



Long-Range Plan October 2017 – September 2022

Northwest Regional Library System
Bay, Gulf and Liberty Counties
Florida

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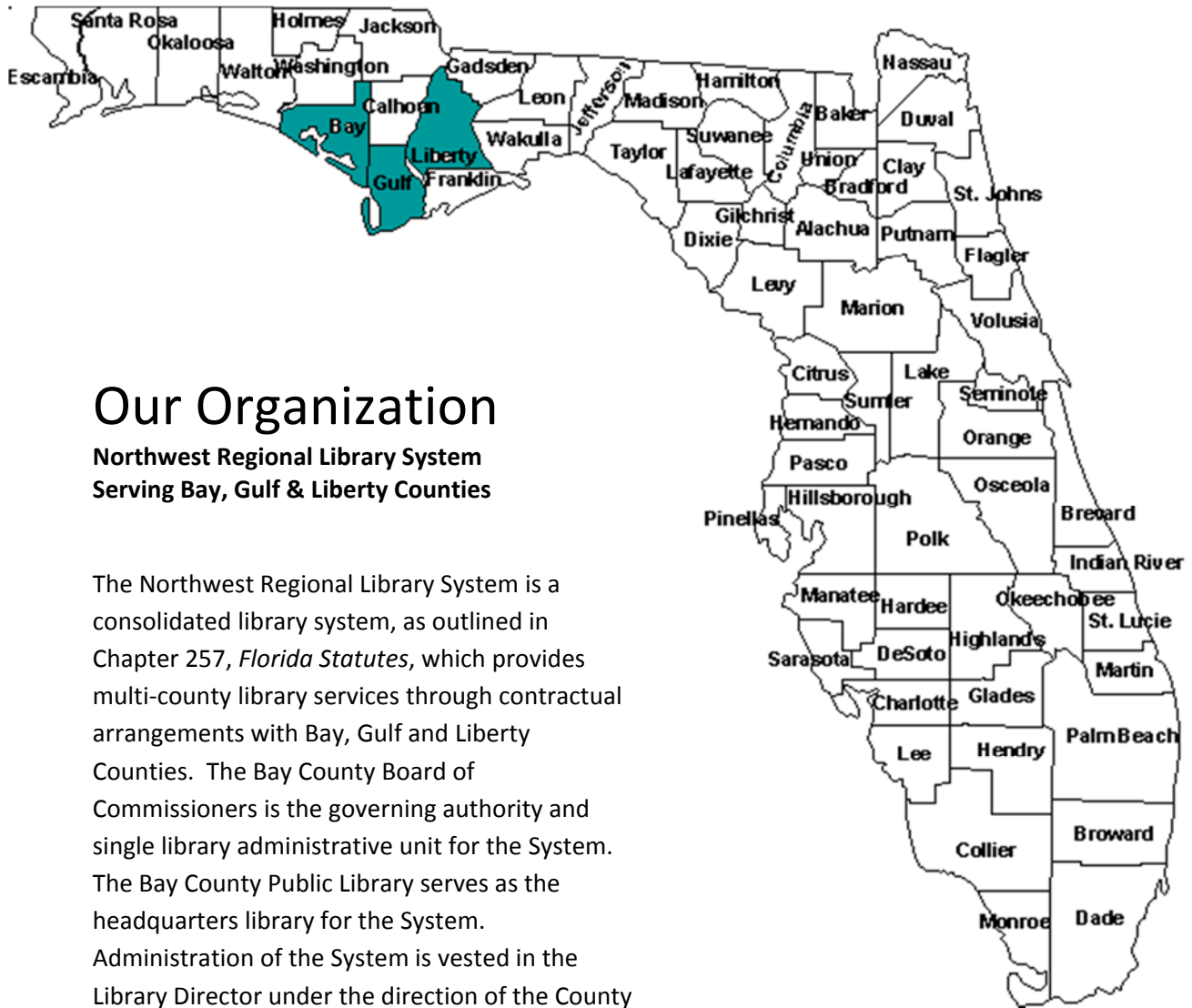
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Our Vision

To build a community where all residents reach their full potential.

Our Mission

To help, inspire, and empower our communities by providing a dynamic center for learning and a place of discovery for all ages.



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.



