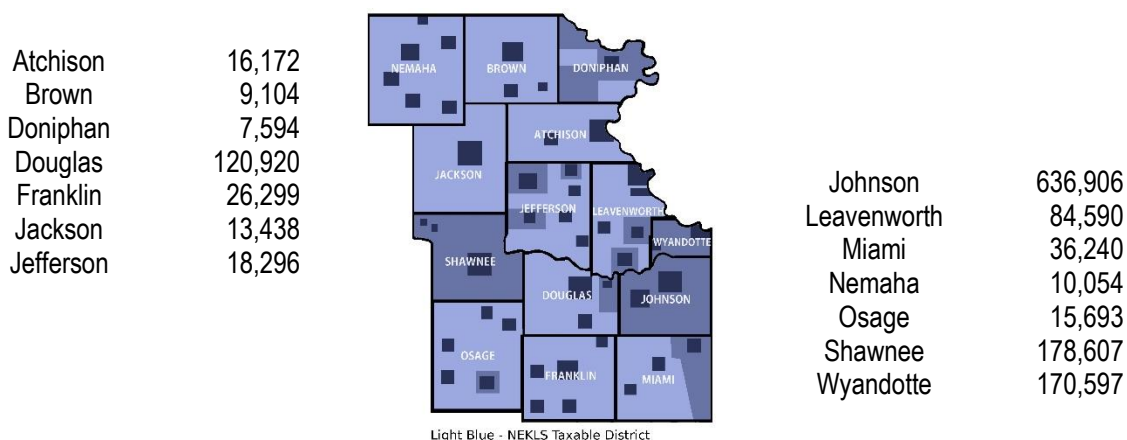


Introduction to NEKLS

NEKLS is one of seven regional systems of cooperating libraries in the State of Kansas and includes a mix of urban, suburban and rural areas in a 14-county region that includes over 1.34 million or 45% of the total Kansas population. A large majority of the population is within the Kansas City metro – Lawrence – Topeka corridor. Population figures dropped slightly for many of the rural communities in the region while some are experiencing modest growth. Twenty-one member public libraries serve populations less than 2,500, fourteen of which serve populations less than 1,000.



Population source: <https://budget.kansas.gov/population/>

Member Libraries: NEKLS has a diverse membership of 118 libraries, including:

- 49 Public libraries
- 51 School districts and private schools
- 11 academic libraries
- 7 special libraries

Governance: A System Board of 147 members (118 member libraries, 11 County Commission Appointees, 18 Executive Board Members) governs NEKLS and meets annually in August or September to approve the System budget. An 18-member Executive Board governs on a day-to-day basis and meets monthly.

Building & Infrastructure: NEKLS owns its headquarters building, which includes a training room with capacity for 40 and hybrid capabilities utilizing a dedicated Zoom room; a collaboration room for small meetings and private Zoom meetings; a courier sorting and supply area; a conference room suitable for twelve attendees, and office space for twelve staff. Two system vehicles support staff travel within the region.

Role of NEKLS

As a regional library system, NEKLS is called by state statute [K.S.A. 75-2547](#) et seq. to contribute to the provision of library services to all residents of the region.

K.S.A. 75-2547. Regional systems of cooperating libraries; purpose. *The purpose of this act is for the state in cooperation with local libraries to provide adequate library services to all citizens of the state through the regional systems of cooperating libraries herein provided, by use of joint planning and financing of library services to improve existing service, to utilize such federal aid funds as may be available and to extend library service to persons not having the same at this time.*

To understand the purpose of a regional system like NEKLS, one first needs to understand that libraries are essential to the communities they serve. **Libraries are a community necessity** – not a luxury – and should be funded as such.

Libraries

- ✓ Encourage patrons of all ages to **achieve literacy**: reading skills, information and digital literacy, financial literacy, health literacy, etc. This is accomplished through library-sponsored programs, online learning resources and broad library collections.
- ✓ Offer **educational resources and learning opportunities** to everyone. Here, patrons might explore a new hobby, research a DIY project, learn bicycle repair, or plan a vacation. They might **develop life skills** by taking classes on such things as cooking, shopping on a budget, basic sewing methods, time management, organizational skills and strategies, basic first aid, and managing self-care. This is accomplished through library-sponsored programs, online learning resources and broad library collections.
- ✓ Provide access to **entertainment and build community**. Here, patrons can find a good book or check out a new movie, join a book club, participate in trivia nights, attend a movie night or join a special-interest group on topics such as gardening, cycling, birding, or photography.
- ✓ Provide programs that **enrich student lives**: summer reading, story times, after-school STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art and math) programs, career exploration, tutoring, etc.
- ✓ Support **business growth and job readiness**. Libraries promote entrepreneurship, support small businesses, and assist individuals with career development. Here, patrons can learn new job skills, prepare a resume, apply for jobs, hold a meeting with a client, create a business plan, etc. Also, businesses recognize the value of having a public library in the community where their employees live and work.

- ✓ Offer **broadband access**. In some communities, the library may be the only free source of access to the internet.
- ✓ Curate **special collections** that encourage exploration and innovation. Some libraries have maker spaces where patrons engage in hands-on experiences to learn new skills and create. Some libraries circulate “things” such as tools, seeds, binoculars, fishing poles, etc.
- ✓ **Preserve local history**. Some libraries participate in projects to digitize photographs and other artifacts, record oral histories, and promote genealogical research.

Regional library systems make local libraries stronger for all residents of the region. NEKLS endeavors to inspire and empower member libraries to engage, educate and add value to their communities.

We accomplish this mission in several ways . . .

- ✓ **Consulting services** that help library directors and library boards to work through challenges and arrive at good solutions. The goal is to foster strong governance of the library – e.g. sound policies, responsible budget practices, proper personnel practices, and legal compliance.
- ✓ Diverse **continuing education and training opportunities** that strengthen the knowledge and skills of library staff and library boards to better serve the community. For various reasons, many libraries cannot offer training opportunities to staff. NEKLS fills this gap through training and education opportunities provided by NEKLS staff or an outside expert. NEKLS partners with other Kansas regional systems on some training opportunities. In addition, NEKLS provides deeper training to new library directors and orientation sessions for new board members.
- ✓ Ongoing development and support for an **online learning management system** that supports continuing education and training for library staff and boards.
- ✓ **Technical assistance** to library staff and financial support that provides more cost-effective digital content to patrons – ebooks, audiobooks, videos, periodicals, etc.
- ✓ Coordinating the **Next shared catalog** for the NEKLS region, which allows participating libraries to share collections in an efficient and budget-friendly manner.
- ✓ Coordinating **statewide courier service**, ensuring patrons receive materials from other libraries in a timely manner. The sharing of materials affords patrons access to a broader selection of information and saves libraries from having to purchase every item that patrons may seek.
- ✓ Impactful **grants and subsidies**. NEKLS projects to provide \$1.6 million spread throughout the system in the form of continuing education grants; courier subsidies; digital content; library development grants to public libraries; competitive grants, including school library grants; and other subsidies.
- ✓ Other **programs and services**, including E-Rate assistance and website hosting.