

NORTHEAST KANSAS LIBRARY SYSTEM

2024 ANNUAL REPORT

Stronger Libraries,
Stronger Communities



Stronger Libraries, Stronger Communities

Our work behind the scenes helps 118 libraries across Northeast Kansas do what they do best—engage, educate, and serve their communities. Through expert consulting, ongoing training, technology support, and targeted funding, we amplify local impact. The highlights below reflect a year of shared purpose, measurable outcomes, and strengthened community connections.

Letter from the Director

Dear Friends:

Thank you for taking a few moments to review the 2024 annual report and learn more about NEKLS's impact on libraries!

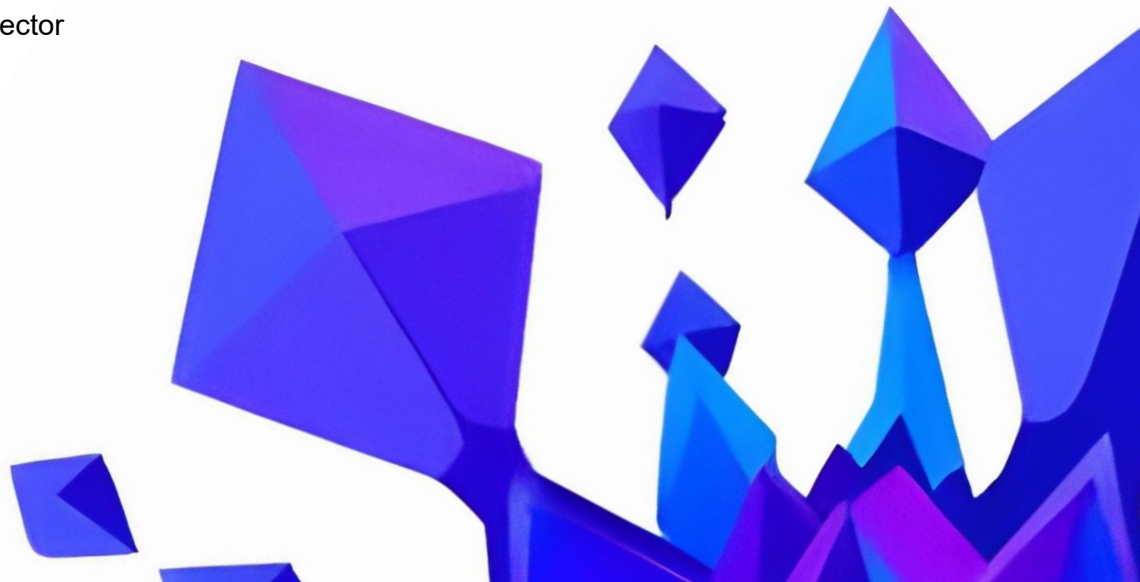
NEKLS has been serving the region since 1967. While technology and fashion have evolved over the past 57-plus years, the need for strong libraries remains a constant. NEKLS strives to deliver quality consulting, exceptional continuing education opportunities, and best-in-class services to our member libraries.

In 2024, we worked with Coneflower Consulting to conduct a survey of our membership, followed by a series of in-person conversations throughout the region where we did a lot of listening. Core needs remain the same: consulting, continuing education, grants & subsidies, resource sharing, and information technology support. Our challenge, then, is to grow and adapt in meaningful ways that support a strong and nimble NEKLS, stronger libraries, and stronger communities. Stay tuned!

A special word of thanks to the NEKLS staff for their dedication to member libraries. Our people are the organization's greatest asset and it is a privilege to work with this team. I would also like to acknowledge the Executive Board for their leadership and unwavering commitment to the success of the system.