Northwest Regional Library System

Our communities and our libraries

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 2016 Census estimate shows a population of 183,974 in Bay County; 6.3% of the population is under the age of five, 21.5% is under the age of 18, and 16.8% of the population is age 65 or older. Census estimates indicate that, within the population of people aged 25 or older, 88% are high school graduates or higher and 22.2% have a Bachelor's degree or higher. The U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis reports the per capita personal income in 2015 was \$39,717, which is 89% of the state average income of \$44,429. Major industries include trade, transportation and utilities; professional & business services; leisure and hospitality; construction; and education and health services. The largest employers include Naval Support Activity (NSA PC), Tyndall Air Force Base, Bay District Schools, Eastern Shipbuilding Group, and Bay Medical Sacred Heart. The unemployment rate in May 2017 (not seasonally adjusted) was 4%, which equals the state average.

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 2016 Census estimate shows a population of 15,990 in Gulf County; 4.3% of the population is under the age of five, 15.7% is under the age of 18, and 18.8% of the population is age 65 or older. Census estimates indicate that, within the population of people aged 25 or older, 82% are high school graduates and 16% have a Bachelor's degree or higher. The U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis reports the per capita personal income in 2015 was \$30,125, which is 68% of the state average income of \$44,429. Major industries include trade, transportation and utilities; construction; professional and business services; and leisure and hospitality. Largest employers include Florida Department of Corrections, Gulf County Schools, Port St. Joe Care & Rehabilitation Center, Sacred Heart Hospital, and Florida Department of Transportation. The unemployment rate (not seasonally adjusted) in May 2017 was 3.5% -- lower than the state average of 4%.

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 2016 Census estimate shows a population of 8,202 in Liberty County; 4.9% of the population is under the age of five, 19.3% is under the age of 18, and 12.1% of the population is age 65 or older. Census estimates indicate that, within the population of people aged 25 or older, 77.2% are high school graduates and 11.7% have a Bachelor's degree or higher. The U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis reports the per capita personal income in 2015 was \$25,492, which is 57% of the state average of \$44,429. Major industries include government, 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 (not seasonally adjusted) in May 2017 was 4.2%, slightly higher than the state average of 4%.

Sources:

Census Data

U.S. Census Bureau, www.factfinder.census.gov

Per Capita Personal Income

U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, <http://www.bea.gov/regional/bearfacts/countybf.cfm>

Industry data

Enterprise Florida,

<https://www.enterpriseflorida.com/data-center/florida-communities/florida-counties/>

Bay County Chamber of Commerce,

<https://issuu.com/baycountychamber/docs/2016guidetodiscoveringbaycounty>

Unemployment Data

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, <https://data.bls.gov/map/MapToolServlet>

Library Description

Collection: As of July 24, 2017 there are over 320,000 items in the eight branch library system, 1.54 per capita (all counties included). This is down from 1.61 items per capita in August 2014. 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. There is a digital collection of over 17,000 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
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
2014	410,370	127,294	11,264	13,827	35,677	14,399	7,657	3,602	19,402	643,492
2015	410,512	131,187	10,998	13,906	34,242	15,627	7,573	4,244	25,728	654,017
2016	419,925	136,887	10,998	12,427	36,847	14,638	6,496	4,551	34,172	676,941

*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 5 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 2013 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 and printers for public use. Most locations offer copier scanners. 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. The Bay County Public Library, Panama City Beach Public Library, Corinne Costin Gibson Memorial Library in Port St. Joe, and the Harrell Memorial Public Library in Bristol have 3D printers which are available per the library’s 3D Printer Use policy. Faxing is offered in Gulf and Liberty County locations.

Classes and events are offered in all locations and include children’s storytimes, computer instruction, book clubs, film screenings, live music performances, 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 63 staff members (49.5 FTE) in the library system; 13 are librarians with a Master's Degree in Library Science. The Law Librarian is included in the total number of staff, although that position is not funded through the library budget. Staff members in all locations except Springfield are employees of Bay County. The six staff members of the Springfield Public Library are employed by the City of Springfield.

Bay County = 48 staff members, 38.5 FTE (includes Springfield)

Gulf County = 9 staff members, 5.5 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 0.43 SF per capita (based on 2016 population estimates). This is down from 0.45 SF per capita in 2014.

