

NEKLS

your library system

2025 ANNUAL REPORT



2025

**stronger
communities**
POWERED BY LIBRARIES

A message from our director

Dear Friends:

The case for libraries has never been more important to make — or easier to prove.

Across our 14-county region, NEKLS member libraries served 1,338,927 residents in 2025 — nearly 45% of the state's total population. They helped job seekers update resumes, connected families to early childhood resources, gave students a place to land after school, and offered rural communities digital access they couldn't get anywhere else. This is the daily work of libraries — practical, unglamorous, and essential.

At NEKLS, our role is to make sure that work is possible. In 2025, we delivered 16 continuing education events at no cost to attendees, distributed \$1,494,775 in grants and subsidies to member libraries, completed 81 technology site visits, and continued building the shared infrastructure — courier services, the Next catalog, consulting — that allows even our smallest libraries to punch above their weight.

This year we also launched our Stronger Communities, Powered by Libraries advocacy campaign — asking patrons across the region to share what their library means to them. The response exceeded our expectations. Nearly 180 people wrote to tell us, in their own words, what these institutions provide that nothing else does. You'll find some of those voices in the pages that follow.

The patrons featured in these pages — from McLouth, Bonner Springs, and Lawrence Public Libraries — volunteered their time for this campaign. We are grateful for their generosity.

The numbers in this report reflect a year of consequential work. The stories tell you why it matters. Both are worth your time.

With appreciation,



Michael McDonald, Director
Northeast Kansas Library System

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Northeast Kansas by the numbers.

118 member libraries

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

14 counties

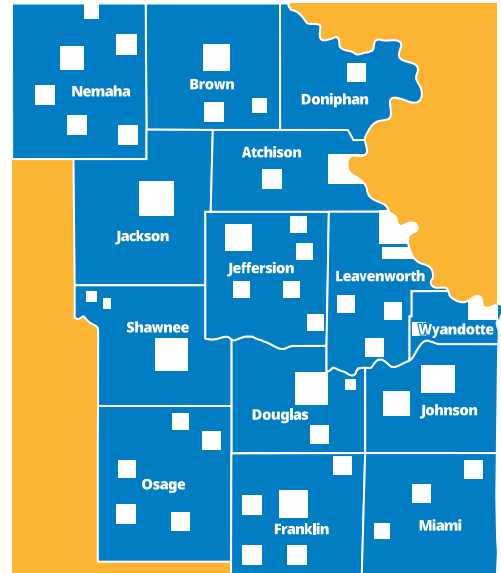
- From growing suburbs to small towns.
- 13 libraries serving communities of fewer than 1,000 residents.

1.34M Kansans served

- 1,338,927 residents — 45% of the state's total population of 2,970,606. The most densely served library region in Kansas.

58 years serving the region

- NEKLS has supported member libraries since 1967. The communities change. The mission doesn't.



In their own words.

Nearly 180 patrons across Northeast Kansas shared what their library means to them. Here are five of those voices.

“My library has been a **special and safe place** for myself and my children to go to when we were at a point that we did not have a stable home. Now that we do, we continue to use the library as a wonderful and fun focal place — for books and activities.”

Summer, age 37 | Leavenworth Public Library
Business Operations Specialist

“I value the library because it serves as **an important community resource**. It provides a reliable place where I can meet with clients, access technology, and support them in their journey toward employment.”

Daniel, age 30 | Horton Library
Employment Specialist

“Love the McLouth library and the book club I belong to there. After my husband passed, **it's been a real blessing** to have things to do there.”

Cynthia, age 94 | McLouth Public Library

“**My library has been a lifeline** for me — not only does it provide media and books, but it creates spaces for groups to meet and discuss pressing issues, philosophical ideas, and current events. When my kids were little, we went weekly. Now I find my library to be an integral part of the life of my community.”

