



# Alamance County Public Library Strategic Plan 2017 to 2022

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*“Providing Possibility. Creating Community.”*



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## **Alamance County Public Library Strategic Plan Needs Assessment Executive Summary February 9, 2017**

### **Needs Assessment Overview**

As Phase 1 of Alamance County Public Library's LSTA funded strategic planning project, a comprehensive community needs assessment was conducted over a seven-month period from July 2016 to January 2017. A total of 672 people participated in the assessment, featuring a wide variety of data collection methods including interviews (n=30), focus groups with the community and staff (n=7, 37 participants), community forums (n=3, 20 participants), one site visit to Hunt Library, and three online surveys (community library priorities n=452, staff n=45, and information and entertainment preferences n=88). Interview participants included the County Manager, a County Commissioner, Mayor of Burlington, City Manager of Burlington, City Manager of Graham, City Manager of Mebane, President of the Burlington Chamber of Commerce, the United Way, Lab Corps, Friends of the Library, Impact Alamance, the Housing Authority, ELON, and many other members of the community.

### **Alamance County in 2017**

Alamance County is on par with the state averages in terms of population growth since 2010 (4.7% to 5.3%), persons under 5 years (5.7% to 6%), and persons under 18 years (23.5 to 23%). For people 65+, however, Alamance has slightly exceeded the state average by 1.4% (16.4 to 15%). Racially, Alamance is slightly more White (75.1 to 71%) and exceeds the state average for people who are Hispanic or Latino by 3.4% (12.4 to 9%); the county also has 2.2% less African American or Black residents than the state average (18.8 to 21%).



In terms of quality-of-life factors, Alamance County is lower than the state average on a number of key indicators as recorded by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics: median value of owner-occupied homes (\$138,100.00 to \$154,900.00), percent of high school graduates (83.2% to 85.8%), percent of bachelor degrees or higher (21.6 to 28.4%), median household income (\$41,814.00 to \$46,868.00), and per capita income in past 12 months (\$23,434.00 to \$25,920.00). Alamance County also has a higher poverty rate (18.9% to 16.4%), more non-



English speaking homes (12.4 to 11.2%), people with a disability (10.3% to 9.6%), and people without health insurance (16.5% to 13.1%)<sup>1</sup> than state averages.

### **Alamance County Public Library Trends 2007-2016**

The Alamance County Public Library system appears to be overall well supported locally. Funding levels have continued to increase over the past 10 years and exceeds the state average for county library per capita funding. Local funding has increased by 23% or \$484,629.00 from 2007 to 2016, which is a per capita local income increase (increase per person) of \$1.78 from \$15.34 per person in 2007 to \$17.12 per person in 2016 (the state average is \$16.45 for county libraries). This increase may be largely attributed to a significant growth in municipal support which increased their total contributions from \$10,000 in 2013 to \$229,600.00 (a 2,000% increase) while county support also has continued to remain relatively stable. Since that time,

municipal support has continued to increase annually<sup>2</sup>.



During that same time, while the percentage of registered users dropped by 33%, from 63% in 2007 to 42% in 2016 overall library usage has dramatically increased in several areas. Total circulation increased by 21% and, while circulation of adult non-fiction has dropped significantly by -34%, adult fiction circulation increased slightly (2%) and Other Print Materials increased by a significant 1,272%.

Circulation of juvenile fiction books increased by 27%, periodical circulation increase by 16%, videos by 74%, A-V equipment checkouts by 1,221%, and total non-print increased by 52%, which includes new non-print items for circulation including e-circulation and zoom passes.

Programming and program attendance also saw dramatic and statistically significant increases. Adult programs inside the library increased by 202% and outside the library by 231%. Meanwhile juvenile programs in-library increased by 4% while juvenile programs outside the library increased by 1,150%, and total programs offered increased by 56%. Attendance at library

<sup>1</sup> Alamance vs. North Carolina Statistics, US Bureau of Labor Statistics, <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/MAN450212/37001.37>

<sup>2</sup> State Library Statistical Reports for Alamance County (Table 4), 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016



programs also increased significantly – adult in-library attendance increased by 195% and outside-library by 281% while juvenile attendance in-library increased by 28% and outside-library by 3,013%. Total attendance at all programs increased by 22,769 attendees from 2007 to 2016, which is a 97% increase.

Other significant trends include a 47% increase in reference questions and a significant -84% drop in program/events being held at the library by the community and a -67% decrease in community attendance at those events.

In terms of digital access from 2010-2016, total database usage increased by 36%. Technology lending (which was first reported in 2013) increased by 51%, and the number of computers made available to both staff and the general public remained static. Computer usage, similar to state and national trends, dropped by 32% and visits to the website dropped by 9%.

An independent big data project examining all the North Carolina public library statistics over a 10-year period (2006-2015) conducted by Chow and Tien (2015) found a statistically significant positive relationship between a county’s total circulation per capita and four quality-of-life factors in that county: percent of high school graduates, percent of college graduates, median household income, and total number of jobs<sup>3</sup>. Closer examination of Alamance County’s per capita circulation from 2010-2016 showed drops in circulation per capita and percentage of registered users annually from 2010-2015 but in 2016 circulation the percent of registered population, and overall circulation per capita increased. The data suggests that a lower percentage of Alamance County residents are using more library resources and using those

resources differently.