Bay County Public Library – 55,000 SF

Panama City Beach Public Library (Bay County) – 9,400 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) – 7,600 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 five 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, 2014 and since then the Northwest Regional Library System has improved services to customers in many ways, including:

- Replacing all staff and public computers and replacing servers and wireless routers, which has greatly increased computer speed and reliability.
- Expanding the adult literacy program to the Panama City Beach Public Library and the Corinne Costin Gibson Memorial Public Library in Port St. Joe.
- Increasing the number of library classes and events offered including live music concerts, arts & crafts for adults, bestselling author visits, and ukulele and dulcimer instruction.
- Adding laptop computers in Gulf County and Kindles in Gulf and Liberty Counties, funded through grants. Grant awards also funded training to improve staff

technology skills and purchase 3D printers in order to provide a more advanced level of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) programming in our communities.

- Adding an Outreach Librarian to the staff at the Bay County Public Library to provide library service to those who are unable to visit library facilities.
- Completing an energy retrofit project at the Jimmy Weaver Memorial Library in Hosford, funded through a \$22,000 U.S. Department of Energy grant. The grant included installation of a new HVAC system, new ductwork, a tankless hot water system, new thermal glass windows and doors, and replacement of existing lighting with new LED units. The grant was written by then branch manager Gerard Giordano. Improvements were completed in May 2015 and has resulted in a reduction in energy usage for the facility.
- Adjusting library hours at the Corinne Costin Gibson Memorial Public Library in Port St. Joe in order to provide opportunities for everyone in the community to utilize library services. Adjusted hours did not increase the total number of operating hours in Port St. Joe, but added Saturday hours.
- Developing a new quarterly *Current Events Guide* to help residents and visitors learn about all the great programs and services we offer.
- Adding AWE “Early Literacy Station” computers in every library location in 2015. (Most were funded by the Bay County Public Library Foundation). Each computer offers over 70 educational games for children.
- Adding scanners to both Liberty County Libraries, courtesy of Early Care and Education, Early Learning Coalition of the Big Bend Region, Inc., in order to help facilitate clients applying for aid through this agency.
- Replacing outdated microfilm reader/scanners for the Bay County Public Library Genealogy and Local History Department.
- Serving as a PrimeTime Family Literacy site in Port St. Joe and Wewahitchka, a six-week program of reading, discussion, and storytelling for families with young children. The goal of the PrimeTime program is to increase family bonding and reading time, improve reading attitudes and behaviors, increase public library use and improve student academic achievement. Nancy Brockman, Gulf County Coordinator, wrote the grant and was the Program Director.

In order to determine customer satisfaction and to learn which services our customers most value, a customer satisfaction survey was conducted in February, 2017. The survey was available in electronic form via our website and in paper form in all library locations. We received 457 completed surveys.

Library services with the highest satisfaction ratings were: Staff Helpfulness (98% of the respondents who rated Staff Helpfulness were “Satisfied” or “Very Satisfied”), Staff Knowledge (98%), Availability of Computers (96%), and Quality of the Facility (95%). Despite a 95% satisfaction with the facilities there were several suggestions for improvement that we hope to address during this next planning period, such as improving lighting, replacing carpet, and adding outlets to plug in electronic devices.

Computer/Internet Speed was also rated at 95% satisfaction, up from 88% in the survey conducted in 2014. All computers in the library system were replaced in 2016 – 2017, and this has made a significant improvement in computer speed.

Services with the lowest ratings were: Children’s Programs (94%), Adult Programs (94%, up from 85% in 2014), Teen Programs (92%, up from 86% in 2014) and Hours Open (89%, the same level as 2014). Comments related to programming indicate that much of the dissatisfaction is because there are not enough programs! Annual statistics from the fiscal year ending September 30, 2016 show a 5.1% increase in program attendance system wide.

Library collections with the highest satisfaction ratings were: Children’s Books (99% of the respondents who rated Children’s Books were “Satisfied” or “Very Satisfied”), Adult Books (97%, up from 90% in 2014), Teen Books (96%) and Genealogy and Local History (96%). Bestsellers/New Books were at 94%, an increase from 88% in 2014. All eight libraries in our system share our books and other materials, and some libraries did have increases in the number of new materials added, which benefits all libraries. CD Audiobooks received a 91% satisfaction rating, which is up from 84% in 2014.

