



ATHENS
REGIONAL
library
SYSTEM

Strategic Plan

2023-2025





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Message from the Director

We are pleased to share with you the Athens Regional Library System's Strategic Plan for 2023 through 2025. It is an aspirational yet realistic plan that provides a framework for our libraries to meet the current and future expectations of our communities and deliver exceptional services".

The Athens Regional Library System is comprised of eleven locations in five counties: Clarke, Franklin, Madison, Oconee & Oglethorpe counties. We cheerfully serve a population of over 240,000 residents. Each of our counties is unique and our patrons are diverse in background and beliefs.

We are united in our vision, mission, goals, and approach to library service. We see every patron as an individual and every point of contact as a new opportunity to strengthen our bonds within our community.

This new three-year strategic plan reaffirms our philosophy of service; to be the place where everyone is welcome, where creativity, inclusiveness, understanding, and life-long learning emanate. As we look to the future, we are focused on continuing our quest to encourage life-long learning, promote the love of reading, develop new partnerships, and provide opportunities for community connections and individual interactions.

Many people assisted in the creation of this plan. On behalf of our knowledgeable and dedicated staff, I'd like to thank our residents, government officials, Boards of Trustees, and Library Friends, for their support and encouragement. I offer additional thanks and praise to the Strategic Planning Committee, whose names appear on page 5 for their tireless efforts to bring this plan to life.

We look forward to serving all of our residents with this new strategic plan.

Valerie Bell
Executive Director
January 2023



Introduction

Athens Regional Library System is a lifelong resource for its community. The library system's committed staff, engaged patrons, and essential services create a welcoming and supportive community space. To align its resources with the emerging priorities of the community, ARLS has undergone a comprehensive strategic planning process with feedback from the community and stakeholders. By implementing a new strategic plan, ARLS will be able to focus efforts on increasing awareness, engagement, and connections that communicate the library's vital nature in the community; embracing equity, diversity, and inclusion in all aspects of the library; cultivating a positive and thriving work environment; and strengthening the vibrancy of the overall organization.

Athens Regional Library System initiated a strategic planning process starting in the Spring of 2022. Amanda E. Standerfer from Fast Forward Libraries LLC was engaged in March 2022 to facilitate the planning process in three phases: Learn, Dream, Do. The Learn phase entailed forming a Planning Team to guide the process, holding staff and Board feedback sessions, conducting a community survey, and leading focus groups. In the Dream phase, the Planning Team discussed possible future pathways for the library. This strategic plan will guide ARLS through the Do phase, as the library executes its vision for the future.



Planning Team

Thanks to this team of library Trustees and Staff for the many hours they spent on the strategic planning process. Planning Team members include:

- Rebecca Ballard, Children's Services Coordinator
- Valerie Bell, Library Director
- Mike Garner, Oglethorpe County Library Trustee Board Member
- Trudi Green, Assistant Director Public Services
- Fred Lutz, Oconee County Library Trustee Board Member
- Steven Mason, Athens-Clarke County Library Trustee Board Member
- Katie Ann Morris, Madison County Library Trustee Board Member
- Toby Mayfield, Assistant Director Regional Services
- Sue Plaksin, Assistant Director Organizational Development
- Annice Ritter, Athens-Clarke County Library Trustee Board Member
- Jen Schumann, Collection Development Librarian
- Niké Shimobi-Obijuru, Circulation Services Coordinator
- Rita Shoemaker, Franklin County Library Trustee Board Member
- Maggie West, Branch Manager Franklin County Libraries



Review of Process

The Planning Team spent months learning about community needs and developing strategies to advance the ARLS mission over the next three years.

March 2022	Planning Team kick-off
May 2022	Staff survey, Board kick-off
July 2022	Community survey, Focus groups
September 2022	Learning Report, Planning Team meeting
October 2022	Staff retreats
Nov. - Dec. 2022	Board retreat, Staff Day session, Plan development
January 2023	Plan review and presentation to Board, transition to implementation



Vision

Engaging Communities — Exceeding Expectations

Mission

We create a welcoming and inclusive environment that empowers individuals and communities by providing resources that encourage discovery, imagination, and life-long learning.



Values

The Athens Regional Library System emphasizes a customer-centered culture. We accomplish this through the everyday practice of our organizational values. It is through our values that we provide an atmosphere and work environment that is:

INCLUSIVE

We are committed to promoting library services for all of our counties' diverse populations. We accomplish this through our policies and procedures, staff training, outreach to our communities, the development of programs and exhibits, and the recruitment and retention of qualified and diverse library personnel. Our goal is to have a positive and lasting effect on every individual who interacts with the Athens Regional Library System by reflecting our values outwards to staff and customers and enabling everyone to expand their horizons in an atmosphere of safe exploration.

Supportive of our COMMUNITY

We aim to support the success of our community and to strengthen the connections we all share. This library is an accessible public resource for the open communication of ideas and information; therefore our facilities, collections, hours and services reflect and enhance our community. We engage our community by being responsive and by making a difference. We are full participants in the Athens Regional Library System's Vision, Mission, Goals, activities and plans.