Dave, age 63 | Bonner Springs City Library
Executive Director

“During the government shutdown of 2025, my family and I lived on Fort Leavenworth. Many services on post were affected by the closure — including the post library. I found the Leavenworth Public Library just outside the gate. **My family jumped right in to the many programs offered**. The Leavenworth Public Library became our safe haven.”

Britney, age 31 | Leavenworth Public Library
Mother



Your library's team behind the scenes.

Most libraries in Northeast Kansas operate with small staffs and lean budgets. A director in a town of 800 may also be the cataloger, the children's programmer, the IT contact, and the grant writer. NEKLS consulting exists so that no library has to navigate its hardest challenges alone.

Six full-time library professionals are available to every NEKLS member library — public, school, academic, and special — at no cost. The range of support is broad by design:

- Strategic planning
- Board development & training
- Fundraising & development
- Intellectual freedom
- Collection development
- Technology
- Human resources
- Advocacy
- Marketing & public relations
- Budget & finances
- Space planning
- Community engagement
- And more

This isn't a hotline or a helpdesk. It's a team of credentialed professionals who know the region, know the libraries, and show up — in person, by phone, or virtually — when the work gets complicated.

In Practice

“Like everyone, we are considering generative AI and its impact. When we started working on guidelines for staff AI usage, I reached out to Robin Hastings to ask for her input. Not only did she engage in a super helpful conversation with me, but she also shared resources, and joined a meeting with our Management Team to answer questions. She shared that she was working on a guide for ALA about public libraries and AI policies and guidelines. She's a leader in our field, and we are lucky she is just a few miles and a phone call away.”

Brenda Hough
Topeka & Shawnee County
Public Library

NEKLS in 2025

118 member libraries
14 counties
1,338,927 Kansans served

Here's what **we delivered.**

Grants & Subsidies

\$1,494,775 delivered to member libraries in 2025

From library development grants to school collection funding, NEKLS grants and subsidies are the single largest investment we make in our member libraries each year.

Courier Service

366 participating libraries statewide

72,834 items shipped monthly on average — at \$1.12 per item, one of the most cost-effective shared services in the state.

School Library Grants

\$51,000 awarded in 2025 — \$280,750 since 2018

15 school libraries across 8 districts. 6,714 students and 390 educators impacted — at a time when most school budgets can't cover basic collection needs.



In Practice

"I was able to purchase 57 new audiobooks for the library collection — a new section for my library. I selected titles that were popular, on the William Allen White list, and had a diverse range of characters, subjects, settings, and reading levels. This collection allows students who need support with reading, or those who have a preferred reading style, to have access to materials they might otherwise not read. Because I tripled my offerings of audiobooks, students have been excited to read more widely."

Meghan Baranski
Library Media Specialist
Washburn Rural Middle School

...and **we delivered even more.**

Continuing Education

16 events — all provided at no cost to attendees

From full-day retreats to just-in-time virtual trainings — bringing library staff together from across the region for shared learning and peer support. Highlights included Libraries in Action: What's the big AI-dea? and The Library: A Community Asset in Disaster Preparedness, Response and Recovery, led by Jessi Harris.

Ongoing Content

NEKLS also produces two ongoing content series for the library community: Season 5 of the Unbound Podcast and the Kansas Library Interview Series — both available year-round as professional development resources for member library staff.

Next Search Catalog

1,045,343 total circulations in 2025

50 participating libraries. 112,544 cardholders. 400,860 titles and 972,284 items owned across the shared collection.

Technology

81 library site visits in 2025

50 computers and 15 networks installed — plus printers, daily remote support, and phone assistance keeping libraries connected and operational.

In Practice

“After the directors' meeting where David Vinjamuri spoke about item placement and impulse buying, I started thinking about how to move older material at our library. We repositioned books to face forward on the top shelves and told staff not to refill them for a week — just to see what happened. That week, we checked out 19 older books, including several nonfiction titles that had been sitting untouched. We kept going: weeded DVDs, opened up the sightline to the teen area, used the proceeds to purchase mobile display units for rotating themes and new releases. That directors' meeting was one of the most beneficial events I've attended in my five years as a director.”

