially. In contrast both adult and young adult outside-library programs grew rapidly while

children's programs decreased. Overall, adult and children programming increased while young-adult programming decreased. Attendance for in-library programs dropped for all three age groups while outside-library program attendance grew for adults and decreased for young adults and children. Overall program attendance for adults increased while young adult and children's attendance dropped.

Overall population service area reduced (-2%) over the past decade (134,502 to 131,303). One additional branch was added to bring the total to six branches and the bookmobile was decommissioned in 2017 although one additional mobile unit was added to bring the total number of services units to eight. Overall public services hours reduced by 24% (14,248 to 8,601) from 2013-2019. One additional librarian with an MLS degree was added (3 to 4) but total staff decreased by 28% from 2011 to 2020 (30 to 21.6 FTE).

In terms of funding, municipal funding increased by 22%, county funds by 84%, and total local income by 54%. Total operating income increased by 30%. Expenditures for salaries and wages have also increased by 30%. Benefits increased by 61% and staff expenditures by 38%. Print materials expenditures have remained static but electronic materials increased by 391% and total material expenditures increased by 14%. Overall, total operating expenditures increased by 30%.

For holdings, total audiovisual materials increased by 22%, adult fiction books decreased by 28%, young adult fiction books increased by 10%, and juvenile books holdings decreased by 16%. Adult non-fiction decreased by 42% and juvenile non-fiction decreased by 41%. Overall, total adult books decreased by 35%, total juvenile books decreased by 25%, and total book volumes decreased by 28%. Overall physical audio decreased by 11% and physical video decreased by 49%.

Electronic item holdings, in contrast, have grown exponentially. Total e-books increased by 281%, e-audio by 776%, and e-video by 267%. In terms of circulation, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, only the period of 2011-2019 was used for analysis unless otherwise stated. Adult fiction book circulation decreased by 20% and non-fiction decreased by 30%, young adult fiction decreased by 46% while non-fiction increased by 14%, and juvenile fiction increased by 28% but non-fiction decreased by 42%. Total adult book print circulation decreased by 22%, young adult print circulation decreased by 45%, and juvenile print book circulation actually increased by 15%. Total combined print book circulation decreased by 2% and overall print circulation decreased by 4%. Analog audio circulation increased by 75%, analog video increased by 59%, and total non-print circulation increased (analog materials) by 65%. In total, all physical item circulation increased by 9% from 2011 to 2019.

Electronic usage has grown exponentially. Total e-book circulation has grown by 9,000% since 2013 and increased by 72% during the pandemic from 2019-2020. **It is important to not misinterpret this rapid growth, however, as the print book to e-book circulation ratio was 23.4 print book circulation for every one e-book circulation.** Total e-audio has grown by 7,000% and increased by 72% from 2019-2020. Total e-video statistics were too low to report.

Total use of electronic materials increased by 8,908% and increased by 70% from 2019-2020 during the pandemic. The use of databases also increased by 3,000% overall and 1,000% from 2019 to 2020. Total electronic use overall increased by 26,000% from 2011-2020 and increased by 294% from 2019 to 2020. Total audio circulation also increased by 361% and total circulation of all AV increased by 73% from 2011 to 2019 and dropped by 17% due to the pandemic from 2019-2020.

Total circulation for all print and electronic has increased by 14% from 2011 to 2019 and then dropped by 20% from 2019-2020. Total use of the collection increased 16% from 2011 to 2019 and dropped by 6% from 2019-2020. **It is important to note that print use is still by far the most used resource with a print to electronic usage ratio of 21.8 to 1 in 2018-2019 and 9.7 to 1 in 2019-2020.** The circulation of children's materials increased by 53% from 2011 to 2019 and dropped by 16% from 2019-2020. Physical circulation still represents 76% of all circulation while digital selection is only 8%.

In terms of total percentage of holdings, electronic holdings represent 52.5% of the entire collection. E-books represent 44.64%, print books represent 44.68%, video material 3.2%, audio material 7.4%, serial subscriptions 0.05%, and databases 0.04%. Total registered users have dropped by 42% from 2011 to 2020 and in 2020, 75% of those registered are adults and 25% are juveniles. As of 2019, people under 18 represent 25% of the population and children under 5 represent 6.6%. The total percent of the population that are registered users now represents only 22% of the population - the state average is 49% for all county libraries and 63% for all types of libraries including municipal and regional. Overall library visits dropped by 56% from 2011 to 2019.