Best wishes,

Michael McDonald, Director



NEKLS Snapshot: People, Libraries & Impact

Regional Reach

The Northeast Kansas Library System (NEKLS) serves a diverse 14-county region that includes urban centers, growing suburbs, and rural communities—home to over 1.32 million Kansans, or 44.93% of the state’s total population. Most residents live within the Kansas City–Lawrence–Topeka corridor. While many rural areas saw slight population declines, some are experiencing modest growth. Thirteen NEKLS libraries serve towns with fewer than 1,000 residents.

- Kansas Population: 2,940,546
- NEKLS Region Population: 1,321,172 (44.93%)
(Source: Kansas Certified Population Report – 2024)

Our Member Libraries

NEKLS supports 118 full member libraries, including:

- 48 public libraries
- 52 school districts and private schools
- 11 academic libraries
- 7 special libraries

All member libraries are considered full members—NEKLS does not have contracting or associate libraries. While some grants and services are tailored to specific types of libraries, all members benefit from shared resources, consulting, and training.

Mission in Action

“The Northeast Kansas Library System inspires and empowers member libraries to engage, educate, and add value to their communities.”

This mission is realized through year-round support, including consulting, continuing education, technology services, and financial assistance.

NEKLS Executive Board (2024)

The Executive Board governs NEKLS on a day-to-day basis and meets monthly to provide oversight and strategic direction. Board members represent a diverse 14-county region and are vital to our continued progress.

Atchison County

Gordon Myers

Doniphan County

Cindy Davis

Franklin County

David Tyler

Jefferson County

Jennifer Lloyd

Leavenworth County

Ashley Creek

Nemaha County

Kate Haynie

Shawnee County

Brenda Hough

Member-At-Large

Sean Stacey

Member-At-Large (School)

Lori Franklin

Brown County

Beverly Sunderman

Douglas County

Anne Liebst

Jackson County

Virginia Schirmer

Johnson County

Sara Eccles

Miami County

Kiersten Allen

Osage County

Jan “JB” Zwilling

Wyandotte County

Jack Granath

Member-At-Large (Academic)

Amber Ovsak

Member-At-Large

Rachael Hissong

Measuring Our Impact

SCHOOL LIBRARY GRANTS

- Collection development grants to schools totaled **\$51,000** of funding to 15 school libraries in 7 districts.
- Since beginning collection development grants in 2018, NEKLS has awarded **122** grants, totaling **\$280,750**.

ADDITIONAL GRANT OPPORTUNITIES

- Focus, Mental Wellness, and Innovation grants.
- Continuing Education grants for conferences, workshops, and MLS courses.
- Mileage reimbursement grant for summer library programs to host performers.
- Substitute Librarian program for public libraries who need meeting or CE time away.

CONSULTING

Six full time library professionals to assist you with technology, collection development, continuing education, fundraising, community relations, strategic planning, board development, and much, much more.

CONTINUING EDUCATION

NEKLS hosted 14 major continuing education events in 2024. These were complemented by numerous smaller training opportunities throughout the year.

NEXT SEARCH CATALOG

- **52** locations
- **45** participating libraries
- 2024 total circulation: **1,065,955**
- 2024 total card holders: **121,111**
- 2024 total titles owned: **401,183**
- 2024 total items owned: **978,456**

COURIER SERVICE

- **364** participating libraries
- **73,334** is the monthly average number of items shipped. The average cost is \$1.06 per item.

TECHNOLOGY

Over 70 library visits in 2024 for technology-related issues. Includes 50+ computers installed, 5 networks installed, as well as printers installed and a variety of other technology support. Daily remote and phone support.



Focus Grants: Transforming Libraries to Meet Community Needs

Through the Focus Grant program, NEKLS helps member libraries make bold, meaningful improvements to their facilities or services—projects that strengthen the library’s role as an essential part of the community. Whether enhancing spaces, expanding access, or reimagining services, these grants empower libraries to create lasting local impact.

