

SCLSNJ Strategic Planning Strategic Plan Framework

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Strategic Plan Framework

Mission

Somerset County Library System of New Jersey partners with you to connect, to explore, to share, and to discover.

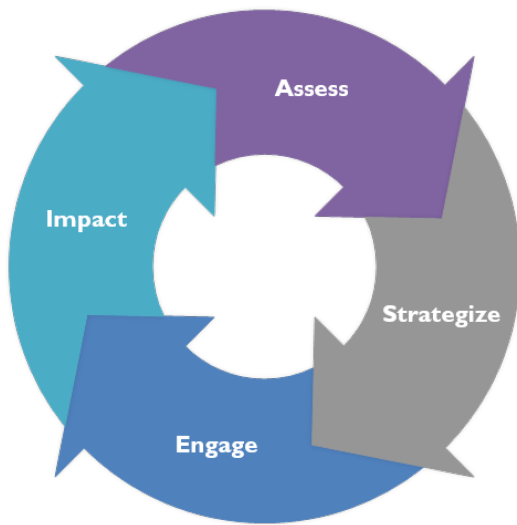
Strategic Priorities

- Promoting the Library as an impartial platform for creating meaningful interactions and connections
- Exploring new ways to shape our spaces to meet community needs
- Welcoming new residents
- Addressing the needs of shifting demographics

Core Services

- Making personalized connections between patrons and materials
- Presenting programs that help community members connect, explore, share, and discover
- Serving as a community gathering space
- Promoting and supporting lifelong learning
- Providing technology access and expertise that meet the needs of the community
- Creating opportunities that build Somerset County's economic and workforce development

Process and Context



SCLSNJ is using the Public Library Association’s Dynamic Planning model in creating our new strategic plan:

Assess - gather community data, conduct community conversations, perform community needs assessment

Strategize - analyze data, identify core services and strategic priorities

Engage - develop goals and actions that meet service needs

Impact - execute plan actions, establish outcomes and methods for assessment, evaluate success



Our planning activities so far have covered the Assess and Strategize phases of the model. This Strategic Plan Framework covers the core services and strategic priorities that emerged from our data gathering.

Staff will then move onto the Engage and Impact phases. We will define the impact we wish to have in each strategic priority area over the next one to three years, and then develop specific initiatives, actions and assessment methods to help us achieve our desired impact.

We will be using a method called Hoshin Kanri to track and communicate our actions and progress, the centerpiece of which is the X Chart, a visual representation of the relationships between strategic priorities, impacts, initiatives, actions and outcomes.

Next steps are expected to progress as follows, with quarterly reporting to the Library Commission on progress.

Milestone/Task	Expected Date
Library Commission Plan Approval	Sep 2018
Define impacts and initiatives for strategic priorities	Sep-Dec 2018
Develop actions, assessment plans, measures	Sep-Dec 2018
Activity from Plan	Jan-Jun 2019
Assessment	Jun 2019
Activity from Plan	Jul-Dec 2019

Assessment	Dec 2019
Activity from Plan	Jan-Jun 2020
Assessment	Jun 2020
Revise and realign strategic priorities as needed	Jul 2020

Strategic Priorities

Our Strategic Priorities represent themes and ideas that emerged across our data (see more on Data Sources below). In identifying these priorities, the Strategic Planning Steering Committee looked specifically for areas where SCLSNJ has the potential to make meaningful changes for our communities and our patrons – in other words, we want to be able to answer the question, “What are we trying to achieve?” As an example, that means that although the word most commonly used to describe the kind of community people want to live in was “safe,” improving safety did not become a strategic priority because the Library has a very limited ability to affect the safety of our physical environment.

Promoting the Library as an impartial platform for creating meaningful interactions and connections

What’s the community need? Connections among residents was brought up as a desire in many Community Conversations; words commonly used in responses to the community survey question “What kind of community do you want to live in?” had to do with positive interactions among community members.

What kind of impact could SCLSNJ have? The Library can provide a place for meaningful interaction and connection with neighbors.

What could that look like? Possibilities include providing programming around civility and civil discourse, creating environments where people can interact with others in areas of difference or conflict, developing partnerships with other community organizations with similar goals, training staff to become facilitation resources, attending meetings and listening to community needs on an ongoing basis in order to provide responsive opportunities, etc.

Exploring new ways to shape our spaces to meet community needs

What’s the community need? The community survey identified “Serving as a community gathering space” as our third most important service (after collections and programs); a need for community spaces was brought up in almost every Community Conversation.

What kind of impact could SCLSNJ have? The Library can become a gathering place for members of our communities.

What could that look like? Possibilities include exploring ways to create study, meeting and community spaces in our buildings, on our own and in partnership with our hosting municipalities, partnering with other community organizations to find underutilized spaces elsewhere and developing ways to make them available, removing barriers to community use of library spaces (including balancing community use with library program use), addressing policy with regard to equitable distribution of resources, etc.

Welcoming new residents

What's the community need? Demographic data suggests that not only is the number of immigrants coming to our service area growing (averaging over 1,500 per year), but the Hispanic and Latino population across our service area is expected to grow from 14.4% of the total in 2010 to 17.3% in 2020; staff recognize the need for accessible ESL and citizenship classes and resources among these populations.

What kind of impact could SCLSNJ have? The Library can help new residents become successful contributors to our communities.

What could that look like? Possibilities include providing expanded ESL and citizenship classes and resources, developing partnerships with other community organizations with similar goals, etc.

Addressing the needs of shifting demographics

What's the community need? Staff recognize populations in our community which have needs that aren't being met elsewhere, including people with disabilities, seniors, veterans, etc.; demographic data suggests that the number of residents ages 55 and older will increase by 13.5% over the next five years; the number of people with disabilities in New Jersey has increased 11.6% since 2011.

