



Strategic Plan
FY 2020 - FY 2023

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Mission

The Augusta County Library provides a welcoming gathering place with convenient access to information, experiences, and materials for the benefit of all members of the community.

Vision

In all Augusta County communities, the Library is celebrated as the centerpiece of learning and exploration, where individuals and families discover, create, have fun, fulfill their aspirations, and connect with each other.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

In preparation for its first site visit, the consulting team reviewed key County planning and economic development documents, demographics, and other publicly available statistics. Meeting with the Library's Strategic Planning Committee (SPC), the consultants presented significant trends and best practices in library services and facilitated a SWOT workshop.

A market segmentation study applied consumer data to the Library's patron list as well as the general services area population to inform decision-making around collections, programming, and communications. Using patron addresses, the Library user base was compared in the aggregate against segments that make up the larger community to determine penetration by segment and opportunities for community outreach. Concurrently, Library leadership conducted interviews with key individuals in the service area who could provide insights into County needs and priorities as well as the Library's reputation and visibility. The Library also conducted an online survey, promoted digitally, to give voice to any County resident who wished to participate. By a large margin, most respondents were Library users (defined as having visited three or more times in person, by phone, or online within the past 12 months).

During a Planning Summit, the consultants reviewed research findings and facilitated conversations about facilities, staffing, funding constraints, and emerging priority needs—Collections, Programming, and Communications. These priorities became the focal points of the new Plan. Subsequently, staff worked in groups to develop responsive strategies and determine how they would be implemented.

The Library's vision and mission statements were reviewed for their relevance and revised to reflect the Library's contribution to the County's educational prospects, workforce development, and overall quality of life.

THE COUNTY AND ITS LIBRARY

Augusta County has been transformed over the past twenty years by rapid population growth. The County has encouraged development around existing infrastructure—tracts adjoining Waynesboro, Fishersville, Stuarts Draft, and Weyers Cave—while preserving large swaths of rural areas.

The Library strives to provide equitable service to all 75,558 residents of the County’s sprawling 970 square miles of urban, suburban, small town, and rural communities. A series of renovations to the main library in Fishersville and the addition of stations in Middlebrook, Stuarts Draft, and Weyers Cave have expanded the Library’s reach, but fiscal constraints leave many residents in the most remote parts of the County without easy access to its programs and services. Because broadband service is either unreliable or unavailable in rural areas, many residents cannot access the Library’s valuable array of electronic resources.

Nevertheless, demand for library services is anticipated to continue to grow as the current financial crisis strains household budgets. The Library’s 2019 Annual Report cited

- 16.6% increase in the number of programs,
- 58.9% increase in program attendance,
- 25% increase in Wi-Fi usage,
- 14% increase in the number of library patrons, and
- 9.8% increase in hold requests.

The County’s Comprehensive Plan Update calls on the Augusta County Library (ACL) to address changing demographics by increasing outreach and service delivery efforts, supporting academic achievement and emerging literacies, developing advantageous partnerships, and collaborating with other County departments. County leaders stress the importance of the Library’s role in internet/computer access and training, job search assistance, and workforce development. They believe the Library must increase public awareness of all it has to offer, and they understand there is a need to add locations, satellites, and/or other access points.

The strategic areas of focus in this plan—collections, programming, and communications—incorporate these mandates in the context of always increasing ease of access to the Library’s resources.

THE LIBRARY'S SERVICE POPULATION

- ◆ The largest age cohorts in the County are individuals between 5 and 17 and between 45 and 54.
- ◆ 65.4% of all Augusta County parents in the labor force have children under age 6; 71.6% have children ages 6-17.
- ◆ The largest demographic living in poverty in Augusta County is females between the ages of 35-44. For Virginia as a whole, the demographic most affected by poverty is that of females between the ages of 18-24.
- ◆ Many of the most sparsely populated areas of the County lack public transportation and/or reliable internet.
- ◆ 15.8% of Augusta County households do not have a computer, and 27.6% do not subscribe to broadband internet.

	Median Age	Poverty Rate	Median HH Income	Median Property Value	% High School Grad or Higher	% Bachelor's Degree or Higher
Augusta County	44.6	8.83%	\$59,544	\$206,300	87.4%	23.5%
Staunton, VA	42.0	13.3%	\$46,435	\$162,500	89.3%	19.0%
Waynesboro, VA	40.0	17.4%	\$42,112	\$161,600	86.6%	14.1%
Virginia	38.3	11.2%	\$72,577	\$281,700	89.9%	22.3%

INFRASTRUCTURE CHALLENGES

Successful implementation of the Library’s 2020-2023 Strategic Plan will rest to a great extent on institutional capacity—the condition and location of facilities, staffing levels, and funding commitments.

