

The Appomattox Regional Library System
Strategic Plan
October 2025- September 2030

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Introduction

In accordance with state requirements, public library systems in Virginia must develop strategic goals every five years. The Appomattox Regional Library System (ARLS) last created a strategic plan in 2021. This updated plan outlines our goals and objectives for the next five years, from June 2025 through July 2030. This plan reflects a renewed focus on key areas identified by both staff and community input. Unlike the previous plan developed with the help of outside consultants this strategic plan was designed internally by the ARLS Librarians Committee, guided by local feedback. 319 residents completed surveys online and in print to help us better understand the priorities across the three localities we serve. To ensure that this plan remains a living document we will conduct quarterly check-ins at librarians' meetings beginning in September 2025.

In order for the librarians to carry out their work with the strategic plan, we intend to also develop a "working draft" document that provides more detail and time tables for the strategic plan work. This will be the document that we work from as we meet on a quarterly basis to discuss our progress on carrying out the strategic plan.

Public libraries continue to face transformational changes in how citizens view them, access information and entertainment, and interact with each other to thrive in today's society. In the survey process, we found that the citizens using the services of ARLS broadly agreed that our library system brings value to their lives and our community. A gradual transition is taking place from book-based learning to the online community, but there is still a very broad spectrum of what our patrons value in our services. We continue to be a destination where people gather to explore, interact, and imagine.

Statements

Vision A Community that is enlightened, empowered, and enriched. (unchanged)

Mission The Appomattox Regional Library Systems fosters lifelong learning, creativity, and joy. We actively engage with our community to meet needs.

Values We work to provide easy access to facts, stories, and spaces. We welcome everyone, protect confidentiality, and build a staff with expertise and caring. We support our communities, and foster connection.

Goals and Objectives

Goal 1 – Raise Professional Standards for Library Services and Staff

Objective 1: The Library will achieve the Library of Virginia Gold Standard by the end of this strategic plan period. Currently, ARLS scores 82 points under the *Standards for Virginia Public Libraries* for libraries serving populations between 50,000 and 99,000. This places us at the "Silver" level, which encompasses scores between 67 and 95. To reach the "Gold" level, we need to gain an additional 14 points.

Objective 2: The Library will establish and maintain minimum standards for continuing education for full-time staff, part-time staff, and Library Board members. Continuing education opportunities may include webinars, conferences, and in-house training.

The following requirements will apply annually:

- Library Board members: 3 hours
- Part-time staff: 3 hours
- Full-time staff: 5 hours

The Director will collaborate with the Library Board to identify and schedule appropriate continuing education activities. All library staff will choose their continuing education opportunities in consultation with their supervisors. This requirement will take effect in the 2026 calendar year and will be included in that year's performance evaluations.

Objective 3: The Library will create or update written procedures to improve service consistency. Three procedures will be scheduled for completion each year, with due dates in March, August, and December.

Proposed Procedures:

- Onboarding
- Incident Reports
- Phone Etiquette
- Money Handling with Patrons
- HR: Retirement Party Protocol
- Disaster Event Procedures (All Locations)
- Weeding Procedures (All Collections)
- Damaged DVDs (View On Site)
- Notary Procedures (Staff and Patrons)
- Purchase Orders
- Library of Things (Check-Out and Check-In)
- Expanded Procedures for Damaged Books

Goal 2 – Analyze and Improve Library Collections and Facilities

Objective 1: The Library will conduct a comprehensive audit of all collections and facilities to assess timeliness and variety. The target completion date is January 2028

Objective 2: The Library will reduce the number of outdated materials by the end of the strategic plan period, as measured by an improvement in the average publication year of the collection.

Objective 3: The Library will conduct a patron survey to gather feedback on collections and facilities. The survey will be available from April through September 2026. A summary report will be presented to the Library Board in January 2027.

Objective 4: The incoming Assistant Director will be tasked with developing a plan to update the Hopewell building specifically focusing on carpet, furnishings, and paint by June 2027. The Assistant Director will also assess the building's cabling issues and provide solution options to the Director.

Goal 3 – Improve Community Access to Impactful Technology

Objective 1: The Digital Services and Materials Services Librarians will assess the Library's access to emerging technologies. This committee will submit recommendations to the Director by April 2027. Their report will include suggestions for items to be added to the *Library of Things* collection, as well as an evaluation of technologies needed to enhance the Library's service offerings to the community.

Objective 2: The Library will evaluate the feasibility of establishing an innovation lab, considering factors such as cost-effectiveness, target audience, and long-term sustainability. A report outlining findings and recommendations will be submitted to the Library Board in January 2028.

Goal 4 – Improve Community Access to Library Locations and Services

Objective 1: The Library will collaborate with localities to improve signage and/or install flags at branches with limited visibility. The Branch Services Manager will provide progress reports twice per year.

Objective 2: The Library will conduct a disability access audit of all library locations by June 2028. Findings will be reported to the Library Board.

Objective 3: The Director will work with the City of Hopewell to develop a plan to improve safety and enhance the exterior appearance of the Hopewell Library. The plan will be completed by the end of the strategic plan period.