The collections with the lowest satisfaction ratings were: Downloadable Books – eBooks or eAudio (83%, up from 78% in 2014), and DVD Movies (90%). There were many comments in the survey requesting a better selection or more copies of popular DVD movies. Five respondents commented that DVDs are frequently scratched and unplayable. Staff will take greater steps to identify damaged discs before they are loaned to customers.

The survey revealed that the top five most important library services to our customers are: (1) the availability of new books, (2) a comfortable, welcoming place to read, study or attend meetings, (3) activities that inspire children to read and learn, (4) computers/high speed internet access, and (5) highly skilled staff to assist with research questions. These areas will be our focus over the next planning period.

All of the above information was considered and has been incorporated into the following plan of goals, objectives and activities for the period October 1, 2017 through September 30, 2022. The plan is designed to be flexible, and if the activities we have planned to make improvements 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, through library Facebook pages, by letter or in person. We welcome your feedback.

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

Objective 1.1 – By the end of FY 2022, each item in the NWRLS’ collection will have an average checkout rate of three times per year.

Activities:

- 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 needed items when the budget allows.
- 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 1% annually.

Activities:

- Market materials through creative displays, via social media channels, and during classes and events.
- Review current formats and consider new services such as streaming video.
- Use the *Current Events Guide*, Newsletter, Facebook page, website, word of mouth and other communication methods to better promote the fact that library selectors welcome customer title suggestions.
- Purchase suggested titles when they meet selection criteria and are affordable within the library budget.

Objective 1.3 – NWRLS will maintain a materials budget of at least 10% of operating expenditures.

Activities:

- 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.
- Utilize Bay County Library Impact Fees to improve the collection as the population increases.

Goal 2 – The Library provides exceptional service, a welcoming atmosphere, and convenient up-to-date facilities.

Objective 2.1 – Provide continuing education training sessions for staff a minimum of once quarterly to ensure consistent, excellent customer service system-wide.

Activities:

- Dedicate an amount equivalent to 2% of the Multicounty State Aid Grant to staff training and conference attendance to help staff stay abreast of current library issues.
- Develop competency checklists for each job title by the end of FY 2018.
- Beginning October 2017, offer a training session at least once per quarter to address competency training needs. Whenever possible create training sessions that can be

attended remotely to reduce the need for mileage reimbursement costs and time away from the primary work location.

- Continue the annual Staff Training Day.
- Encourage staff to become members of professional organizations and use budgeted funds, donations and scholarships to fund staff attendance at conferences and other trainings offered by these associations.

Objective 2.2 – By the end of FY 2018, develop a facilities improvement plan for each location.

Activities:

- By the end of FY 2018, conduct a Capital Improvement Plan Needs Assessment to determine when and where additional library branches are needed.
- By the end of FY 2018, revise the Bay County Comprehensive Plan to include plans for construction of new library facilities in growing sections of the county.
- By the end of March of each year, review population and Library service statistics and create plan for how to use Bay County Library Impact Fee funds to improve service levels in Bay County.
- Seek funding in each location to make needed facility improvements.

Objective 2.3 – Review library policies and procedures annually to ensure convenient, efficient service.

Activities:

- By November 1, 2017, establish a policy review schedule so that all policies are reviewed each year by staff and the Library Advisory Committee. Recommendations for change are forwarded for administrative review and BOCC approval.

Objective 2.4 - Visits to NWRLS branches will increase by 1% annually.

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

Objective 3.1 – By the end of FY 2018, develop a plan and budget (in cooperation with the Bay County Information Technology Department) for a modern, high bandwidth IT network infrastructure that provides a reliable, high speed internet experience for library customers.

Activities:

- Maintain a 4 year replacement schedule for library computers.

Objective 3.2 – By the end of FY 2018, all staff meet or exceed technology competencies established for their position.

Activities:

- By December 1, 2017, compile a list of online tutorials that demonstrate the use of library resources and share with all staff.
- By July 1, 2018, establish technology core competencies for library staff.
- Design classes to train staff to use library technology that is not already offered via webinar or other easily accessible methods. Make classes available beginning October 1, 2018.

Objective 3.3 – All Library locations offer group or individual technology tutoring sessions that address community and individual needs.