Heather Garrison
Carbondale City Library



NEKL **Foundation**

The Northeast Kansas Library Foundation exists because public funding, however essential, has never been the whole story. Private philanthropy fills gaps, funds new ideas, and sustains the programs communities count on most. In a year when the value of libraries was debated at every level of government, donor support mattered more than ever.

As a registered 501(c)(3), the NEKL Foundation accepts charitable donations on behalf of any NEKLS member public library — or for the system as a whole. Those contributions go directly to the libraries that need them.

Library Giving Day 2025

216 donations totaling \$15,752 raised

338% increase in gift count

177% increase in funds raised vs. 2024

This year's campaign launched with a \$10,000 matching initiative — and the response exceeded every expectation. The first donation arrived at 7:03 AM. By end of day, 105 gifts had come in — more than double the previous year's entire campaign total. The match cap was achieved before the day was out.

Top Performers

- Leavenworth | \$3,058 from 21 gifts
- Bonner Springs | 41 gifts, most of any library
- McLouth | 21 gifts, remarkable engagement for a small library

Stronger Communities, Powered by Libraries

In fall 2025, the NEKL Foundation launched Stronger Communities, Powered by Libraries — a regional advocacy campaign built around a simple idea: let patrons speak for themselves. Posters, bookmarks, and a one-pager went to member libraries across the region. A 'Share Your Story' invitation asked patrons to describe, in their own words, what their library means to them. Nearly 180 people responded. Their voices are woven throughout this report — and will carry into our advocacy work in 2026.



NEKL Financial Report

2025

Revenues

NEKLS Tax Revenue – General Fund	2,279,841
State Grant-in-Aid	109,358
Transfer in (GF)	183,000
Other	107,720
Subtotal	2,679,919
NEKLS Tax Revenue –	
Employee Benefits Fund	354,206
KLE Courier Fees & Grant	1,031,191
Total	4,065,316

Expenditures

Grants & Subsidies to Libraries	1,494,775
Services to Libraries	71,610
Next Regional Catalog – Contractual Support	45,145
Next Regional Catalog – Resources	28,952
Administration & Operations	1,058,289
Subtotal	2,698,771
NEKLS Employee Benefits	379,826
KLE Courier Services	978,827
Transfer out (CIF)	183,000
Total	4,240,424

NEKL Foundation Financial Report

2025

Revenues

Donations	21,059
Grants	65,100
Other	1,077
Total	87,236

Expenditures

Donations Remitted to Libraries	16,985
Grant Expenses	200,000
Contribution Fees	489
Operating Expenses	757
Total	218,231

NEKLS Executive Board

2025

Gordon Myers, *Atchison County*
Beverly Sunderman, *Brown County*
Cindy Davis, *Doniphan County*
Anne Liebst, *Douglas County*
David Tyler, *Franklin County*
Virginia Schirmer, *Jackson County*
Jennifer Lloyd, *Jefferson County*
Sara Eccles, *Johnson County*
Jacque Slingsby, *Leavenworth County*
Kiersten Allen, *Miami County*
Kate Haynie, *Nemaha County*
Jan "JB" Zwilling, *Osage County, Board Chair*
Brenda Hough, *Shawnee County*
Laura Hunt Pellegrino, *Wyandotte County*
Amber Ovsak, *Member-at-Large (Academic)*
Lori Franklin, *Member-at-Large (Schools)*
Rachael Hissong, *Member-at-Large*
Sarah Goodwin Thiel, *Member-at-Large*

NEKL Foundation Board Of Directors

2025

Nancy Keith, *President*
Sandee Morris, *Vice President*
Kevin McCarthy, *Secretary*
Diana Weaver, *Treasurer*
Emily Bradbury
Ann Premer
Logan Isaman-Unruh

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