In terms of programming, adult in-library programs continuously grew from 2011 to 2017 (8 to 128) and then dropped back down to only 8 programs in 2018-2019, which represented a 1,500% decrease over a three-year period. Programs for young adults has continued to fall from a high of 54 programs in 2011 down to only 2 programs in 2018-2019. Children's programs, in contrast, have grown by 512% from 68 programs in 2011 to 416 programs in 2019. Adult outside-library programs, however, have started to grow exponentially, from 2 programs in 2017 to 20 programs in 2019; young adult outside-library programs have also grown exponentially from 1 program in 2016 to 10 programs in 2019. Children's outside-library programs, in contrast, have dropped by 81% from 129 programs in 2011 to 24 programs in 2019. Overall, adult programming increased by 250% from 2011 to 2019 as did children's programs by 123%. Young adult programming, in contrast, dropped by 80% over the same time period. Total library programs increased by 82%, total in-library programs increased by 228%, and total outside-library programs, in contrast, decreased by 60%.

In-library program attendance dropped by 80% for adults, 93% for young adults, and 16% for children from 2011 to 2019. Outside-library program attendance for adults increased by 561% from 2011 to 2019. For both young adults (-36%) and children attendance (-81%) decreased from 2011 to 2019; for young adults, however, there was a significant spike in attendance for young adults from 2019 to 2020 during the pandemic for a net increase from 2011 to 2020 of

104% (491 attendees in 2011 to 1,000 attendees in 2020). From 2011 to 2019, overall adult attendance increased by 77% while young adult program attendance dropped by 79% and children's attendance dropped by 58%. Total program attendance decreased by 55% (13,811 from 2011 to 6,187 in 2019) and total attendance per program also decreased by 75% (52.3 people per program in 2011 to 12.9 in 2019).

Average attendance per program for adults also dropped by 49% (75 people in 2011 to 38 in 2019) from 2011 to 2019 and children's average attendance dropped by 81% (57 children per program in 2011 to 11 children in 2019). It is important to also note that the average attendance in 2019 for adults was 38 people per program compared to 11 for children. Finally, the overall percent of program attendance represented by adults has continuously increased from 4% in 2011 to 17% in 2019 while children has dropped continuously from 81% of total attendance in 2011 to 76% in 2019. Overall, children's programming represents 91.7% of all programming followed by adult programs (5.8%) and young adult programs (2.5%). In-library programming represents 88.75% of all programming and outside-library programming is 11.25% while 56.9% of all attendance is in-library and 43% are outside-library programs.

Reference transactions have also decreased by 48% (46,333 to 23,936), the use of meetings decreased by 2%, as has meeting attendance from 2011 to 2019. Interlibrary loans provided to other libraries have also decreased by 97% and received from have decreased by 19%. Computers available for staff have increased by 29% (17 to 22) and increased for the general public by 60% (40 to 64); uses of computers by the general public, however, have dropped by 46% from 2011 to 2019 while access to Wi-Fi has increased by 528%.

Robeson County Public Library 2020 Statistics Compared to State Averages

A comparison of RCPL 2020 statistics to other county library systems shows a number of significant differences and opportunities for growth and improvement. This includes a need to increase staffing and salaries and wages as well as per capita local income. In addition, RCPL could also increase its overall expenditures per capita on collections. RCPL circulates juvenile fiction at higher rates than the state average for county libraries but could increase its circulation per registered borrower. One significant opportunity is to increase the percentage of the population that are registered users. In addition, it should try and increase overall library visits per capita and also reference transactions per capita. In terms of programming, it should consider increasing adult programming and reducing the number of children programs to better balance them in comparison to the state averages for other county libraries.

In terms of FTE staffing per 25k population served, RCPL is below the state average at 4.13 FTE compared to 7.0 FTE for county libraries and 8.56 FTE for all libraries across the state (including municipal and regional libraries as well). Salaries across all positions are also below

state averages – for average expenditures going to salaries and wages, RCPL is at \$43,185 compared to the state average for county libraries of \$52,264 and overall state average of \$51,550. The Director's salary is also 14% below the county library state average and 9% below the state average for all libraries. The branch librarians are also lower than the state average by 61%, youth librarians are lower by 11%, and adult librarians by 10%. Technical librarians are on par with state averages.