- Atchison Public Library received \$17,000 to renovate its lower level with new carpeting, fresh paint, and movable panels, allowing flexible use for programs and events.
- Morrill Public Library (Hiawatha) received \$15,000 to enhance its outdoor areas with landscaping and a new green space for community-involved gardening programs.
- Ottawa Library received \$18,000 to build new study and meeting rooms to support quiet workspaces and small group collaboration.

School Library Collection Development Grants

In Fall 2024, NEKLS awarded \$51,000 to 15 school libraries across 7 districts through a competitive grant program at expanding and updating library collections. Grantees will provide a grant report at the conclusion of the 2024-2025 school year. In 2023, NEKLS awarded \$48,000 to 18 school libraries across 10 districts that impacted 10,435 students and 392 educators and staff.

“Because of this grant, our library was able to create an entirely new section—early reader nonfiction. Our youngest students now have a dedicated area filled with engaging, relevant titles curated just for them.”

— Amanda McCoy, Lawrence Public Schools

This grant program remains vital at a time when many school budgets can’t cover basic collection needs. “Programs and events are important,” Amanda noted, “but what school libraries need most is funding for books.”

Spanish Language Collection Expansion

NEKLS invested \$5,000 in Spanish-language ebooks and audiobooks via the State Library of Kansas Cloud Library. In 2024:

- Spanish-language checkouts increased by 38%
- Title-specific circulation rose by 44%

NEKLS also partnered with Corazón de la Nación REFORMA, donating a themed basket to the KLA Education Foundation and supporting visibility at the KLA Conference. These efforts helped recruit new REFORMA members, energizing the chapter with nuevo vida.

Aspen Discovery: A New Chapter for the Next Catalog

In 2024, NEKLS launched Aspen Discovery, a powerful enhancement to the shared Next catalog. This discovery layer brings a modern, intuitive search experience to library users across our region.

With Aspen, users benefit from:

- Smarter search results that prioritize the most relevant and desirable editions
- Enhanced title information including rich descriptions and personalized recommendations
- At-a-glance library info, such as open hours and local updates, right on each library's homepage

Aspen Discovery helps libraries put their best digital face forward—making it easier for patrons to explore, engage, and connect.

Continuing Education: Stronger Together in 2024

NEKLS delivered 14 major continuing education events, all provided at no cost to attendees, in 2024. These larger sessions brought our library community together for shared learning and support—including a full-day in-person retreat with Dr. Beth Wahler, who led us in exploring the role of trauma-informed care in public libraries.

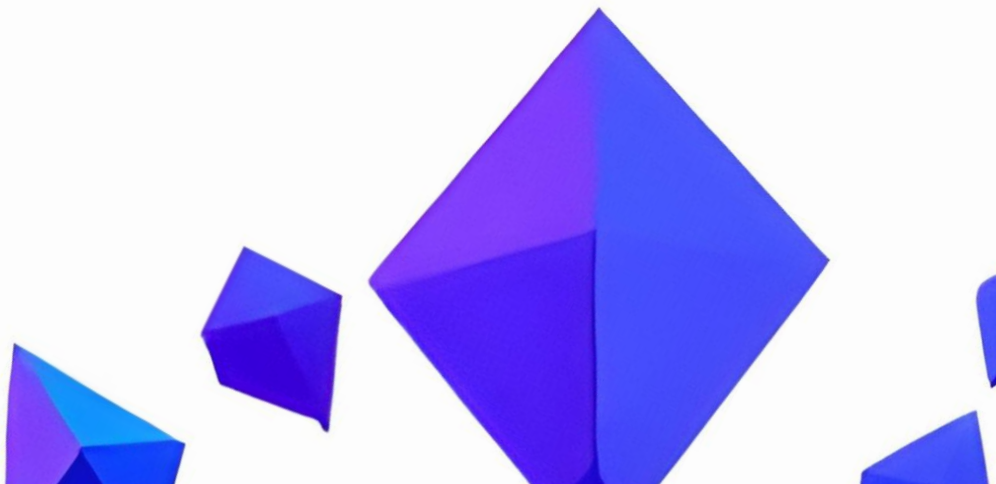
We didn't shy away from hard conversations. Sessions addressed pressing challenges like responding to substance use, overdose, and the realities of fentanyl in library spaces.

