Long-Range Plan
October 2014 – September 2017

Northwest Regional Library System
Bay, Gulf and Liberty Counties
Florida

Approved by Bay County Board of County Commissioners September 16, 2014

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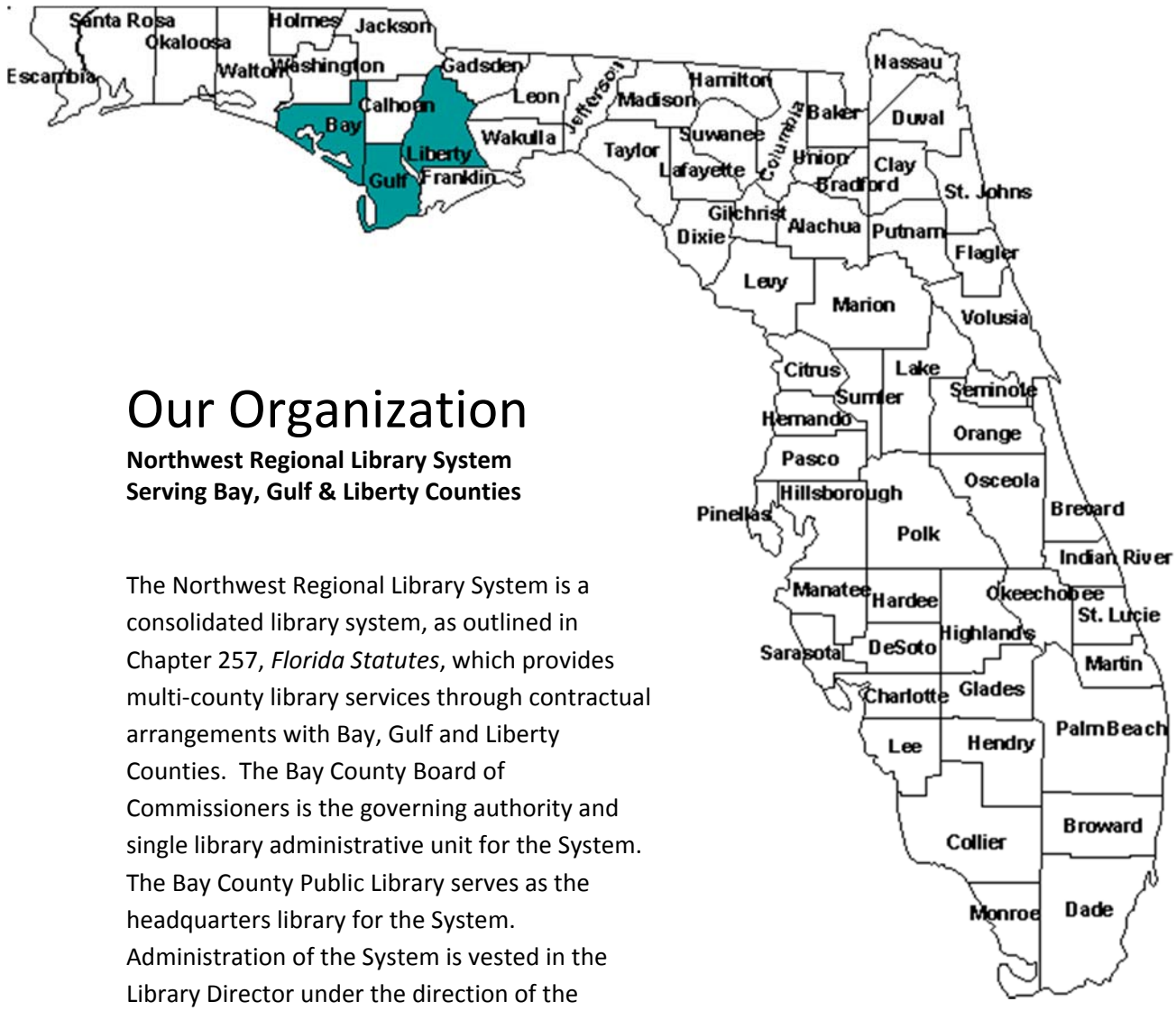
Our Mission

To connect the people of our diverse community with the information they seek for school, work, and play.