Fiscal Year	Service Pop.	Total Circulation	% Registered	Circ. Per Capita
2009-2010	148,338	873,844	54%	5.9
2010-2011	151,745	851,887	53%	5.6
2011-2012	152,531	855,115	50.8%	5.6
2012-2013	153,033	848,906	48.5%	5.5
2013-2014	153,595	794,564	40.5%	5.2
2014-2015	155,789	783,741	41.4%	5.0
2015-2016	153,595	937,098	42.2%	6.1

The implications from the Chow and Tien study suggest that the seminal library output that has real and statistically significant impact is

**circulation of library items per capita** and not program attendance or any other identified library output. The other facet that is not measured and remains difficult to quantify is the return-on-investment for seniors and their quality-of-life. While not measured by traditional measures collected by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics it is essential to note that seniors, their voices, and their stories of how important libraries are to them and their quality-of-life, represented a significant amount of input provided by the community through this needs assessment.

### Alamance County Mirroring North Carolina Public Library Trends

<sup>3</sup> Chow, A. & Tien, Q., 2015, unpublished study



When examining statewide North Carolina public library statistics over time, library usage is changing. Traditional print circulation is down, computer usage is down, and traditional reference is also down. On the other hand, however, public libraries have seen significant increases in e-book and other non-print circulation, children and youth material circulation, programs and program attendance, and meeting and meeting attendance. Alamance’s public library trends over time have mirrored these statewide trends except for community meetings and meeting attendance.

### **Meeting the Strategic Needs of the County and Community in General**

Interview, focus group, and community forum participants observed that Alamance County was a growing and expanding community with a shifting population. The first major issue identified was **economic development**. Economic development was considered essential to help increase wages, increase the tax base, and bring in quality jobs, which would help make the economy more robust and successful with help across the board. Per one participant, “Taxes are not that big of a deal for most companies – a skilled workforce and quality of life are the two biggest factors” (Interview participant, August 2016). Another participant noted that 80% of Alamance’s population are educated at the high school level. Alamance has been historically a textile community. Years ago,

even a high school education was not needed – textile jobs were high pay, low skill. That has changed but the culture and expectations have not; many people’s social norms have remained the same across generations with a low priority placed on education. The County also has very low tax rates and there has not been that much



support for education as the County Commission refuses to raise taxes. There is a sense of “We have a lot of catching up to do.” Another participant noted that the crime rate has gone up and continues to grow rapidly while the County’s law enforcement departments remain understaffed.

**Education** was the second major issue identified. Participants felt that the overall quality of education and schools were an essential issue of concern. One participant noted, there must be an increased focus placed at the very beginning of the elementary and pre-K levels because waiting until middle and high school is too late. The focus also needs to be on getting parents back to



reading – one participant noted that there were many teen mothers with no culture or tradition of reading and education and that they were likely to pass this lack of reading and interest onto their children. Another participant noted that a lot of people who work in Alamance County live in other counties because they are perceived to have better schools. The community has made a significant push around early childhood (STRIVE – evidence based program, how to move the needle on education) that centers on families and looking to stabilize them - reading to children early and promoting literacy for both kids and their parents and bringing literacy to the community (e.g. STORY Walks). Another participant commented that the average reading level for adults in Alamance was on the 8th grade level; parents and adults were having issues with literacy as well.

**Poverty** is the third big issue identified for the community. This was also tied to health and wellness. As one participant noted, many jobs have gone away, opportunities have changed and some residents do not have a real understanding of how important education is. The business community has come together to address these issues (e.g. Impact Alamance). There are high numbers of children that are in poverty and the community is looking for opportunities for families to get healthy foods. The hope is that the new public transportation system will help individuals get access to some of the services they need.

The Library can support the Alamance community strategically in each of these areas in several ways. First, libraries can **serve as a destination** – a place where the community and family can



go to be together. This serves as a symbolic impression of what the community stands for and values as important. It can serve as both a beacon and a portal to technology and information; newspapers and news available in different formats for adults as well as lots of things for children to do and interact with. Examples of this include the makerspace movement and other early childhood development experiences. It also must try to walk a fine line between traditional expectations and

presenting a more welcoming and modern feel. There are many in the community that do not use



the library, are intimidated by the library, or associate the library with dusty books that many in the younger generation do not wish to have anything to do with. Providing safe places for kids and teens to “hang-out” are also a primary way to reach out to those who otherwise would not visit a library – this is especially true of teens in the Hispanic community who often grow up feeling somewhat segregated from society. The Library could be their sanctuary. As one participant noted, “libraries are not fun places to be. The front doors need to be welcoming and when people who are not traditional library users peek inside the doors, they should see technology, games, etc.