RCPL also receives much less funding per capita than state averages. For local income per capita, RCPL receives \$7.55 per person compared to \$18.39 per capita for county libraries and \$22.31 for all libraries in the state (144% less per person). Total income per capita is also lower – RCPL is \$9.65 per person compared to \$20.93 for county libraries and \$25.40 for all state libraries (117% less per person). This deficit can be attributed directly to local income as RCPL's operating funds is 78% local compared to 87% for county libraries and 85% for all libraries.

In terms of expenditures, staff expenditures per capita is 102% less at \$7.13 compared to \$14.42 for county libraries and \$17.44 (144% less) for all libraries. Total collection expenditures per capita is also 182% less at \$0.73 expenditures on collections per capita compared to \$2.05 for county libraries and \$2.45 for all libraries (237% less). Similarly, total operating expenditures per capita for RCPL is 97% less at \$9.95 compared to \$19.65 for county libraries and \$23.99 for all libraries (141% less).

For collections, RCPL has a higher percentage of adult books than the state average (62% to 58%), on par for young adult books at 5%, and slightly less than the state average for children's books (33% to 36%). RCPL is slightly below the state average in terms of percent of holdings that are books (44.68% to 47%) but significantly below in terms of book volumes available per capita (0.82 to 1.64) and electronic books per capita (0.82 to 1.6) for the state. In terms of percentages of total holdings electronic holdings are above the state average (52.5% to 47%) and physical holdings are slightly below (47.5% to 53%).

In terms of circulation, RCPL's adult fiction print book circulation was 18% of total print circulation compared to 22% for county libraries and for adult non-fiction it was also less at 4% compared to 7% for county libraries. Overall juvenile fiction percentage of total print book circulation was higher than the state average at 27% compared to 20%. Overall circulation percentages for RCPL in terms of physical circulation was slightly higher at 76% than 71% and slightly lower at 24% digital compared to 29% for county libraries. Circulation per registered borrower was lower for RCPL at 4.68 compared to 8.16 for county libraries but total collection use per capita of 1.04 was 266% lower than county libraries at 3.8 per capita.

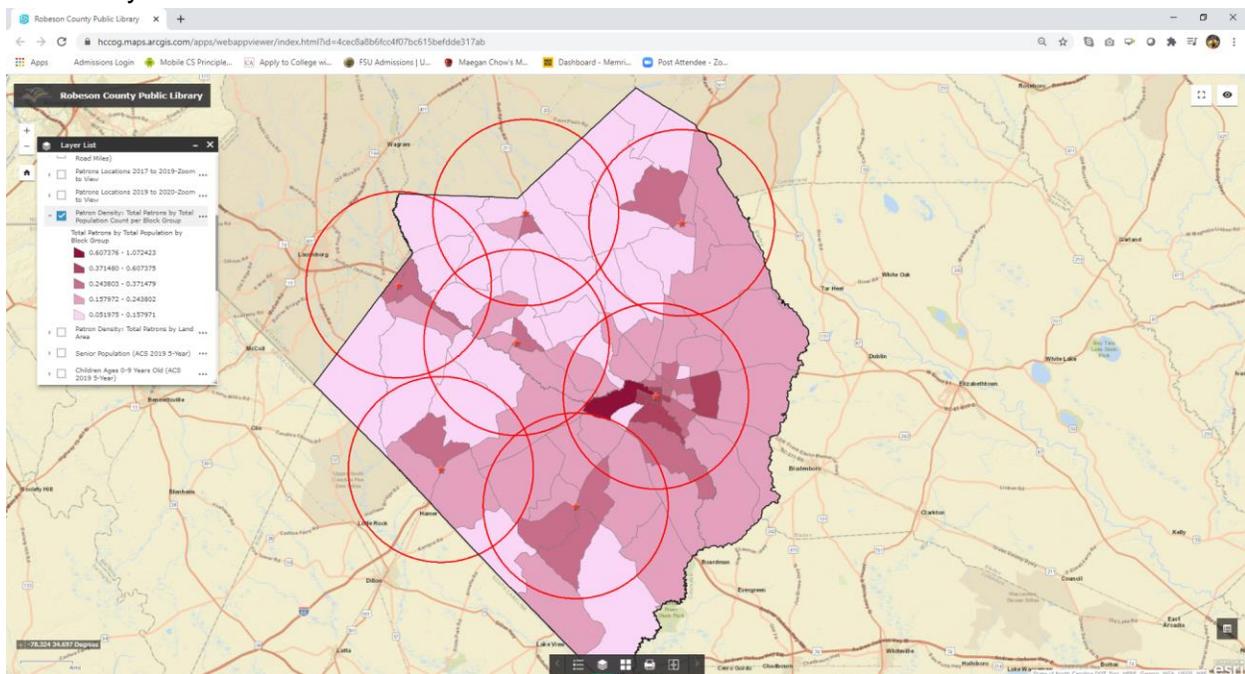
The percentage of population that are registered users of 22% is significantly lower than the 49% for county libraries and the 63% for all libraries. Library visits per capita are also 176% lower than the county state average (0.66 to 1.82), reference transactions per capita is 296% less at 0.10 compared to 0.41, and reference transactions per FTE staff are 149% less at 624 per FTE compared to 1,588 for county libraries.