Our Organization

Northwest Regional Library System
Serving Bay, Gulf & Liberty Counties

The Northwest Regional Library System is a consolidated library system, as outlined in Chapter 257, *Florida Statutes*, which provides multi-county library services through contractual arrangements with Bay, Gulf and Liberty Counties. The Bay County Board of Commissioners is the governing authority and single library administrative unit for the System. The Bay County Public Library serves as the headquarters library for the System. Administration of the System is vested in the Library Director under the direction of the County Manager or his/her designee. A Library Advisory Committee, consisting of appointees from all three counties, advises their County Commissioners on library issues.

Community Description

Bay County: There are seven municipalities in Bay County: Callaway, Lynn Haven, Mexico Beach, Panama City, Panama City Beach, Parker and Springfield. The county seat, Panama City, is approximately halfway between Tallahassee and Pensacola. Bay County is known for its beautiful, white sand beaches and is a popular tourist destination. Bay County is home to Tyndall Air Force Base, Naval Support Activity which houses the Naval Surface Warfare Center Panama City and the Naval Experimental Diving Unit, and the Northwest Beaches International Airport.

The 2013 Census estimate shows a population of 174,987 in Bay County; 6.2% of the population is under the age of five, 21.5% is under the age of 18, and 15.9% of the population is age 65 or older. Census estimates indicate that, within the population of people aged 25 or older, 87.4% are high school graduates and 21.3% have a Bachelor's degree or higher. The U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis reports the per capita personal income in 2012 was $38,209, which is 93% of the state average income of $41,012. Major industries include trade, transportation and utilities; leisure and hospitality; construction; and education and health services. The largest employers include Tyndall Air Force Base, Naval Support Activity, Bay County Schools, and Bay Medical Center. The unemployment rate in June 2014 was 6.4% -- slightly higher than the state average of 6.2%.

Gulf County: The county seat is Port St. Joe, the birthplace of the Florida Constitution. Wewahitchka, the other incorporated city, is located inland and boasts some of the best bass fishing in the world as well as the world famous Dead Lakes. The gulf side of the county includes the beautiful beaches of Cape San Blas, Indian Pass, WindMark Beach and St. Joe Beach. Tourism is vital to the economy of Gulf County.

The 2013 Census estimate shows a population of 15,829 in Gulf County; 4.3% of the population is under the age of five, 15.7% is under the age of 18, and 17.4% of the population is age 65 or older. Census estimates indicate that, within the population of people aged 25 or older, 78.3% are high school graduates and 13.8% have a Bachelor's degree or higher. The U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis reports the per capita personal income in 2012 was $26,653, which is 65% of the state average income of $41,012. Major industries include public administration; trade, transportation and utilities; construction; and leisure and hospitality. Largest employers include GAC Contractors, Sacred Heart Hospital, Port St. Joe Care & Rehabilitation Center, Florida Department of Corrections, and Gulf County Schools. The unemployment rate in June 2014 was 6.1% -- slightly lower than the state average of 6.2%.

Liberty County: Liberty County is located about halfway between the state capital Tallahassee and the beaches and resort area of Panama City Beach. Bristol is the county seat and the only incorporated city. Liberty County has a very low population density since most of the county is comprised of unpopulated forest. The Apalachicola National Forest accounts for about half the

county. Liberty County is bordered by the Apalachicola River on the west and by the Ochlockonee River to the east. Liberty County offers many opportunities to enjoy the outdoors.

The 2013 Census estimate shows a population of 8,349 in Liberty County; 4.8% of the population is under the age of five, 20.0% is under the age of 18, and 11.5% of the population is age 65 or older. Census estimates indicate that, within the population of people aged 25 or older, 73.9% are high school graduates and 11.8% have a Bachelor's degree or higher. The U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis reports the per capita personal income in 2012 was $25,059, which is 61% of the state average income of $41,012. Major industries include education and health services; natural resource and mining; and trade, transportation and utilities. Largest employers include Twin Oaks Juvenile Development, Liberty County Schools, C.W. Roberts Contracting, Inc., and Georgia Pacific. The unemployment rate in June 2014 was 5.6% -- lower than the state average of 6.2%.