Objective 4: The Library will pilot a live chat reference service to assess community interest. This trial will run for a minimum of two months in 2026, Monday through Friday. All transactions will be recorded for statistical analysis.

Objective 5: The Library will enhance language and translation services for non-English speakers. A standardized procedure and staff training will be implemented for all circulation and reference staff by the end of 2027.

Objective 6: All departments responsible for programming will submit annual reports to the Library Board. These reports will evaluate each program's popularity and cost-effectiveness.

Strategic Plan Matrix: Goals, Objectives, and Target Dates

Goal 1 – Raise Professional Standards for Library Services and Staff

Objective	Description	Target Date / Frequency
1.1	Achieve Library of Virginia Gold Standard by increasing score from 82 to at least 96	By end of strategic plan (2028)
1.2	Establish and maintain minimum standards for continuing education: 3 hrs/year for Library Board and part-time staff; 5 hrs/year for full-time staff	Begins 2026; evaluated annually
1.3	Create or update written procedures to improve service consistency; 3 per year due in March, August, and December	Ongoing through 2028

Goal 2 – Analyze and Improve Library Collections and Facilities

Objective	Description	Target Date / Frequency
2.1	Conduct a comprehensive audit of all collections and facilities for timeliness and variety	January 2028
2.2	Reduce outdated materials, measured by average publication year	By end of strategic plan (2028)
2.3	Conduct a patron survey on collections and facilities; report results to Library Board	Survey: Apr–Sep 2026; Report: Jan 2027
2.4	Assistant Director to develop a plan for Hopewell building updates (carpet, furnishings, paint, cabling)	Plan due June 2027

Goal 3 – Improve Community Access to Impactful Technology

Objective	Description	Target Date / Frequency
3.1	Assess access to emerging technologies and recommend items for Library of Things	Report due April 2027
3.2	Evaluate feasibility of establishing an innovation lab based on cost, audience, and sustainability	Report due January 2028

Goal 4 – Improve Community Access to Library Locations and Services

Objective	Description	Target Date / Frequency
4.1	Work with localities to improve signage/flags at low-visibility branches	Progress reports twice per year
4.2	Conduct a disability access audit of all library locations	Report due June 2028
4.3	Develop a plan with the City of Hopewell to improve exterior and safety at Hopewell Library	By end of strategic plan (2028)
4.4	Pilot a live chat reference service (Mon–Fri) for at least 2 months	Trial in 2026
4.5	Improve language/translation services for non-English speakers; provide procedures and staff training	By end of 2027
4.6	All programming departments submit annual reports evaluating program popularity and cost-effectiveness	Annually

Appendices

ARLS Overview

History

Our name reflects the Appomattox River, which flows through each of the three three localities that we serve, the City of Hopewell, Prince George County, and Dinwiddie County. Library Services in the Hopewell- Prince George area began in 1930 when Thomas B. Robertson established a Library Association for persons interested in forming a library. In 1931, the city of Hopewell formally took over operations, appointing Mrs. Maude Langhorne Nelson as its first librarian. Originally known as the John Randolph Library, the Library was located in the State Planters Bank building (now United Virginia Bank). In 1957 the library moved to the annex of the municipal building, and its name was changed to honor its first librarian Maude Langhorne Nelson. In 1974, Prince George and Dinwiddie Counties joined the City of Hopewell to form the Appomattox Regional Library System.

Today the Appomattox Regional Library System (ARLS) operates eight library locations-

Prince George County: Burrowsville Library (Disputanta), Disputanta Library (Disputanta), Carson Depot (Carson), Prince George Library (Prince George)

Dinwiddie County: Dinwiddie Library (Dinwiddie), McKenney Library (McKenney), Rohoic Library (Dinwiddie)

City of Hopewell: Maude Langhorne Nelson Library (Hopewell)

Programs and Services

All ARLS programs, services, and resources are free of charge and available to the public offerings include:

- Lending of print and online books and magazines, and audiovisual materials including DVDs, audiobooks, and e-content.
- Library of Things, featuring non-traditional items such as blood pressure monitors and art kits.
- Internet access, computers, scanning, printing, copying, and faxing.
- Electronic resources for continuing education and job development including access to Universal Class, Brainfuse, Transparent Language, and more.

- Electronic resources for genealogy research including Ancestry Library Edition and HeritageQuest.
- Storytime and other educational and creative programs for youth 0-18 years of age.
- Collaborative programming with local organizations to bring health, social, and educational resources directly to the library.
- Fitness classes
- Book clubs for adults
- Seed Library
- Public art exhibitions
- Cultural and community events
- Book-a-Librarian: formatting resumes, setting up new online accounts, and other basic computing skills.
- Public meeting rooms
- Notary services
- Exam Proctoring
- Through community partnerships, the library offers free access to essential items like COVID-19 tests and menstruation products. Items may change over time depending on partnerships and community needs.

Planning Process for Committee

Regional Library Director Brian Manning authorized the Librarian staff to design the Strategic Plan for 2025-2030. This approach differed from the process of a previous Strategic plan, which was guided by two paid outside consultants, and another previous Strategic plan, in which a committee of staff, Board members, and volunteers from the community crafted the plan.