As a response to these needs, we also launched a Mental Wellness Grant opportunity, empowering libraries to create local solutions and foster staff well-being.

Beyond these marquee events, NEKLS supported dozens of additional learning opportunities, from one-on-one consultations to just-in-time virtual trainings. In every format, our aim remained the same: to equip and uplift the people who power our libraries.

Looking Ahead

As we reflect on the successes of 2024, NEKLS remains committed to supporting and empowering our member libraries in the year ahead. Together, we will continue to innovate, connect, and strengthen communities through the vital work of libraries across Northeast Kansas.



NEKL Foundation

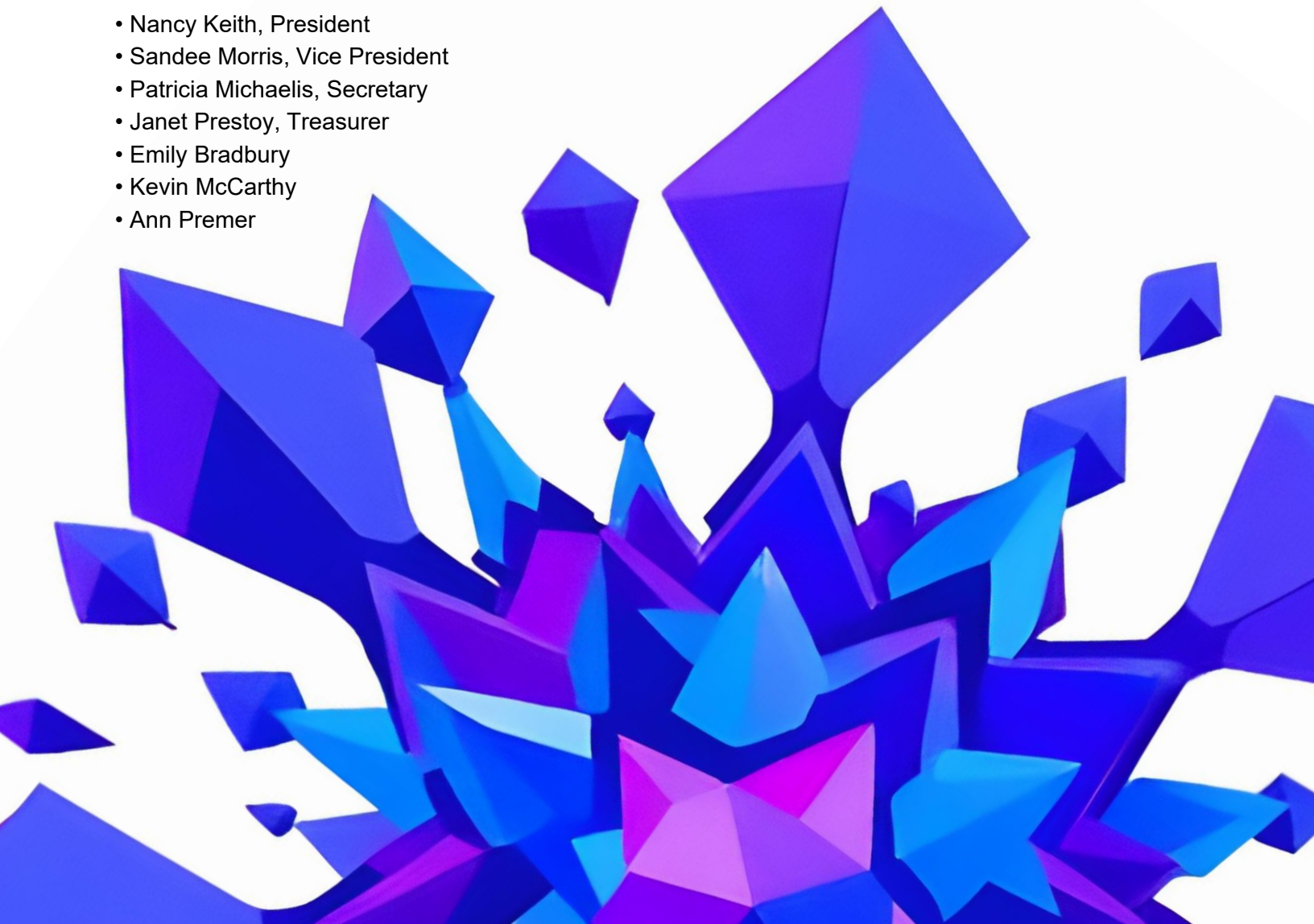
Philanthropy plays a vital role in helping libraries across Northeast Kansas thrive. It fuels innovation, supports growth, and ensures libraries remain essential hubs for learning, connection, and community well-being. Libraries are far more than buildings filled with books—they are dynamic spaces, both physical and digital, where people of all ages come to grow, explore, and belong. No matter the size of the town, a strong library strengthens the heart of the community.