In 2020, the percent of adult programs as the total is significantly lower than the county state average at 8.7% compared to 24.3% while the adult attendance per program is higher than the state average at 24.9 compared to 19.10. RCPL's young adult programs similarly are a much lower percentage at 0.3% compared to the county state average of 7.7%. Children's programs are a much higher percentage for RCPL at 91% compared to 65.6% for the county state average. Children program attendance per program is also much lower at 9.9 compared to the county state average of 25.

As far as technology, public computers per 5,000 population is lower than the county state average at 2.44 compared to 3.74; use per hour of computers by the public are also lower than the county average at 2.42 compared to 3.88 and overall wireless uses per hour are also lower than the state average at 3.68 compared to 5.82.

GIS Maps ([Access Dynamic Map Here](#))

A dynamic GIS map system was created for this project. The cluster map below shows card holders by distance from each branch.



Patrons outside the outer ring are more than 7 miles or approximately 20-25+ minutes driving time away. People outside of those rings could be considered “underserved” due to the travel time and distance required to visit a library. The maps suggest that the underserved reside along the eastern (East Howellsville, Wishart, Britts) and southern (Orrum, Sterlings) borders of the county with a small area to the north (Parkton, Lumberbridge) as well. The various GIS map views show potential underserved community members in terms the 0–9-year-old population, seniors, 0–5-year olds, families in poverty, population change, veterans unemployment rate, no high school diploma, some college with no degree, college graduates, Residents that are American Indian, Residents that are Hispanic/Latino, Residents that are Black or African

American, Residents that are White, limited English-speaking, Internet subscriptions, households with no computers, and educational attainment ([view PDF here](#)).

Interviews and Focus Groups

The sample included a past president of the Chamber of Commerce, the Assistant County Manager, Executive Director of the Visitor's Bureau, Assistant Superintendent in Curriculum and Instruction, a school social worker, Director of the Museum of the Southeast American Indian and member of the Lumbee tribe, a County Commissioner, the library director, and manager of each library branch. Focus groups were conducted with the staff, parents with children, power users, and seniors.

The Community's Highest Priorities

Priority issues include crime, unemployment, homelessness, quality of education, high dropout rate, high illiteracy rate, economic growth, and access to technology.

How the Library Can Best Help

Offer relevant materials, services, and programming aligned to community needs. This includes serving as a community hub especially for technology, community gatherings, cultural activities, and access to information about other county services. It must be multi-use: both quiet for reading/working/studying as well as offering vibrant and fun programming for all ages. Due to the COVID-19 related shift to digital and remote learning access to technology, providing educational resources and instruction on how to teach and learn in this relatively new environment is increasing. Emphasizing and supporting education and literacy must remain a priority which includes strong partnerships with the school district and other literacy organizations and providing educational technology and experiences inside, outside, and virtually. Outreach is also of critical importance so that the community truly knows and understands what a modern library can do for them. The Lumbee also mentioned assisting in digitization efforts and emphasizing their history and culture at a deeper level is a high need.

