



SCLSNJ Strategic Plan Report 2022

Strategic Plan Framework	1
Process and Context	2
Strategic Priorities	3
Core Services	4
Data Sources	6

Strategic Plan Framework

Mission

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

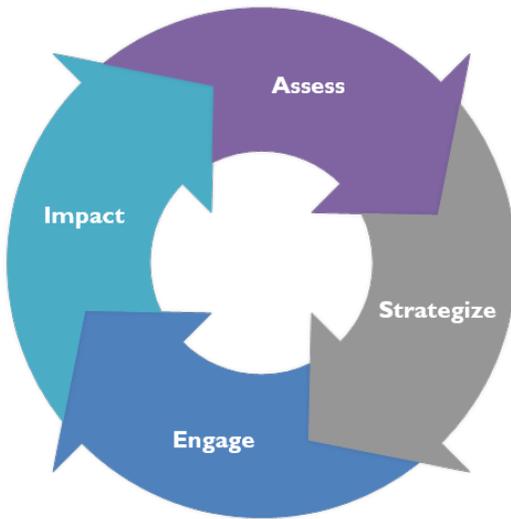
Strategic Priorities

- Providing activities and places that foster social interactions and connections
- Connecting people to opportunities for community engagement and participation
- Addressing the needs of shifting demographics
- Exploring and enhancing the variety of ways customers experience library services

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 continues to use the Public Library Association's Dynamic Planning model in creating our 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 Report 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.

Next steps are expected to progress as follows, with regular updates to the Library Commission.

Milestone/Task	Expected Date
Library Commission Plan Approval	Jan 2023
Define impacts and initiatives for strategic priorities	Jan-Mar 2023
Develop actions, assessment plans, measures	Jan-Jun 2023
Activity from Plan	Feb-Dec 2023
Assessment	Dec 2023
Activity from Plan	Jan-Dec 2024
Assessment	Dec 2024
Activity from Plan	Jan-Dec 2025
Assessment	Dec 2025

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 one of the most common words 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.

Providing activities and places that foster social interactions and connections

What’s the community need? All of our Community Conversations touched on a variation of a theme – people feel socially isolated from each other and are looking for ways to renew and build interpersonal connections. A substantial number of survey responses talked about wanting to live in a community where people know each other and, in turn, are able to break down division and misunderstanding.

What kind of impact could SCLSNJ have? The Library can provide opportunities for people to interact with and get to know their neighbors.

What could that look like? Possibilities include providing programs that promote interaction among participants, creating activities that allow people to engage and connect with others who have new or different sets of experiences, developing partnerships with other community organizations with similar goals, training staff to become facilitation resources, making space available for newly found connections to grow and flourish, etc.

Connecting people to opportunities for community engagement and participation

What’s the community need? Survey respondents and conversation participants said they want to feel like they are part of their community. Between pandemic restrictions and ongoing societal changes, many are no longer certain where or how they can get involved.

What kind of impact could SCLSNJ have? The Library can help bridge the divide between individuals and their communities.

What could that look like? Possibilities include working with partner organizations to host events at the Library that allow people to find ways to get involved, acting as a clearinghouse for information about community engagement opportunities, providing activities that allow municipal employees to connect with residents in the Library, etc.

Addressing the needs of shifting demographics

What's the community need? Staff recognize that characteristics of our community continue to change, which requires constant attention. Demographic data suggests that the number of residents ages 55 and older will continue to increase by 6% over the next five years; over 20% of adults in New Jersey were estimated to have a disability in 2020; a quarter of residents of our member municipalities were born outside the United States.

What kind of impact could SCLSNJ have? The Library can fill gaps that help 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.

Exploring and enhancing the variety of ways customers experience library services

What's the community need? People told us they want to know what the Library has to offer, but they don't always know how to find out. As we talked about expanding and personalizing our communication with customers, we imagined undertaking an enriched exploration of our current and potential touchpoints, with the hope it leads to a paradigm shift in how we think about what we do.

What kind of impact could SCLSNJ have? The Library can plan a multi-year project to focus on how our internal and external activities influence customers' feelings about SCLSNJ.

What could that look like? Possibilities include working with experts in the customer experience field to make sure all SCLSNJ staff have a shared understanding of the concept, developing a multi-year implementation plan, building a framework for evaluating points of contact with customers, involving staff system-wide in enhancing our wide array of interactions, 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 is a challenging area for the Library to 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 reexamining 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. We want to continue to 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 September 18 through October 31, 2022, during which time we collected over 1,000 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 fifteen Community Conversations conducted in October and November, 2022. 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. A summary of the themes and ideas that emerged from the conversations overall can be found in the [Community Conversations Summary](#).

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.