Sources:
Census data: www.census.gov
Per capita personal income: www.bea.gov
Industry data from Enterprise Florida: www.eflorida.com
Unemployment data from US Bureau of Labor Statistics: www.bls.gov

Library Description

Collection: As of August 4, 2014 there are over 321,000 items in the eight branch library system, 1.61 per capita (all counties included). Formats include print books, large print books, movies on DVD and Blu-ray, books on CD and MP3, downloadable eBooks and eAudiobooks, print magazines and newspapers, and digital magazines. There is a digital collection of over 16,000 historical photographs which is accessible via the library catalog. The Bay County Law Library moved from the Bay County Courthouse to the Bay County Public Library in June 2011. The Law Library collection is open to the public during all BCPL operating hours.

Circulation of Library Materials – Five Year Summary

FY Ending	BCPL	PCB	PAR	SPR	PSJ	WEWA	LIB	HOS	Digital Branch*	TOTAL
2009	399,608	72,606	10,595	17,834	31,873	11,579	5,977	1,283		551,355
2010	405,339	83,925	11,046	17,015	32,198	11,510	6,385	1,631		569,049
2011	415,863	108,066	10,568	16,386	31,618	11,656	6,426	2,397		602,980
2012	435,816	121,367	11,706	19,203	31,723	13,101	7,053	2,543	10,636	653,148
2013	435,664	123,352	12,293	18,448	35,256	13,989	7,552	2,913	15,572	665,039

*Digital Branch includes eBooks and downloadable audio books available via the Library website.

Programs and Services: There are eight locations. The headquarters library is the Bay County Public Library, located in Panama City.

Bay County Public Library - open 7 days per week, 61 hours
Panama City Beach Public Library (Bay County) - open 6 days per week, 50 hours
Parker Public Library (Bay County) - open 4 days per week, 28 hours

Springfield Public Library (Bay County) - open 4 days per week, 28 hours
Corinne Costin Gibson Memorial Library, Port St. Joe (Gulf County) – open 4 days, 32 hours
Charles Whitehead Public Library, Wewahitchka (Gulf County) - open 4 days, 32 hours
Harrell Memorial Public Library, Bristol (Liberty County) - open 5 days, 38 hours
Jimmy Weaver Memorial Library, Hosford (Liberty County) - open 4 days, 30 hours

All libraries have automated circulation and online catalogs, public computers with Microsoft Office software and internet access, Wi-Fi internet access, access to electronic resources including the Florida Electronic Library, online reference help via Ask-A-Librarian, and copiers for public use. The Bay County Public Library offers scanning. Four locations, Bay County Public Library, Panama City Beach Public Library, Corinne Costin Gibson Memorial/Port St. Joe Library and Charles Whitehead Public Library, have meeting rooms available for public use.

Programs are offered in all locations and include children's storytimes, computer instruction, book clubs, film screenings, crafts for a variety of ages, art displays, and lectures. The library website, www.nwrls.com, contains an events calendar showing programs scheduled in all locations.

Staff: There are 60 staff members (45 FTE) in the library system; eleven are librarians with a Master's Degree in Library Science. Staff members in all locations except Springfield are employees of Bay County. The staff of the Springfield Public Library is employed by the City of Springfield.

Bay County = 45 staff members, 35 FTE (includes Springfield)
Gulf County = 9 staff members, 6 FTE
Liberty County = 6 staff members, 4 FTE
(Staff members who work 30 hours per week or more count as 1 FTE. Staff members working less than 30 hpw are counted as .5 FTE)

Financial Resources: Funding for the library system comes from a combination of local government funds, State Aid to Public Libraries grant funds, and donations.

Facilities: Combined square footage of all branches is 89,850 or 0.45 SF per capita.

Bay County Public Library – 55,000 SF
Panama City Beach Public Library (Bay County) – 10,000 SF
Parker Public Library (Bay County) – 1,000 SF
Springfield Public Library (Bay County) – 6,600 SF
Corinne Costin Gibson Memorial/Port St. Joe Library (Gulf County) – 6,600 SF
Charles Whitehead Public Library, Wewahitchka (Gulf County) – 4,700 SF
Harrell Memorial Public Library, Bristol (Liberty County) – 3,800 SF
Jimmy Weaver Memorial Library, Hosford (Liberty County) – 1,750 SF

Long Range Plan: Overview and Process

The Northwest Regional Library System Long Range Plan outlines the Library's operations and development priorities over the next three years. The plan is a tool for Library leadership to use when evaluating current programs and services and considering new projects, in planning budgets, and for evaluating and allocating staff resources.