What kind of impact could SCLSNJ have? The Library can fill gaps that help changing and underserved populations and other residents interact.

What could that look like? Possibilities include developing and delivering targeted programming, expanding staff expertise in working with specific populations, exploring best practices in library services to underserved populations, developing partnerships with other community organizations with similar goals, etc.

Core Services

Core Services are our “bread-and-butter” – they’re the things SCLSNJ has done for a long time and will continue to do well into the future. In addition to meeting patrons’ individual needs on a day-to-day basis, we’ll use our Core Services as a way to deliver on our Strategic Priorities. If Strategic Priorities are the “why” of what we do, Core Services are the “how.”

Making personalized connections between patrons and materials

About this core service: Providing library materials – in all formats – is the most heavily used and highly valued service SCLSNJ provides. Answers in the Community Survey to the question “What is SCLSNJ doing well?” referenced materials twice as often as any other service, and use of the collection is growing overall. We want to continue to provide a robust collection of materials, and leverage the expertise of our staff in helping connect patrons not only with the materials they want, but with items they may not yet know they want.

Presenting programs that help community members connect, explore, share and discover

About this core service: Library programs and events are extremely popular among our patrons and, generally speaking, they wish we did even more. Much like our materials, SCLSNJ programs are a method we use to give people access to information, knowledge, and ideas. As with our collections, we want to learn more about demand for programs and program outcomes so that we can effectively tailor our offerings to meet specific community needs and make sure they have the greatest possible impact.

Serving as a community gathering space

About this core service: Libraries as community spaces are nothing new, and work informed by SCLSNJ’s last strategic plan included efforts to make our spaces attractive and adaptable to what our community members are looking for. This continues to be important, as demonstrated by its inclusion as a strategic priority on its own. Still, this is a challenging area for the Library to have any impact because of the relationship between the buildings in which we provide service and the municipalities that provide the buildings. Continuing efforts in this area may require reframing the way SCLSNJ and the Library Commission allocate resources toward furniture, fixtures and equipment.

Promoting and supporting lifelong learning

About this core service: Supporting lifelong learning has always been a core service for public libraries – think about Andrew Carnegie’s “People’s University” mission in the late-19th and early-20th centuries – and libraries are committed to being open to all members of our communities. The results of our Community Survey indicate that our patrons continue to value our activities in this area. We anticipate that this core service

will provide a channel for meeting our strategic priorities around new residents and shifting demographics, while our staff continue to make their expertise available to individual patrons who want to explore and learn.

Providing technology access and expertise that meet the needs of the community

About this core service: Of our core services, this one has shifted the most over time, as does how we measure whether or not we are successful. Development of a technology plan in the past few years has helped SCLSNJ make tremendous strides in keeping pace with the needs of our community. As we create a new version of that plan, we want to make sure that we build capacity and expertise in our staff so that patrons can continue to use the Library as a technology resource, not just as a technology source.

Creating opportunities that build Somerset County's economic and workforce development

About this core service: SCLSNJ's continued relevance is sustained by individual users, but we also need to support organizations and the community as a whole in order to demonstrate value. We plan to continue our support for small businesses and entrepreneurs through materials, programs, and consultation with our expert staff. We will continue to connect community members to job readiness tools, such as resources and programs that improve language and technology skills. We also want to be open to new ways we can use our other core services to create opportunities for growth and development.

Data Sources

Development of SCLSNJ's Strategic Plan Framework was driven by a number of sources of data about and from our communities.

Community Survey

Our online survey was open from June 1 through August 16, 2018, during which time we collected nearly 900 responses. The survey asked twelve questions: the first four were open-ended questions about what kind of community the respondent wants to live in and why that is important; questions five through eight asked about the respondent's opinions and use of library services; the last four questions gathered general data about residence and library use patterns. The [Community Survey Report](#) summarizes our findings.

Community Conversations

Staff acted as facilitators for over two dozen Community Conversations conducted in May, June, July and August 2018. Using methodology developed by [The Harwood Institute for](#)

[Public Innovation](#), we asked participants to talk about their concerns, hopes and aspirations about their communities. These were not *library* focus groups; rather we used these conversations as a way to learn more about ways SCLSNJ can make a difference in the community that may not already be reflected in our core services.

In addition to an overall [Community Conversations Summary](#), where we summarized the themes and ideas that emerged from the conversations as a whole, we also created a one-page report to make available to the municipalities where we conducted conversations in order to share what we learned.

Staff Survey

A small work team developed and deployed an anonymous Staff Survey in late June 2018. This survey was made up of 16 open-ended questions, many of which provided opportunities for staff members to comment on SCLSNJ as a workplace and as an employer. This [Staff Survey Abridged Data Report](#) focuses on the four questions that specifically addressed staff opinions about library services and community needs, as this data had the most value in creating our Strategic Plan Framework. (The work team continues to analyze the rest of the data for internal use.)

Demographic Data

We reviewed general demographic data from the US Census and from one of our online resources, *Gale's Demographics Now*. The [Demographic Data Summary](#) provides a summary of the findings we found most informative in developing our Strategic Priorities.

Library Use Data

As the Strategic Plan Steering Committee has worked through the first two phases of this process, one of the things we have considered is how our efforts can reflect each of our individual member municipalities while still creating a system-wide strategy. We looked at use trends that describe where people who live in different communities use our branches, as reflected in [Branch Use by Municipality](#). Our interpretation of the data is that while use is often focused on a "home" branch, many of our users travel around the system, indicating that we should continue to balance the needs of specific demographics in our communities with a broader County-wide approach to service.