The Ideal Library

The ideal library is beautiful both inside and out, has lots of technology, and should be a source of civic pride. It has food and drink in moderation similar to a coffee house, modern and updated bathrooms, and lots of natural and bright lighting. It should serve as the hub of the community. It should have bright colors and be vibrant and welcoming for families and children. It should be a "library of things" and unlibrary as often as it can, offering non-traditional collections, events, and programming. There should be plenty of mixed-use space for individuals and group collaboration and meetings. It should invite in experts from the community to help with common high-priority services such as social services, workforce development, and medical/mental health professionals.

What are the primary strengths of your Library?

The primary strengths of the library are: summer programming, leadership, facility locations, genealogy resources for the Lumbee Tribe, good staff that goes out into the community and are willing to go the extra mile, dedicated patrons, a great YA collection, and a strong library board.

What are its primary opportunities for improvement?

Most buildings need renovation. There is a need for more room, more study areas, and more outside spaces for people to use the free Wi-Fi. Building design needs improvement and the face of the buildings could be refreshed. The delivery of technology could be improved. The lack of funding has limited progress and opportunities to do more for the community. A greater focus on seniors is another area to explore. The library could offer a wider variety of programs outside of existing topics (Legos/crafts) such as community gatherings, speakers, history, and other topics to encourage adults and seniors to move, learn, and get out of the house. The library needs to be the place to go.

Are there specific steps that the Library can take today to ensure its future relevance?

The library should continue to evolve and grow. Focus on getting digital access to the community and other understanding and delivering on what people need. The Library needs to increase its flexibility of time; more opening times for people who work and weekend hours. Right now, it is not accessible to a lot of people. Need to continue marketing and attracting people to the Library; marketing and getting people here and making it attractive. Focus on young adults who do not have a lot of safe options in the community.

How else can the Library best serve you and the community in the future?

The library should prioritize over the next five years creating more open space at its libraries. Continuing focusing on digital access. Focus on children, especially for the at-risk, and offer digital literacy programming. Must continue to help with the access-to-broadband issue and be a source of access to services and resources and technology. Also, seek to create opportunities to generate revenue through paid events, adult prom, wine and cheese (the experience), etc. Make education and literacy for all ages a priority. Aesthetically, clean up the buildings inside and out and ensure bright and flexible lighting. Serve a leadership role in revitalizing the towns and communities it serves. Work with the County to seek to become a certified retirement community and offer high quality services so the community can market itself as a retirement option. The Library is a central player in helping recruit industry; plug in with arts and culture community to serve as a cultural hub.

The Library must make community outreach and engagement a high priority - let people know what a modern Library has to offer and what they are missing. Partner with the school district and other organizations to prioritize literacy initiatives to build a love of reading. This outreach should also be focused on public schools and their teachers and administrators. Also work more closely with the religious community and churches. Remember to unlibrary by hosting carnivals, parties, and community events that can connect attendees to its resources and especially books. Allow food and drink and move away from uncomfortable seating and being too dark and serious. The library should seek to become a safe, exciting place to gather as there are not a lot

of safe places for young people to gather in particular. The Library has to “bust up those stereotypes.”

The library must continue working together with community organizations and schools to collaborate on educational and literacy activities and programming. The Library also must retain its place as a space for intellectual learning, reflection, and reading. A place to read and learn the love of reading. Focus on non-traditional library programming and events - bouncy houses, food, tours, and big community events (e.g., holidays, historical events, popular movies, arts, competitions, etc.).

Focus on technology outside of its walls – online learning, virtual programming, instructional videos, smart lockers, technology lending, etc. Work closely with the City of Lumberton and the County Commissioners to fund and renovate the facilities.

Finally, focus on improving the quality of life for the community – workforce development and jobs, educational programming, and serving adults who need better jobs or want to improve their lives in some way.

Community Needs Assessment Survey

The random sample identified their highest priority information sources as the Internet, TB, social media, libraries, and print newspapers. The general sample also identified online newspapers as a top choice. In terms of travel time to the library, 85% of the random sample lived 20 minutes or less from their library. 90% were within 25 minutes or less. For the general sample, 91% lived within 20 minutes or less and 95% lived within 25 minutes. The random sample had 27% of the participants indicate they did not use libraries and the general sample had 13% who did not use the library. Of the reasons why, 71% listed other information sources but 23% selected inconvenient hours, 9% identified not a safe or comfortable environment, and 6.3% selected no convenient location. Lack of time was also mentioned.