The current plan began October 1, 2011 and since then the Northwest Regional Library System has improved services to customers in many ways, including:

- Adding self checkout machines in November 2011 in our busiest locations, the Bay County Public Library and Panama City Beach Public Library (paid for by the Bay County Library Foundation). These units are a convenient option for customers who want to bypass lines at the checkout desk, and they reduce staff workload.
- Adding a collection of eBooks in February 2012 enabling customers with a Kindle, Nook, iPad, smartphone, tablet or other compatible device to download popular eBooks 24/7 through the library's website.
- Increasing the size of the collection from 287,000 in October 2011 to 321,000 in August 2014.
- Adding a collection of digital magazines in June 2014 which is available 24/7 from the NWRLS website. This project was fully funded for at least 2 years thanks to a $20,000 donation from the Bay County Library Foundation.
- Creating a monthly newsletter available through email subscription and via the NWRLS website and Facebook pages to share information about library programs and accomplishments.
- Adding an online fee payment option for customers who want to use debit or credit cards to pay library fines and fees.
- Added the Learning Express Library database to provide 24/7 access to study guides and practice tests for popular exams such as GED, SAT, civil service tests, and many more. LEL also offers reading, writing and math skills tutoring.
- Revising and simplifying policies guiding public use of the Library so they are easier to understand for the public and library staff.
- Increasing the number of items a customer can place on reserve from 5 to 10 and increasing the loan period for eBooks and downloadable audio books from 2 to 3 weeks to match the loan period of physical items.
- Adding laptops for in-library use in both Liberty County Libraries and adding two public internet access computers to the Charles Whitehead Public Library in Wewahitchka to better meet customer demand for computer access.
- Adding six operating hours per week at the Jimmy Weaver Memorial Library in Hosford.
- Introducing new programs including evening computer training at the Bay County Public Library in a series called *Connect U*, the *Books in Motion* program at the Bay County Public Library where films based on books are screened and then both are discussed, *Craft Day* programs at the Liberty County Libraries, a *Book Babies* story program at the Panama City Beach Public Library, and the *Book-A Librarian* program at the Bay County Public Library where customers can reserve a one-on-one session with a librarian.

Library customers have responded positively to these changes. Annual visits to the libraries have increased from 491,873 (end of FY 2011) to 520,629 (end of FY 2013). The number of items borrowed annually has increased from 602,980 (end of FY 2011) to 665,039 (end of FY 2013).

Despite these recent accomplishments there are still many areas of service Library staff would like to improve. New staff members need more in-depth orientation, and refresher training is needed for existing staff to maintain consistency of service across all libraries. The computer network has outdated equipment that often results in slow computers and difficulty in completing tasks such as filling out online job applications. Many people who live in our three county area still do not know about the many services provided by their local public library, and so increased marketing is needed.

In order to determine customer satisfaction and to learn which services our customers most value, a customer satisfaction survey was conducted in February, 2014. The survey was available in electronic form via our website and in paper form in all library locations. We received 525 completed surveys. It should be noted that 75% of completed surveys were submitted from customers of the Bay County Public Library or the Panama City Beach Public Library.

Library services with the highest satisfaction ratings were: Staff Helpfulness (99% of the respondents who rated Staff Helpfulness were “Satisfied” or “Very Satisfied”), Staff Knowledge (98%), Quality of Library Buildings (95%), Availability of Computers (94%), Wait Time for Holds (91%) and Children's Programs (90%). Services with the lowest ratings were: Hours Open (89%), Computer/Internet Speed (88%), Teen Programs (86%) and Adult Programs (85%).

Library collections with the highest satisfaction ratings were: Genealogy and Local History (96%), Children and Teen (both 93%), Movies (91%) and Adult Books (90%). The collections with the lowest satisfaction ratings were: Bestsellers/New Books (88%), Audio Books on cassette or CD (84%), and Downloadable eBooks and Audio Books (78%).

The survey revealed that the top five most important library services to our customers are: (1) the availability of new books, (2) computers and high speed internet access, (3) a comfortable, welcoming place to hang out, (4) highly skilled staff to assist with research questions, and (5) lifelong learning: books to learn about topics of interest.