RESPECTFUL

We treat every person fairly and impartially, providing equitable access to all library resources, information, and technology, and taking into account the individual's needs and requirements. We seek to improve lives by providing services and resources to everyone without consideration of social status, education level, ability, ethnicity, ideas, personal beliefs, age, sexual identity, gender or citizenship status. We believe, without exception, in validating all voices and treating everyone equitably.

Committed to EXCELLENCE

We strive toward the highest standards of performance, quality, and service. We act with integrity, honest and confidentiality. We focus on the needs and expectations of the community and of our residents. As employees, we are empowered to continuously improve and expand our individual and organizational knowledge, skills, abilities, and activities.

WELCOMING

We believe "helpful" is an active word with a human element. We seek to connect with patrons and each other in positive ways. We help people make the best use of the library. We celebrate the individual uniqueness of our patrons or staff; we anticipate the needs of the individual and community, and we adapt in order to better serve them. As libraries, technologies and people change, we will transform the resources, services and programs that we offer. We understand that our connection with people is unique and vital.

Strategic Goal 1

We are vital to the community.

Athens Regional Library System is an integral resource for the communities we serve. We will enhance services and spaces to meet the diverse needs of our patrons as well as expand our partnerships to better reach under-served populations. With renewed efforts to inspire lifelong learning, ARLS will serve as the library system our communities need for continued growth and vitality.

Objectives

- 1.1 Increase awareness of all the library offers.
- 1.2 Engage community members through a customer service experience that promotes library resources.
- 1.3 Spark new connections and partnerships.
- 1.4 Create safe and welcoming spaces that meet the needs of our residents and library users.
- 1.5 Inspire community members to learn and grow throughout their lifetime.

Anticipated Results

- Increase in overall library usage
- Community members report receiving excellent customer service
- Increase in and satisfaction with partnerships
- Community members report feeling safe and welcome
- Community members report that their needs are being met
- Program attendees report that they had a positive experience

Strategic Goal 2

We embrace equity, diversity, and inclusion in every aspect of the library.

The Athens Regional Library services reflect and support all of the populations we serve. Our libraries seek to provide materials and programs that celebrate a wide variety of cultures and strive to connect community members from diverse backgrounds and with varying abilities. Athens Regional Library also aims to expand access to all library services and further equip the community to confidently explore new technologies.

Objectives

- 2.1 Identify our underserved populations.
- 2.2 Ensure multi-cultural physical and digital collections respond to evolving community needs.
- 2.3 Provide community members with barrier-free access to library programs, services and technology.
- 2.4 Develop partnerships to help provide inclusive programming that is available to all and reaches previously underserved populations.
- 2.5 Provide opportunities for community members to meet, learn from each other, and celebrate various cultures.

Anticipated Results

- Community members report the collection meets their needs
- Increase use of accessible technology resources and services
- Community members report satisfaction with technology access
- Increase in program attendance and overall library usage
- Increase in cultural programs

Strategic Goal 3

We are a vibrant organization that is essential for the future.

Expanding connections with local decision-making bodies will serve to further communicate the value our county libraries bring to the community. We will seek new grants and other sponsorship opportunities. As part of these efforts, we will effectively communicate our successes through annual reporting and the widespread sharing of our community impact.

Objectives

- 3.1 Strengthen relationships with local decision-makers to ensure understanding of the library's value and financial needs.
- 3.2 Investigate additional funding sources to add value to the lives of community members.
- 3.3 Continue to seek system-wide efficiencies to maximize resources.

Anticipated Results

- County and city decision-makers report that they value the library
- Increase in conversations with county and city decision-makers
- Increase in visits to the library by county and city decision-makers
- Increased fundraising and grants
- Staff report updated processes and procedures that have increased efficiencies

Strategic Goal 4

We learn and grow together to foster a positive and thriving work environment.

Athens Regional Library staff and administration will work together to create positive work cultures where staff are encouraged to grow and succeed. Expanded training, two-way communication, and learning opportunities will allow us to meet individual and team goals. Equitable wages and increased transparency will foster trust and lead to improved staff retention.

Objectives

- 4.1 Cultivate a culture of listening and responding to each other.
- 4.2 Create opportunities to engage with and learn from each other to promote excellent team dynamics.
- 4.3 Continue to increase trust by working to provide equitable wages and increasing transparency.

Anticipated Results

- Increase in staff retention
- Staff members report that they feel trusted, heard, and part of a team
- Staff members report high job satisfaction
- Staff members report that their strengths are utilized

Next Steps

Implementation and Evaluation

Now that this plan has been adopted by the Athens Regional Library System Board of Trustees, staff will develop annual activity plans to guide implementation. Implementation is a continual process. The timing of certain activities will be determined by priority and influenced by various factors, such as funding and other resource allocation. Review and adjustment of the activity plan will happen on a regular basis.

A complete evaluation framework will be developed once the activity plans are finalized. Evaluation of the plan will be ongoing once the plan implementation is underway. The status of the plan and its implementation will be reported regularly to Trustees and stakeholders.