Both the random and general sample identified Saturdays and Mondays as the most popular/desirable days to visit. In terms of the most important daily activities, the random sample identified leisure reading, watching movies/TV, and social media as their top three. The general sample also identified learning new skills and pursuing hobbies as priorities.

The general sample had slightly higher access to a mobile device (82%). Preferences for use of library physical space for the random sample was a welcoming environment, a quiet space, location and access, and building accessibility for all ages. The general sample also identified spaces for children as a fifth priority. In terms of access to technology, the random sample had access to a computer or tablet (90%) and a mobile device (83%) but lower access to reliable wi-fi (66%) and Internet (65%) and access at work (45%). The top four highest priority technology and web-based services for the random sample was Internet speed, wi-fi access, personal

productivity equipment, digital access to local history and genealogy. The general sample also identified streaming services as a fifth priority.

The survey participants overwhelmingly (87% of the random sample and 93% of the general sample) agreed that joining the NC Cardinal consortium is a good idea. In terms of adult digital and physical collections, the top five were local history and genealogy, large print, nonfiction, fiction, and newspapers and magazines. The general sample also identified e-books and e-audio as additional priorities. For children and teens, the random and general sample identified a top three for children as fiction, audio books, and DVDs. For teens the top were digital magazines, e-books, magazines, e-audio books, non-fiction, DVDs, and fiction.

Participants felt that the performing and visual arts at the Library was somewhat important as the random sample rated this a 3.89 (78% out of 100%) out of 5.0 and the general sample rated it a 3.62 (72% out of 100). Overall, the random (4.1 out of 5.0, 82% out of 100%) and general sample (4.2 out of 5.0, 84%) were satisfied with the facilities.

In terms of the importance of programming: for children and teens, the top programs identified were school-aged STEAM, early literacy storytimes, teen engagement, school-age literacy, and participating in community festivals; for parents it was information on parenting, civic education/engagement, special needs, programs regarding community groups, the military, and technology; For general adults, the top programs were genealogy, technology, healthy living, programs about community groups, local history, author visits, civic education, and programs for military families.

The top potential and expanded services included opportunities to digitize and record family histories, live streaming of library programs, greater access to productivity equipment, story walks in parks, greater focus on pre literacy/early literacy and parenting, jobs and workforce development, access to innovative technology, story times outside of the library, and access to multimedia production tools. Finally, the participants noted the top three ways in which the library could improve the quality of its services were to improve the collection, upgrade facilities, and more programming.

Staff Survey and Priorities

The staff were overall satisfied with their jobs (6.0 out of 7.0) and felt that patrons were somewhat satisfied (5.4 out of 7.0). In terms of priority sources and services, the staff felt the top were Wi-Fi, access to computers, books for adults and children, e-books, large print books, access to online resources, programs and outreach to children, and resources for school and/or homework, computers and technology for children, and e-audio.

RCPL's greatest strengths included outreach, the staff, improved PR, the collection, and technology access. Weaknesses include facilities and layout of spaces, technology, funding,

limited staff, lack of community awareness, diversity of collection and staff, outreach, staff training, and relevant services and programming.

Major opportunities for improvement include the need to promote the libraries to branch towns, empowering staff, increasing relationships with teachers and school librarians, marketing and outreach (especially to adults, teens and the underserved), staff training, and expanding the collection. Major threats are lack of appropriate funding, increasing poverty in the community, having fewer children and teens involved in literacy, barriers to access like not being ADA compliant and space issues, becoming irrelevant, and not enough marketing and outreach to the community.

The staff's top priorities were programming, outreach, technology, the collection, more space, and improvements to youth areas. In terms of workplace climate, staff were satisfied and opportunities for improvement include receiving praise more frequently (5.6 out of 7.0), retention over the next five years (5.6), discussing their progress every six months (5.1), and ensuring that the organization and peers are on the same page (5.0).

Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, the following are recommended:

1. Continue offering a "library of things" for checkout, which is a national trend.
2. Expand focus on early literacy and parenting education and children's services.
3. Maintain strong print collections with a focus on increasing print book circulation per capita.
4. Expand and invest in clear areas of national and state growth – electronic resources, programming, reference, and meeting spaces.
5. Prioritize increasing the number of registered users in the County – join NC Cardinal and the Student Access program (student IDs become public library cards) which will greatly help with this.
6. Right-size programming using state averages as a guide - adult programming is close to three times lower than the average for county libraries (8.7% to 24.3%) and children's programming is much higher (91% to 65.6%); also consider offering more outside-library and teen-focused programming.
7. Gradually seek to increase staff salaries so they are more comparable to state averages for county libraries.
8. Seek increased local funding at town and county levels to raise the per capita local income closer to state averages for county libraries (currently \$7.55 to \$18.30 per capita).
9. Prioritize increasing library visits, reference transactions, and overall circulation per capita.
10. Focus on underserved areas outside of the seven-mile radius of any branch – smart lockers, programming, little free libraries, partnerships with schools and senior centers, etc.
11. Serve as a community hub – welcoming, cultural center, a third space, a connection point to information and other people and organizations, food and drink, comfortable spaces inside and outside. Align services and programming to help address the community's highest

priorities including workforce development, homelessness, education, economic growth, and access to technology.

12. Prioritize technology and digital access and literacy as the community's technology hub – offer strong technology (connectivity that is fast and stable, productivity hardware/software, learning spaces), technology support and programs, recording and streaming programs, technology for checkout inside and outside the library supporting teleworking and remote learning, and innovative technology people can explore.
13. Offer learning experiences through maker spaces, games, technology and a close partnership with the school district.
14. Prioritize marketing and outreach and tell the library story and how it is impacting people.
15. Un-library the library by providing services, programming, and resources not typically associated with libraries that will bring in those who may not be using the library at all. Circulate a “library of things.”
16. Partner closely with the County, the School District, and other community organizations which will help with marketing and outreach as well as joint resources, services, and programming.
17. Offer events and other services as paid/fundraising events for the Library – partner with the County.
18. Consider opening branches on Saturday and offering other flexible times to increase access opportunities for more members of the community.
19. Focus on spaces that are welcoming, a quiet/mix use, convenient location/hours/access, building accessibility for all ages, and spaces for children and teens.
20. Maintain strong collections as identified in the survey including local history and genealogy, large print, nonfiction, fiction, and newspapers and magazines, e-books, e-audio. For children, focus on fiction, audio books, and DVDs. For teens, focus on digital magazines, e-books, magazines, e-audio books, non-fiction, DVDs, and fiction.
21. Maintain/expand programming for adults in genealogy, technology, healthy living, programs about community groups, local history, author visits, civic education, and programs for military families. For children and teens, programs in STEAM, early literacy story times, teen engagement, school-age literacy, and participating in community festivals. For parents it was information on parenting, civic education/engagement, special needs, programs regarding community groups, the military, and technology.
22. Expand/increase services focused on services to digitize and record family histories, live streaming of library programs, greater access to productivity equipment, story walks in parks, greater focus on pre literacy/early literacy and parenting, jobs and workforce development, access to innovative technology, story times outside of the library, and access to multimedia production tools.
23. Major opportunities include promoting libraries to branch towns, empowering staff, increasing relationships with teachers and school librarians, marketing and outreach (especially to adults, teens and the underserved), staff training, and expanding the collection.
24. Prioritize workplace climate opportunities for improvement focused on staff receiving praise more frequently (5.6 out of 7.0), retention over the next five years (5.6), discussing their progress every six months (5.1), and ensuring that the organization and peers are on the same page (5.0).

Strategic Plan: 2021-2026

Vision Statement

RCPL engages our community through forward thinking initiatives and services.

Tagline: *Engaging, forward thinking initiatives and services*

MISSION STATEMENT

RCPL is a catalyst for inclusion, learning and self-expression, a partner for community organizations, workers and local businesses, and a champion for early literacy efforts.

ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES

1. Communication and Assurance

- Respect each other's thoughts, ideas, and concerns.
- Practice active and appropriate listening.
- Promote effective critical thinking and problem solving.
- Agree to disagree without damaging work relationships.

