

# NORTHEAST KANSAS LIBRARY SYSTEM STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

# 2025



Empowering People  
Engaging Communities  
Ensuring Sustainability  
Encouraging Literacy  
Exploring Possibilities

NEKLS  
your library system

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## OUR STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Informed by data from a 2024 member survey and a series of follow-up conversations, Northeast Kansas Library System (NEKLS) updated its Values and Strategic Priorities to better reflect the needs, challenges, and aspirations of our organization and the libraries we serve.

The NEKLS Executive Board approved the updated Strategic Framework in October 2025.

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### OUR VISION

We are leaders and innovators in providing exemplary library services.

### OUR MISSION

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

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# OUR VALUES

## CONNECTIONS

**People First** - We recognize and value the expertise of library staff, boards, and volunteers, and support their growth, recognition, and well-being.

**Collaboration** - We foster open communication, shared learning, and mutual support among member libraries.

**Community** - We position libraries as welcoming hubs for connection, learning, and belonging.

**Autonomy** - We respect each library's unique identity, culture, and decision-making authority.

**Participation** - We encourage active involvement in local, regional, state, and national library initiatives.

## ETHICS

**Confidentiality** - We protect patron privacy and uphold the confidentiality of library records and data.

**Intellectual Freedom** - We defend the right to access information, exchange ideas, and read freely without censorship.

**Integrity** - We act with honesty, fairness, and transparency in our relationships and decisions.

**Sustainability** - We model responsible stewardship of financial, environmental, and organizational resources.

## GROWTH

**Empowerment** - We build the capacity of libraries and staff to serve their communities with confidence and creativity.

**Access** - We promote equitable access to knowledge, services, and resources across the system.

**Innovation** - We support curiosity, experimentation, and the thoughtful use of technology to improve library services.

# OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Rooted in our mission, vision, and values, the NEKLS Strategic Priorities reflect the voices and needs of our member libraries.

The five priorities—Empowering People, Engaging Communities, Ensuring Sustainability, Encouraging Literacy, and Exploring Possibilities—help NEKLS and its members align efforts, respond to emerging needs, and pursue improvement with purpose and clarity.



# EMPOWERING PEOPLE



We invest in the growth, leadership, and well-being of NEKLS staff and the people who power member libraries—staff, trustees, and volunteers—through targeted support, mentorship, and inclusive practices.

Library employees come from diverse educational and professional backgrounds. One ongoing challenge for library leaders is ensuring staff receive the support needed to grow within their roles and the organization.

NEKLS recognizes that people thrive in strong relationships. Communication and collaboration are essential, and we see it as our role to foster both across the system. We believe that leadership exists at every level and that each person's growth path is unique.

We support this by offering professional development and mentoring opportunities that build leadership and confidence. We advocate for fair compensation and help libraries explore sustainable options for salaries, benefits, and additional support that contribute to staff wellness and satisfaction.

NEKLS applies this same commitment to the growth and well-being of our own staff.

## Key Needs

- Skilled and supported library staff, boards, and volunteers
- Peer connection and communities of practice
- Tools and guidance for leadership development and mentoring

## Key Outcomes

- Stronger capacity across library roles and responsibilities
- Improved internal communication and collaboration
- More confident leaders at NEKLS and member libraries

# ENGAGING COMMUNITY



We help libraries build responsive programs, advocacy efforts, and community relationships—and model this by engaging our member libraries as a community of our own.

Communities take many forms—rooted in place, shaped by shared interests, and built through relationships with family, friends, colleagues, and neighbors. Libraries are uniquely positioned to serve a wide spectrum of these communities, often acting as a crossroads for connection, learning, and support.

NEKLS will support libraries in engaging their communities more intentionally by providing tools and guidance for uncovering local goals, values, and evolving needs. We will support libraries in developing responsive programming, forming strong partnerships, and using outcome-based tools to evaluate and improve their impact.

We also see our member libraries as our core community. We will continuously seek dialogue, listen deeply, and adapt our services to provide greater value. By participating in leadership and service across all levels of the library ecosystem, NEKLS will model community engagement that is proactive, collaborative, and meaningful.

## Key Needs

- Community and stakeholder awareness
- Local partnerships and outreach strategies
- Identification and engagement with partners for library services

## Key Outcomes

- Stronger relationships between libraries and their communities
- Programs and services that reflect local priorities
- Broadened engagement at the regional, state, and national levels

# ENSURING SUSTAINABILITY



We support libraries in financial planning, resource management, and operational resilience—and model sustainable practices in our own organization.