Facilities

Augusta County Library ranks highly when benchmarked against Virginia’s 92 other library systems. While it is 32nd in service area population, it ranks 26th in the annual number of visits. To provide this level of service across the County, the Library has been inventive in co-locating and repurposing facilities. However, as population and service demands continue to grow, the County must look to a comprehensive overview of its library facilities and the configuration of services within those facilities.

In particular:

- ◆ A reconsideration of the service model and space that would best serve the small population of Deerfield
- ◆ A well-appointed, visually appealing, and spacious standalone branch with expanded hours for the fast-growing Stuarts Draft area
- ◆ A renegotiation with the Town of Craigsville for a larger footprint for the Library and 24/7 Wi-Fi access
- ◆ Updated HVAC systems and meeting space renovations at Fishersville
- ◆ Upgraded décor, restrooms, and HVAC at Churchville
- ◆ Expansion of the Middlebrook station to incorporate a meeting room, study spaces, and additional computer workstations
- ◆ Additional investment in developing the Weyers Cave outpost into a full-service branch

Staffing

Augusta County Library ranks 23rd in the Commonwealth in the number of outlets, but 37th in staffing—a shortfall exacerbated by the inefficiencies inherent in a system with so many small and far-flung

facilities. (For example, Suffolk County, Virginia—also suburban and rural—has twice as many staff serving essentially the same size population.) Staff levels are strained to the point that senior leadership is performing “double duty” at circulation and reference desks as well as conveying materials to outlying stations.

Recommendations include:

- ◆ Reassigning the Assistant Director to become Director of Branch Services for more productive inter-library cooperation and coordination;
- ◆ Upgrading Library Station Managers to Library Assistant II;
- ◆ Assessing the feasibility of hiring a Director of Technical Services;
- ◆ Funding approved promotions; and
- ◆ Adding the following positions to support service levels:
 - Churchville: full time Aide
 - Stuarts Draft and Weyers Cave: Librarian I—Branch Manager, Library Assistant II, full time Aide
 - Fishersville: Librarian I—Adult Services, Library Assistant II—Youth Services.

Funding

Augusta County Library is funded at \$17.85 *per capita*, far less than the average Virginia library rate of \$32.86 *per capita*. While it ranks 32nd in service area population, it ranks 56th in total operating revenues.

Further straining the budget are the costs of maintaining multiple sites and keeping pace with technology. The still-wide digital divide necessitates funding for equipment, such as the purchase of Chromebooks to support home schooling and Wi-Fi hotspots.

STRATEGIC AREAS OF FOCUS

Collections: What the Research Tells Us

- ◆ Survey respondents indicated Augusta County Library's most important role is as a source for books and other media, both physical and digital, and users report that the quality and variety of these collections are satisfactory. Nevertheless, respondents name print materials as the offering they would most like to see the Library expand, especially for the purpose of reducing wait times.
- ◆ While visits *per capita* (2.45) are lower than the state median (3.75), ACL's circulation *per capita* (6.57) is higher, indicating that those who can and do visit the Library make excellent use of the collection. As schools move to more online instruction, ACL's e-collection usage is anticipated to increase.
- ◆ ACL's 0.58 turnover rate was lower than both the state average of 1.30 and the state median of 0.84, attributable in part to the need to maintain core collections and duplicates of popular materials in smaller libraries.

Collections: Service Responses

Facilitate access to materials, particularly for individuals and communities with limited transportation options.

- ◆ Explore partnerships, grants, and additional funding to launch service to homebound individuals.
- ◆ Expand Books on Wheels (BOW).
- ◆ Improve marketing of online services to patrons with lack of transport.
- ◆ Create "pop-ups" at assisted care facilities and communities.
- ◆ Rebalance and diversify collections.
- ◆ Aggressively weed and rebalance permanent collections of smaller libraries.
- ◆ Budget for weekly courier service for more frequent branch and station collection refreshes.

- ◆ Apply market segmentation data to outlet-specific collection development purchases.
- ◆ Promote and test with designated holdings code expanded collection categories to appeal to underserved segments.
- ◆ Seek funding for developing, promoting, and maintaining a Library of Things, including toys, professional attire for job interviews, and tools, etc., to be cross-marketed with other relevant collection materials.

Programming: What the Research Tells Us

- ◆ Covid-19 has hindered both staff's ability to provide traditional programming and the public's willingness to participate.
- ◆ Nevertheless, during the pandemic, school reopening and instructional decisions will increase demand for home schooling support.
- ◆ Limited staff and the additional locations call for a reevaluation of programming.

Programming: Service Responses

Build on the Library's longstanding commitment to educational support.

