Gaston County Library
Strategic Plan
2019-2021

“The library card is a passport to wonders and miracles, glimpses into other lives, religions, experiences, the hopes and dreams and strivings of ALL human beings, and it is this passport that opens our eyes and hearts to the world beyond our front doors, that is one of our best hopes against tyranny, xenophobia, hopelessness, despair, anarchy, and ignorance.” – Libba Bray, Author
Executive Summary

The Gaston County Public Library (GCPL) has been working to develop a comprehensive, strategic plan to guide the organization for the next several years. A committee of staff from various sections and locations first met in January 2018 to begin the process of renewing the Library’s strategic plan. This committee discussed the library’s vision and agreed that the current statement is still a relevant declaration for this organization and then worked to develop a 21-question community survey. The survey was published and available from the beginning of February to the end of April. During this three-month window, 835 citizens offered their feedback and comments to the library. The Library received many valuable comments, which helped to define the scope for the focus groups. Five focus groups were conducted in July and August at various branch library locations throughout the county. Although attendance was low, moderators received some additional feedback that, combined with the community surveys and staff comments, served as the basis of this strategic plan.

The Gaston County Public Library 2019-2021 strategic plan was developed with these 11 priority goals in mind:

1. Promote inclusivity and increase visibility to library programs and services by engaging the community and enriching the lives of its members.
2. Maintain a diverse collection of electronic and physical formats that reflects community demand.
3. Develop a system-wide marketing plan for promotion of library programs.
4. Develop a comprehensive outreach plan to broaden the library’s community impact by engaging underserved audiences.
5. Expand relationships with community partners to enrich the lives of citizens and to ensure library facilities have safety measures in place.
6. Create an Adult Programming Plan and expand program offerings for adults.
7. Organize and host a Literature and Arts Festival.
8. Develop and implement a comprehensive technology plan.
9. Invest in staff professional development.
10. Remodel and upfit library facilities to be attractive, modern community destinations that are accessible by all people.
11. Create page positions at branch locations.
Goals and Objectives

Strategic Goal A: Promote inclusivity and increase visibility to library programs and services by engaging the community and enriching the lives of its members.

Libraries serve as a neutral entity within their communities where many people feel comfortable speaking openly about their ideas and concerns. Building an atmosphere that focuses on common interests creates an opportunity to acknowledge differences, learn from these differences, and build upon the commonalities of all people.

Objectives:

1. Create a Community Advisory Panel of community members (agencies and individuals) to help with service and program development. Panel should reflect the full diversity of Gaston County’s growing and thriving citizenry.
2. Utilize the Community Advisory Panel to promote library offerings to their respective communities to further promote the inclusive nature of the library.
3. Expand the reach of promotion through increased advertising and exploring new avenues of distribution.
4. Incorporate feedback from the Community Advisory Panel into the creation and revision of the Library’s Marketing Plan (see Strategic Goal C).
Strategic Goal B: Maintain a diverse collection of electronic and physical formats that reflects community demand.

Readers are as diverse as the materials they read and the format they choose to read. Gaston County Public Library (GCPL) strives to stay ahead of popular trends while focusing on needs of the local community. As use of formats shift and expand, so must also the library’s offerings.

Objectives:

1. Continue to assess digital collections by utilizing circulation statistics to balance materials budget requests with community demand and library trends.
2. Take advantage of North Carolina Digital Library (NCDL) resources when possible to build a more inclusive and diverse collection that includes foreign languages, LGBT, African-American, etc. materials.
3. Explore new digital resources as they become available and evaluate content, cost, and user experience when considering additions.

Strategic Goal C: Develop a system-wide marketing plan for promotion of library programs

As a versatile community center, the library provides a vast array of programs each week. Likewise, community members are bombarded with a wealth of information from many different sources each day. Ensuring promotion is adequately reaching audiences is vital to individual growth and program success.

Objectives:

1. Evaluate the various current means of promoting library programs throughout the system.
2. Explore alternative ways to promote events including non-traditional means such as cross-promotion to neighboring facility locations, monthly electronic newsletters, large posters for special events (paid authors or artists), etc.
3. Write and implement a comprehensive marketing plan for the library system. Make this resource available during new employee training when appropriate.
**Strategic Goal D:** Develop a comprehensive outreach plan to broaden the library’s community impact by engaging previously underserved audiences.

*In libraries, outreach is often described as services for those who are infrequent users or nonusers; or as services for those who are traditionally underserved. Outreach librarians strive to provide equitable delivery of library services to all people through the development of programs, policies, practices, and behaviors which make the library available to all people.*

**Objectives:**

1. Establish an annual outreach calendar that includes as many County-wide events as possible.
   a. Demarcate events geographically to allow branches to participate in their individual community events.
   b. Participate in relevant outreach opportunities within the community.
   c. Host activities that increase civic engagement and community awareness such as Dolly Parton Imagination Library (library cards for children when they register) on a regional level and national initiatives such as the American Library Association’s “Bring Your Child to the Library Day” (library cards, giveaways, and special activities).

2. Assess community needs for outreach of library services to individuals with limitations to access.
   a. Create a mobile library service to take library services and programs into the community for retirement communities, residents with no transportation, and shut-ins.
   b. Outfit the van as a mobile hotspot providing an outreach vehicle that can take Wi-Fi service and library resources to underserved areas of the county.

3. Hire or reorganize staff to include an Outreach Librarian and/or utilize volunteers to help expand library services by organizing, delivering, and managing library outreach services.

*Signing up for a library card at Octoberfest in Lowell.*
Strategic Goal E: Expand relationships with community partners to enrich the lives of citizens and to ensure library facilities have safety measures in place.