About the NEKL Foundation

The Northeast Kansas Library Foundation (NEKL Foundation) is dedicated to supporting the public libraries in our region. As a registered 501(c)(3), the Foundation can accept charitable donations on behalf of any NEKLS member library—or for the entire system. These contributions help libraries enhance services, launch new programs, and bring fresh ideas to life. Often, it's this kind of support that sustains the special programs and traditions your community treasures most.

NEKL Foundation Board of Directors, 2024

- Nancy Keith, President
- Sandee Morris, Vice President
- Patricia Michaelis, Secretary
- Janet Prestoy, Treasurer
- Emily Bradbury
- Kevin McCarthy
- Ann Premer



2024 Financial Report – NEKLS

1.138 = 2024 combined General Fund and Employee Benefits Fund mill levy rate

| Revenues | \$\$ | Expenses | \$\$ |
|--|------------------|---|------------------|
| NEKLS Tax Revenue – General Fund | 2,255,587 | Grants/Subsidies to Member Libraries | 1,412,970 |
| KLE Courier Fees & Grant | 1,010,011 | Courier Services | 936,831 |
| State Library * | 73,853 | Services to Member Libraries | 34,902 |
| Next Fees | 86,175 | State Library E-Content | 36,631 |
| Other | 41,118 | Next Regional Catalog – Contractual Support | 67,958 |
| Transfer in (GF) | 130,000 | Next Regional Catalog – Resources | 34,016 |
| | | Administration & Operations | 971,576 |
| Subtotal | 3,596,744 | Subtotal | 3,494,884 |
| NEKLS Tax Revenue – Employee Benefits Fund | 328,203 | NEKLS Employee Benefits | 327,233 |
| TOTAL | 3,924,947 | Subtotal | 3,822,117 |
| | | Transfer out (CIF) | 130,000 |
| | | TOTAL | 3,952,117 |

* LSTA grant and State Aid

2024 Financial Report – NEKL Foundation

| Revenues | \$\$ | Expenses | \$\$ |
|------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| Donations to Libraries | 248,033 | Donations Remitted to Libraries | \$48,091 |
| Donations to NEKL Foundation | 200 | Operating Expenses | \$997 |
| Miscellaneous | 267 | | |
| TOTAL | 248,500 | TOTAL | \$49,088 |

The background is a complex, abstract geometric pattern. It consists of numerous faceted, three-dimensional shapes in various shades of blue and purple, arranged in a symmetrical, star-like or crystalline structure. The shapes have sharp edges and flat surfaces, creating a sense of depth and complexity. The colors range from deep indigo and violet to bright cyan and light blue.

NEKLS
your library system