- ◆ Reach out to local agencies to develop a resource and outreach network with adult education and career advisory service providers.
- ◆ Coordinate and communicate with County teaching staff and reading specialists to identify support needs for distance learning students.
- ◆ Provide additional Wi-Fi hot spots for check out, with particular focus on the most remote Library outposts.

Explore alternative program options.

- ◆ Budget for additional staffing, supplies, and a mode of transporting materials.
- ◆ Establish baseline measures and track program attendance.

- ◆ Provide both print and online forms to evaluate the appeal, relevance, and quality of all programs.
- ◆ Eliminate low-attendance, limited-appeal programs.
- ◆ Test alternative methods for program delivery (virtual, pop-up, outdoor) in venues large enough to maintain social distancing.
- ◆ Develop additional and diverse passive programming (fairy garden walks, story book walks, scavenger hunts, etc.).
- ◆ Host multigenerational programs emphasizing do-it-yourself, crafts, and cost savings topics, in partnerships with community members and organizations.
- ◆ Recruit volunteers for Books on Wheels (BOW) transport and seek input from County teachers about programming for BOW-eligible students.

Communications: What the Research Tells Us

- ◆ Interviews with community leaders and survey comments demonstrate a limited understanding of the full scope of Library resources and services.
- ◆ A total of 19,796 households—almost two-thirds of the County’s households—are not active users of the Library.
- ◆ 73% of survey respondents prefer to learn about Library programs and services through online or electronic media, rather than traditional sources such as flyers, newspapers, and PSAs. However, electronic communications do not reach the nearly 28% of Augusta County households without broadband service.

Communications: Service Responses

Apply market segmentation insights to develop a marketing plan that prioritizes targets, selects services to be promoted, and identifies media preferences.

- ◆ Launch an aggressive all-County card registration drive, with smaller campaigns targeting the County’s opportunity segments.
- ◆ Emphasize home schooling and distance learning resources in all outreach communications.

- ◆ Increase promotion of ACL’s online newsletter by word-of-mouth, in-house signage, handouts, and social media posts.
- ◆ Test non-electronic, targeted communications to underserved market segments.
- ◆ Include a line item in the budget for marketing and explore grant opportunities (Dollar General, Community Foundation of the Blue Ridge, etc.) to fund targeted advertising costs (e.g. Facebook boosts, Google ads), printing, and branded giveaways.
- ◆ Improve marketing of the Library’s current educational resources to market segments with children.
- ◆ Establish baseline measures of cardholders, program participants, and platform use to assess performance of communications vehicles and activities.

Develop alternate communications channels.

- ◆ Coordinate with Parks and Recreation so that the *Activities Guide* can be reconfigured to reach targeted demographic(s).
- ◆ Explore working with selected partners to expand messaging reach.
- ◆ Provide staff training to increase staff and volunteer comfort with verbally promoting the Library, cross-selling its resources, and encouraging program promotions with each patron interaction.
- ◆ Utilize community resource pages (such as the Churchville Community Page, In the Draft, Middlebrook, and Craigsville pages) to promote service.

Market current collections more effectively.

- ◆ Provide staff training on effective merchandising techniques.
- ◆ Test bookstore model of collection organization in Stuarts Draft and/or Weyers Cave.
- ◆ Apply genre markers and develop more visible collection displays.
- ◆ Develop family of *Readers Advisory* publications for online referral and in-library distribution.
- ◆ Add a cross-marketing segment to Radio Reference (as in “If you liked...” or “Now that it’s nearing election time, you might want to read...”) with a particular focus on cross-promoting print materials with online resources, audio- and e-book, Young Adult, and DVD collections.

- ◆ Develop system-wide branded, thematic programming to facilitate more cost-effective targeted marketing.

Improve internal communications.

- ◆ Encourage staff to use the password protected blog and provide training where needed.
- ◆ Begin program of staff rotation to all locations to encourage familiarity with all communities within the service area.
- ◆ Explore installing G Suite or similar tools to facilitate centralized schedules, calendars, and communications.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Demographic and Library Use Data

- ◆ Census: data.census.gov
- ◆ Data USA: datausa.io/profile/geo/augusta-county-va
- ◆ Library of Virginia: lva.virginia.gov/lib-edu/LDND/libstats/
- ◆ Institute of Museum and Library Services: imls.gov/labs/search-compare/index/details.html?fscs_id=VA0006
- ◆ Augusta County Library Annual Report 2019
- ◆ Claritas MyBestSegments

Comparative In-State Data (lva.virginia.gov)

	Augusta County Library	VA Libraries Average	VA Libraries Median
Holdings <i>per capita</i>	11.23	8.71	5.47
Circulation <i>per capita</i>	6.57	6.15	4.56
Item Turnover rate	0.58	1.3	0.84
Visits <i>per capita</i>	2.45	NA	3.75
Expenditures <i>per capita</i>	17.78	32.86	26.16