More than ever, libraries are focal points in communities across America. As such, staff members respond to and try to answer patron needs beyond their level of expertise. Unemployment, homelessness, addiction and abuse, domestic violence, etc. are a few of the situations where they are called upon to assist. By partnering with the appropriate agencies, individuals are in contact with the best possible resources within the county.

Objectives:

1. Create new partnerships with agencies such as NC Works, Gaston College, and the local Workforce Development Board to provide assistance to job seekers beyond the library’s ability to offer resume writing and mainstream software training.
2. Maintain current partnerships and explore avenues for growth with the Gaston Arts Council and the North Carolina Arts Council as well as the Cooperative Extension Service and local museums.
3. Explore collaboration with the Department of Health and Human Services to have a contact within their network to assist with patrons in need of social services.
4. Continue to work with local law enforcement and emergency management services to ensure the library is prepared in the event of an active shooter, natural disaster, or fire emergency, and that life-saving processes and devices are in place.

Jason Luker, Gaston County Museum Director, engages a group during a summer reading event.
Strategic Goal F: Create an Adult Programming Plan and expand program offerings for adults.

Gaston County Public Library has offered adult programs for many years; however, these programs have been very limited in scope and nature to focus on genealogy research, films, literary events including author visits, and concerts. Informational programs on geological resources, financial planning, and voters’ rights have been well attended by the community showcasing the need for such investments in the library’s service offerings.

Objectives:

1. Form a staff committee assigned to develop a strategy and plan to expand adult services and programs.
2. Survey adult patrons in each community to determine specific programs they would like to see and evaluate programming ideas mentioned in the Community Survey as well.
3. Foster new relationships as well as maintain current partnerships with local agencies that have speakers who could expertly address desired program topics, building an informal network of local speakers.
4. Continue to offer resume writing workshops and job searching classes and increase staff training so any staff at any time can assist a patron in need.
5. Seek grant opportunities to purchase a mobile computer lab to be used for programs in meeting rooms.
6. Explore the feasibility and usefulness of a makerspace area at the Main Library for additional programming opportunities.
**Strategic Goal G:** Organize and host a Literature and Arts Festival.

*Libraries are traditionally known for books; however, current trends are putting more focus on the story. In celebration of the story, the library looks to incorporate a Literature and Arts Festival to share the story experience with new and old readers and art aficionados.*

**Objectives:**

1. Work with related local and state organizations to bring speakers, authors, and artists to the event.
2. Apply for grants to help pay for speakers.
3. Consider partnering with other relevant community agencies, such as the Gaston Literacy Council and local schools and colleges.
4. Invite local authors to sell their books and sign them.
5. Have a mix of programs to connect with all ages.
6. Consider this as a yearly event to help the Library’s local economy, library visibility, and community reputation.

**Strategic Goal H:** Develop and implement a comprehensive technology plan.

*Technology has been a driving force for much of the change in the way libraries provide service. Use of websites, apps, databases, and e-resources require constant evaluation of library systems.*

**Objectives:**

1. Ask the Digital Services Coordinator to convene a task force to research and develop a Comprehensive Technology Plan.
2. The Comprehensive Technology Plan should take into consideration the following items:
   a. Timeline for hardware update or refresh
   b. Redesign of website
   c. Exploration and administration of digital strategy to increase virtual library
   d. Need for and capacity of bandwidth
   e. Currency of system software updates
   f. Capability to provide wireless printing
3. Explore the possibility of circulating Wi-Fi hotspots to patrons.
Strategic Plan J: Invest in staff professional development.

The library provides a wealth of information to the community; however, the library’s greatest strength lies in the ability of staff to connect the correct information resources to the patrons’ need. In order to do this effectively, staff must understand the various resources as well as the organizational philosophy and structure.

Objectives:

1. Continue to explore, apply, and participate in webinars and training sessions at the local, state, and national level.
2. Constantly work to improve customer service skills.
3. Educate and train staff to provide the best library experience as possible:
   a. Basic structure and governance; and roles of the Board of Commissioners, Library Board, and Friends of the Library Board
   b. Help staff understand why the library is organized the way it is and cover the duties and responsibilities of each section and location
   c. Increase technology competency across the board to meet the changing landscape of library service and offerings
4. Improve staff understanding of policy and procedures to ensure consistent application throughout the system.
   a. Establish and continually evolve a training plan.
   b. Establish a system-wide policy and procedure manual that is readily accessible and easily updated.
5. Develop and implement a measurement to ensure staff members are learning as expected.
Strategic Plan K: Remodel and upfit library facilities to be attractive, modern community destinations that are accessible by all people.

Capital improvement projects are frequently put on the back burner during lean budget times. The library is at a point where many issues need to be addressed including carpeting, furniture, and restrooms. Some of these issues will allow for greater access for patrons with mobility issues while others will simply provide for a more pleasurable experience for all patrons.

Objectives:

1. Continue branch renovation projects utilizing funds from the Friends of the Library as well as other outside sources.
2. Maintain communication with the Gaston County Facilities Department to get assistance on projects such as carpeting, restroom upgrades, roofing and HVAC.
3. Explore the feasibility of adding outlets for technology usage throughout library buildings.
4. Research options and develop a plan for adding small study room(s) on the third floor at the Main Library.

Strategic Plan L: Create page positions at branch locations.

Branch libraries are a vital part of the Gaston County community. These locations are strategically placed to provide convenient library access to community members outside of the Gastonia area. Having pages would alleviate basic responsibilities from staff, allowing the managers and library assistants a greater capacity to serve the community in other ways.

Objectives:

1. Conduct a needs assessment for each library branch location.
2. Request to add positions with Human Resources.
3. Incorporate new positions into budget preparation.