All of the above information was considered and has been incorporated into the following plan of goals, objectives and strategies for the period October 1, 2014 through September 30, 2017. The plan is designed to be flexible, and if these strategies do not yield results we will discard them and try something else. Customers are encouraged to share their ideas about how the library can better meet their needs. There are many ways to submit comments: by email via the *Contact Us* page of the NWRLS website, www.nwrls.com, by phone to the branch manager or Library Director, by letter or in person. We welcome your feedback.

Goal 1 – The Library offers a current, well maintained collection in the formats necessary to meet the informational, educational and recreational needs of our community.

Objective 1.1 – By the end of FY 2017, each item in the NWRLS's collection will have an average checkout rate of three times per year.

Strategies:

- Create a standardized weeding procedure to remove outdated, poor condition, and uncirculated materials consistently in all locations.
- Maintain a schedule and standardized process for searching for and removing missing items from the library database; replace items as needed.
- Shorten the automated timeline for removing long overdue and lost items from the database.

Objective 1.2 – NWRLS branches will increase checkouts of Library materials by 2% annually.

Strategies:

- Establish guidelines for all selectors to use to determine the most needed materials for each library location.
- Continue to create displays of materials within the library and create lists of materials within the LS2 public access catalog and Library Newsletter to showcase the collection.
- Promote newly received items via Facebook, the website and email newsletter.

Objective 1.3 – NWRLS will maintain a materials budget of at least 10% of overall expenditures and will work to increase funding for materials.

Strategies:

- Work with Library Foundations and Friends groups to raise funds for materials.
- Seek grants and donations to add books and other materials to the collection.

Goal 2 – The Library has a professional and well trained staff committed to providing exceptional and innovative customer experiences.

Objective 2.1 – Develop a standardized staff training program for new and existing staff to ensure consistent, excellent customer service system-wide.

Strategies:

- Create customer engagement standards and train all Library staff.
- Create training checklists to ensure all staff members learn what they need to know to succeed in their position.
- Develop in-person and online training programs to provide convenient and effective training opportunities; managers will develop annual training plans for their staff to ensure they receive the training needed to excel at their jobs.
- Continue annual Staff Training Day.
- Continue cross-training staff to work effectively in various departments.

Objective 2.2 – Library staff members will present programs at state and national conferences, publish articles on topics on their areas of expertise and participate in regional and national library related associations to enhance their professional skills and networks.

Strategies:

- Annually, NWRLS will dedicate an amount equivalent to 2% of the Multicounty State Aid Grant ($7,000) to staff training.
- Staff is encouraged to attend conferences, join Library associations and attend regional meet ups and workshops.
- Five staff members will participate in the 2014-2015 Sunshine State Library Leadership Institute coordinated by the Florida Bureau of Library Development.

Objective 2.3 – Increase staffing and opportunities for advancement within the NWRLS.

Strategies:

- Communicate and justify the need for additional staff to the appropriate funding authorities.
- Promote internship and volunteer opportunities to local high schools, colleges and Library Schools.
- Add or reclassify positions to create more levels, providing more opportunities for professional growth and advancement without the need to leave the library system.

Goal 3 – The Library provides the reliable high-speed internet access, computers and equipment, and technology training necessary to meet customer needs.

Objective 3.1 – By the end of FY 2017 all outdated NWRLS public and staff computers and network equipment will be replaced and maintained on a regular replacement schedule.

Strategies:

- Use Library Impact Fee funds and other funding to upgrade network infrastructure equipment, computers, and MS Office software in all locations.
- Place public and staff computers on a 4 year replacement schedule.

Objective 3.2 – All Library locations offer group or individual technology tutoring sessions that address community and individual needs.

Strategies:

- Develop and offer computer training classes focusing on workforce readiness skills, social networking, library resources and homework help.
- Continue the Teen Producers video production program at the Bay County Public Library and develop additional STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) programming system-wide to inspire children and teens to pursue these fields of study and improve their technology skills.
- Offer one-on-one tutoring sessions in each library to address individual learning needs using library staff or volunteer tutors.

Goal 4 – The Library offers a welcoming, convenient and comfortable learning environment.

Objective 4.1 – Visits to NWRLS branches will increase by 2% annually.