Libraries face a persistent challenge—their vital work is often invisible to those who benefit from it. To sustain and grow their impact, libraries must both manage resources wisely and communicate their value effectively.

NEKLS will partner with directors and boards to deepen understanding of library governance, budgeting, and statutory responsibilities. We will offer training on advocacy, grant writing, and fundraising strategies that connect a library's story to community priorities.

We will expand our support for member libraries' fundraising efforts through the Northeast Kansas Library Foundation

Resource sharing remains central to NEKLS's mission. We will continue to support the equitable sharing of collections, expertise, and innovative ideas across the system.

Finally, NEKLS will model and promote environmentally sustainable and socially equitable practices—helping libraries align operations with the long-term health of their communities.

## Key Needs

- Budget and funding awareness
- Training in fundraising and grant writing
- Equitable access to shared resources and systems

## Key Outcomes

- Better understanding of fiscal responsibilities
- Increased local and regional fundraising capacity
- Libraries better positioned for long-term success and sustainability

# ENCOURAGING LITERACY



We champion libraries' pursuit of lifelong learning and responsive literacy initiatives—while connecting them to shared resources, partners, and evolving best practices.

In the 21st century, literacy extends far beyond reading and writing. To fully engage in society and seize opportunities, individuals must develop a broad set of skills across multiple domains.

At NEKLS, we define foundational literacy to include reading, writing, speaking, numeracy, and data fluency. However, we also recognize the growing need for other forms of literacy—such as digital, critical thinking, financial, health, and civic literacy—that empower individuals to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

We encourage libraries to assess the specific needs of their communities and to play an active role in building pathways for lifelong learning. As a multi-type regional system, NEKLS is uniquely positioned to help libraries strengthen their role in advancing literacy across generations.

NEKLS will collaborate with libraries to address these and other vital literacies, ensuring our communities are well-informed, capable, and empowered.

## Key Needs

- Literacy-informed library services
- Partnerships that support lifelong learning
- Emphasis on digital, financial, and other vital literacies

## Key Outcomes

- Expanded literacy offerings and supports
- Stronger connections with education providers
- Libraries as essential contributors to community learning



# EXPLORING POSSIBILITIES



We drive innovation by encouraging experimentation with new ideas, technologies, and service models, and by sharing lessons learned to help libraries adapt and grow.

In today's rapidly evolving landscape, organizations that don't experiment and innovate risk becoming irrelevant. The challenge for NEKLS and our member libraries is to continuously explore fresh ideas, test new approaches, and find creative solutions that address both emerging challenges and untapped opportunities.

Through continuing education programs, we'll introduce the latest trends, thought leaders, and best practices. We'll also facilitate collaborations, providing resources and funds that allow libraries to experiment and evaluate what works best in their communities, with potential for broader implementation across the region.

As a nimble organization, NEKLS is committed to staying proactive in identifying opportunities and responsive in developing solutions. Our staff will remain attuned to the changing needs of our communities, actively seeking new approaches and ideas. While not all experiments will be successful, we believe in the importance of testing ideas and learning from them. When launching new initiatives, NEKLS will solicit feedback from our members to improve and refine services, ensuring that each iteration leads to stronger and more effective outcomes.

## Key Needs

- Resources and technology to pilot new ideas
- Processes for testing, feedback, and iteration
- Courage (and permission) to end what is no longer supporting the community

## Key Outcomes

- Greater experimentation and learning across the system
- Projects shaped by input and community feedback
- Scalable ideas and tools that benefit multiple libraries

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## ACTIVATING THE FRAMEWORK

The development of the NEKLS Strategic Framework marks the beginning of an ongoing process. NEKLS staff will continuously review and refine the framework, ensuring it remains adaptable and aligned with both internal growth and the evolving needs of our member libraries.

To ensure the framework remains dynamic and responsive, we will:

- ✓ Refer to the NEKLS Strategic Priorities Framework regularly to guide planning and decision-making, and review it at staff meetings when discussing projects and initiatives.
  - ✓ Check in with each member library annually to listen, gather feedback, and discuss how NEKLS can better support their goals.
  - ✓ Use evaluation data to inform annual budget planning and resource allocation.
  - ✓ Produce an Annual Report that highlights accomplishments aligned with the Strategic Priorities.
  - ✓ Support the ongoing professional development of NEKLS staff to strengthen leadership capacity.
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