Activities:

- Continue to offer STEM classes such as robotics and Arduino in all three counties to provide these communities with opportunities to learn and practice these skills.
- By October 1, 2017, submit a plan for building a MakerSpace at the Bay County Public Library.
- Seek grants to fund updated equipment and expert presenters on technology topics.
- Ask local engineers, students, and technology businesses to provide demos.
- Offer training on the use of e-readers and tablets at least once quarterly to teach customers how to use library resources on their personal devices.

Goal 4 – The Library improves academic achievement through classes and resources that prepare children for school and provide students with the skills, curiosity, and support they need to succeed.

Objective 4.1 – NWRLS will offer a minimum of 25 classes per quarter for children ages birth through 18 and their families that teach the foundations of reading, inspire a love of books, encourage intellectual curiosity, and support self-directed education through children’s literature and creative expression.

Objective 4.2 – Each County in NWRLS will offer a minimum of one class for school-aged children, per quarter, that teaches STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) concepts to encourage an interest and understanding of these subjects.

Objective 4.3 – Continually look for opportunities to expand Library services into underserved areas.

Activities:

- Review population and Library service statistics annually and use Library Impact Fee funds to improve service levels.
- Expand outreach programming to provide services to as many groups as budget and staffing allows.

Goal 5 – The Library offers year-round classes and events that educate, inspire and entertain the members of our community throughout their lives.

Objective 5.1 – All NWRLS locations will offer a minimum of one adult or family program per quarter.

Activities:

- Share program ideas and coordinate performer scheduling to reduce costs.

Objective 5.2 – Attendance for in-library programs will increase by 2% each year.

Activities:

- Review program statistics and continue to offer classes and events that are of greatest interest to library patrons.

- Discontinue programs with low attendance and focus time and resources on topics of greater interest.
- Use class surveys and/or comments to determine topics of interest.
- Use local experts and volunteers to teach classes to reduce staff workload and provide classes staff are unable to offer.
- Seek new ways of promoting library classes and events to people who do not regularly use the library.

Objective 5.3 – Continually look for opportunities to expand Library services into underserved areas.

Activities:

- Consider simple social activities such as a book club in a café, readers’ theatre in an art gallery, pop-up library book discussions at community events to provide real-time library experiences.
- Continue to develop services to seniors, particularly those who do not visit a library.
- Develop regularly scheduled storytimes in public housing and neighborhoods where transportation to a central location is not readily available.

Goal 6 – The Library provides quality resources and expert staff assistance to support local businesses and local residents seeking jobs or promotions.

Objective 6.1 – Offer workforce readiness skills training in order to increase the pool of qualified candidates for local businesses.

Activities:

- Offer a minimum of two group technology classes and ten individual technology training sessions each month at the Bay County Public Library to prepare citizens to be productive, tech savvy members of the local workforce.
- Offer a minimum of one employment seminar per quarter at the Bay County Public Library in partnership with local agencies and the Workforce Program.
- Assist staff to become Certified Microsoft Office Specialists so they are better prepared to teach classes to the public and other staff. Attendees who complete a class can be offered a certificate from a certified trainer, which may enhance the value of the training to the student and potential employers.

Objective 6.2 – Support the local business community through the availability of current research resources and instruction provided by highly trained staff.

Activities:

- Develop a training program and require selected staff to attend the classes needed to become expert in the business resources provided by the library.
- Contact local small businesses and each Chamber of Commerce and inform them of the resources offered by the library. Provide training upon request.
- Evaluate the library’s subscription business resources and demo other products in order to make informed decisions and provide the best resources the library can afford.
- Identify other available agency resources and share this information with library customers when appropriate. Collaborate with agencies with shared goals.

- By the end of March 2019, update Bay County Public Library meeting room equipment to provide local businesses with a state of the art collaborative meeting space.

Objective 6.3 – Library staff will conduct a minimum of one outreach presentation to a civic group in each NWRLS county per quarter, and will collaborate with local businesses and civic groups when appropriate.

Activities:

- Update the library’s Speakers’ Bureau webpage and inform local civic groups about the free outreach programs available.
- Partner with small businesses on initiatives such as Small Business Saturday.
- Develop library events that take place in local cafes and shops.
- Partner with local businesses to cross promote services.