Strategies:

- Offer either evening or weekend hours at all locations.

- Upgrade shelving, displays and furniture to improve the appearance, comfort and convenience of the Library.
- Rearrange and repurpose space as needed to create collaborative meeting spaces and interactive discovery zones.
- Seek grants to fund programs, supplies and equipment that draw people to the library.

Objective 4.2 – Expand Library services to locations far from physical Library facilities.

Strategies:

- Establish and maintain deposit collections.
- Identify possible vending machine or pick up locker locations and secure funding for these projects.
- Expand the number of materials available online, via the Library website, so customers have a wide selection available 24/7 that can be used on their personal computer or other devices.

Objective 4.3 – Utilize technology appropriately to enhance services and save staff time.

Strategies:

- Configure computer reservation software and revise access procedures so customers have faster access to computers while minimizing staff involvement.
- Investigate the use of scheduling software so customers can request use of meeting rooms and study rooms online.
- Promote use of self checkout machines with signage and staff or volunteer guides.
- Include video games, iPads, tablets, and other devices in youth areas for children and teens to explore.
- Improve online forms, such as Interlibrary Loan request and Suggest a Title, to include an auto reply to confirm receipt and communicate the process to customers.
- Create video tutorials to assist the public in using the library website and online services.

Goal 5 – Everyone in Bay, Gulf and Liberty Counties is aware of the programs, services and resources available at their local NWRLS Library.

Objective 5.1 – Increase readership of the digital Library newsletter by 100% by the end of FY 2015, and increase readership by 10% each fiscal year thereafter.

Strategies:

- Change the library card application form to ask if a patron wants to sign up for the digital library newsletter.
- Create a monthly prize drawing limited to patrons who are currently signed up for the digital newsletter.
- Ensure that the digital newsletter and monthly drawing are advertised in-house at all library locations.
- Provide a form where patrons can sign up for the library newsletter at all programs and community outreach events.

Objective 5.2 – Increase library website usage and database usage by 10% each fiscal year.

Strategies:

- Update the NWRLS website by the end of FY 2015 to improve usability and ensure customers can view it using mobile devices.
- Ensure that the NWRLS web address appears on all marketing materials.
- Ensure that every staff members' email signature includes the NWRLS web address.

- Market databases through the digital newsletter, flyers, bookmarks, the website, and social media.
- Utilize existing training or create video screenshot training that users can access through our website.
- Market relevant databases directly to community groups.
- Market relevant databases to area teachers to share with their students.

Objective 5.3 – By the end of FY 2017, the number of registered library card holders will increase from 35% of the total population in Bay, Gulf, and Liberty Counties to 40% of the total population.

Strategies:

- Sign up new library cardholders during community events.
- Coordinate with local schools to have a representative from the library at the school for parent night so that parents can get their children library cards without having to come to the library.

Objective 5.4 – Actively seek opportunities to speak to community groups and local agencies about Library collections, programs, and services.

Strategies:

- Create a PowerPoint presentation and DVD about the Library System.
- Purchase promotional give-a-ways with the Library logo.
- Create branded flyers and bookmarks to distribute to groups.
- Create a speakers' bureau of library staff and volunteers; each staff member on the speakers' bureau will participate in a minimum of two outreach events in each fiscal year.
- Contact community groups and local agencies directly and let them know we are available for speaking engagements.

Objective 5.5 – Market programs and services to patrons and the local community, including local news outlets.

Strategies:

- Market events and programs through press releases, events calendars, newspaper calendars, website calendars, and social media.
- Create PowerPoint presentations that advertise library events and services and show them on dedicated flat screen monitors within each library.
- Market new additions to our resources (i.e., new database, new service such as downloadable music, etc.) through press releases and social media.
- Establish a relationship with local media contacts.

Objective 5.6 – Increase our Facebook likes by 10% each fiscal year.

Strategies:

- Create a Facebook page for the Gulf County Libraries.
- Ensure that the Facebook logo appears on all Library marketing materials.
- Ensure that every staff members' email signature includes a link to our Facebook page.
- Create a periodic prize drawing limited to patrons who have "liked" our page.
- When updating the website, make sure there is a prominent "Like Us" button on each page.
- Include a link to the Facebook page in the NWRLS digital newsletter.