2. Honest and Inclusive

- Provide a positive, welcoming environment for all.
- Reflect high ethical standards and transparency in the workplace.
- Be a trusted source for information services and resources.
- Promote unbiased collections, programs, and events.
- Partner and collaborate with diverse organizations and populations in the community.

3. Innovative

- Empower staff to explore emerging and established trends.
- Reward curiosity, initiative, and dedication related to innovation.
- Improve policies and facilities to reduce barriers for staff and patrons.

ORGANIZATIONAL CORE COMPETENCIES

1. High-Quality Technology

- Provide specialized technology training for staff.
- Upgrade and maintain uniform technology infrastructure.
- Identify emerging technologies which support strategic goals.

2. Diverse Outreach Services

- Build strong community partnerships.
- Focus on reaching the underserved areas and populations.

3. Welcoming and Inclusive Community Hub

- Accessible facilities and operating schedules.
- Flexible uses of spaces.
- Facilities align with NC Public Library Standards.
- Access to high-quality collections.
- Well trained, engaged staff.
- Unique programming, activities, and events for all ages.

HIGH-PRIORITY ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS

Goal 1: Robust Outreach, Programming, and Partnerships

Goal 2: Expansive and Innovative Technology

Goal 3: Modern and Inclusive Facilities and Environments

Goal 4: High-Quality Collections



GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND TACTICS

GOAL 1: ROBUST OUTREACH, PROGRAMMING, AND PARTNERSHIPS

Objective 1.1: Progressive and Expanding Outreach

Objective 1.2: Comprehensive Programming

Objective 1.3: Strong Partnerships

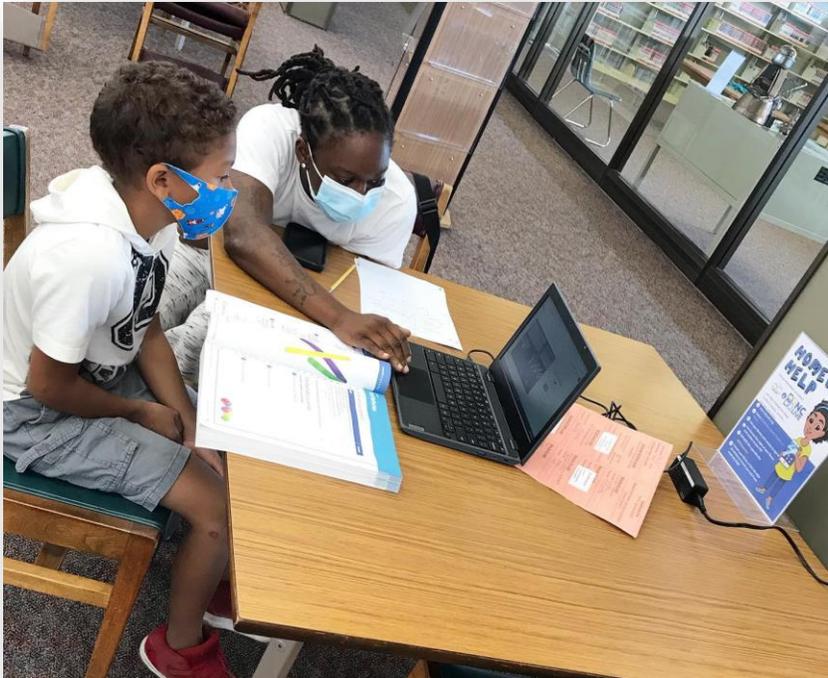


GOAL 2: EXPANSIVE AND INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGY

Objective 2.1: Provide Technology Programming

Objective 2.2: Provide Uniform, Current Technology

Objective 2.3: Innovative Technology Services



GOAL 3: MODERN, INCLUSIVE FACILITIES AND ENVIRONMENTS

Objective 3.1: Modern and Accessible Facilities

Objective 3.2: Serve as a Community Hub (One-Stop Place) in 5 Years

Objective 3.3: Bright, Colorful, Well-Laid-Out Spaces

Objective 3.4: Welcoming Customer Service

Objective 3.5: Introduce Non-traditional (Un-Library) Concept and Activities



GOAL 4: HIGH-QUALITY COLLECTIONS

Objective 4.1: Evaluate Collections and Identify Priorities

Objective 4.2: Strengthen the Collections

Objective 4.3: Increase Total Circulation by 15% Annually