As part of the new process, the librarians designed a public survey for the ARLS community. The survey was made available both online and in a print version. Over 280 people completed the survey. The findings of the survey can be found under *Survey Process and Themes*. Following the Survey, the librarians met monthly to develop the new strategic plan.

The Librarians Committee made a decision to refocus our strategic priorities. This shift does not dismiss the importance of past goals such as expanding library programming for children and adults, an initiative that remains vital and was reaffirmed in the survey responses. However the committee recognized an opportunity to address additional areas essential to library excellence. These include raising professional standards for library services and staff, analyzing and improving library collections and facilities, improving community access to impactful technology, and improving community access to library locations and services.

To ensure that this plan remains a living document we will conduct quarterly check-ins at librarians' meetings beginning in September 2025 where we will dedicate time to reflect on the plans progress and discuss how it is being incorporated into daily operations.

Planning Committee Participants

- Chris Wiegard, Assistant Director
- Ginger Mauler, Branch Services Manager
- Sarah Finch, Youth Services Librarian
- Cathy Field, Adult Services Librarian
- Alex King, Digital Services Librarian
- Morgan Devlin, Material Services Manager
- Megan Ranes, Adult Services Librarian
- Sarah Ball, Administrative and Personnel Services Manager

Demographic Summary of Service Community

City of Hopewell

Hopewell is an urban community with a population of approximately 22,970 in 2024. The city's population skews young, with 21.5% under 18 and 15% age 65 or older. Hopewell's racial composition is 44.4% White, 42.6% Black, and 8.6% Hispanic or Latino.

Key challenges include a high poverty rate of 23.8%, low median household income at \$48,681, and lower educational attainment with only 12.5% of the population holding a bachelor's degree or higher. Despite economic barriers, 92.2% of households have access to computers and 85.6 % have access to broadband internet.

Key strategic opportunities include:

- Support digital literacy and expand technology access
- Enhance youth and family programs
- Job readiness and GED support
- Strengthen health and social service partnerships

Prince George County

Prince George County is a suburban-rural hybrid with a population of 43,589 in 2024, experiencing a modest growth of 1.4% from 2020. The age profile of the population is 19.3% under 18 years of age and 13.9% age 65 or older. The racial composition is 59.9% White, 32.8% Black, and 10.9% Hispanic or Latino.

Economically, Prince George has a median household income of \$88,225, home owner occupied housing units at 73.9%. and a poverty rate of 11.3%. Educational attainment is higher than the other two localities, with 24% holding a bachelor's degree or more. 95.7% of households have access to computers and 92.1 % have access to broadband internet.

Key strategic opportunities include:

- Enhance youth and family programs
- Promote skill development and personal growth resources
- Strengthen outreach

Dinwiddie County

Dinwiddie is a largely rural county with a steadily growing population of 28,576 in 2024, up 2.3% since 2020. The age profile of the population is 19.8% under 18 years of age and 19.6% age 65 or older. The racial composition is 65.1% White, 30.9% Black, and 4.5% Hispanic or Latino.

Economically, Dinwiddie has a median household income of \$83,898, poverty rate of 11.8%, and high home owner occupied units at 78.2%. Educational attainment is moderate, 20.5% of the population has a bachelor's degree or higher. 94.1% of households have access to computers and 84.7 % have access to broadband internet. Dinwiddie has a low population density with an estimated 55 people per square mile.

Key strategic opportunities include:

- Expand digital access support for rural and older residents
- Conduct accessibility audits and collaborate with localities to improve signage and reduce barriers.

[U.S. Census Bureau. \(n.d.\). U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: United States.
https://www.census.gov/quickfacts](https://www.census.gov/quickfacts)

Survey Process and Themes

In early 2025, ARLS distributed a survey to library users in order to gain their perspective on community desires and needs. This survey was intended to provide useful input as we tried to tailor our strategic goals to meet those desires and needs.

We were surprised and pleased to receive 319 responses to our survey! The responses came from all locations within our service area. Most responses were made online, although some were made using the paper forms.

There were a number of shared themes in the responses. Many respondents used words such as “welcoming,” “comfortable,” “friendly,” and offered praise to staff. In terms of services, there were many comments in support of existing services such as audiovisual materials, meeting spaces, and programs for children and adults. Though some mentioned access to e-materials such as electronic books or AV materials, more people supported traditional paper-based books.

Some of the respondents at Hopewell made critical comments involving the presence of unsheltered persons in the Hopewell building. In some cases the comments explored real issues such as patron behaviors or the presence of trash outdoors, and in other cases questioned the rights of unsheltered people to enter the building- an idea that has no legal basis.

An additional recurring comment was on the limitations of branch hours in our more rural locations. Our Dinwiddie location had the most comments about limited hours, with 15 responses.

There is a great deal of information in the survey responses. Here is a link to the spreadsheet of responses for those interested in the details:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1z-AWMexkKmF2wHb45M5gcYgVGP5sSWNzq35vykCLKaE/edit?usp=sharing>