For so many people, reading is considered “SOO not cool!” How do we build excitement around reading and libraries? “Technology” (Community Leader Interview, August 2016). Another participant noted, that maybe the Library needed to start catering to “the phone generation” through mobile apps, mobile licensing of games, and access via smartphone, tablet, etc.

The second major way the Library can meet the current needs of Alamance is by continuing to serve as **an education center** in order to support the community’s high priorities in both economic and workforce development and pre-k-12 education of children and youth. The maker-space movement could help in both areas.

As one city mayor noted, “why can’t we be the Maker City? A place for businesses to experiment with and develop prototype concepts. The Library can support this by providing a space for this and sharing resources as part of our Maker ecosystem” (Community Leader Interview, August 2016).



The Library can continue to positively impact the quality-of-life of the community by supporting and providing life-long learning opportunities. This includes supporting the continuum from early childhood literacy, K-12, adulthood, and seniors by providing quality information and access to a wide spectrum of resources and services. This is especially important for those



looking to get into, or who are already in, the workforce. The Library is already doing a great job partnering with the community college, providing digital access to those who cannot afford it, and taking outreach programs into the community.

Another facet of education the Library might be able to help with is by supporting (in a newly funded capacity) cities in creating and sharing archives (both physical and digital) with their respective communities. There seems to be a gap where a lot of city history and associated artifacts are not being preserved or shared with local communities. One aspect of this would be to also support the cities in conducting research to ensure that local decision makers have quality information from which to make the best, well-informed decisions as possible.

As one city leader confessed, “we all Google.” As another community leader reflected, the Library could also serve as the information resource and expert on a whole range of issues the community is working on together. “Libraries have an expertise within them that is very valuable – knowledgeable staff who very familiar with content and where and how you find information and where that content is; the library and staff are resources” (Community Leader Interview, August 2016).

Lastly, is how the Library can help the community address **poverty**. The first part of addressing this is by helping close the digital divide by providing consistent access to the Internet and electronic devices that connect those people who cannot afford it. In the information age,

information is power and capital and this helps level the playing field.

Maximizing access across the County is one pivotal way of addressing the digital divide. The concept of a cybrary or cyberlibrary, which is a technology center (and a waystation for books to be requested and delivered) that is technology enriched but has very few books is one possible idea that would allow for smaller, more cost-effective satellite branches that could serve as rural community Internet and wireless “hotspots.”





Several participants noted that people currently park in the library parking lots just to use the wireless connection, both during and after regular business hours. Tied to this would be a focus on supporting school-aged children with this technology access not only through connectivity but also by providing the technology they need to connect as well as to support their schoolwork, which could extend to a technology lending program that mirrors the technology required by their schools.

Many participants identified the need for technology to be more accessible to people living in poverty as a key desire. Technology could be a connection point to libraries through something that is already familiar and is considered desirable, as opposed to the traditional connotation associated with libraries, such as books, learning, and a connection to education. These are likely to serve as an aversion because of their previous experiences with formal education. Unfortunately, parents who have this stigma do not bring their kids to the library, which then helps perpetuate this cycle.

The second element to this is marketing and outreach programs. People who do not use the library and do not have a cultural tradition from their parents, grandparents, and families have no idea what libraries can do for them today. For example, many children within the Hispanic community come home to empty houses because their parents are working. One participant noted that the Library could offer more academic and tutoring support for this population as their parents are unable to help them and would be relieved that their children are safe at the library.



AmeriCorps could help partner with the Library on this. Their educational support would also extend to parents, many of whom never received any formal education from their native countries and are completely overwhelmed and largely unable to navigate healthcare and other



social services that may be available to them. Many in the Spanish-speaking community avoid places where they cannot communicate. For the Library to make inroads with this community they need to recruit staff and volunteers (seniors for example) who can speak Spanish.

### **Alamance County Public Library SWOT Analysis**

Content and thematic analysis of all staff interviews, focus groups, and survey data identified primary categories of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. ACPL's **Primary Strengths Include:** library staff, providing a quiet and welcoming environment, provision of strong resources (e.g. books and information of all types, technology, etc.), programming, and marketing/outreach. As one staff member noted, "I think we do our best to provide a great number of things to the patrons. We have an amazing staff who go out of their way to meet the patron's needs and desires, who will help as best as they can to make sure the patrons have all the information they need, and who have a lot of know-how. We have a great children's program. We offer a lot of events and services for children to come to and enjoy. We stay pretty up-to-date on the latest titles and have as decent a system as I can think of for getting the popular/ new ones out to patrons as quickly as possible" (ACPL Staff member, December 2016)

**Primary Weaknesses Include** staffing issues (e.g. related to retention, feeling overextended, and a need for continuing education and training, especially in teamwork and leadership), communication that is at times ineffective and limited, library space (e.g. spaces, buildings, and parking) that is either ineffective or potentially unsafe, out-of-date programming and resources

that may not be meeting the needs of the community, and a lack of community participation.



One staff member observed that, "The library does not currently do a great job of advertising its services outside of its 'library community'. There are populations in our community we are not reaching effectively. ACPL's library spaces were designed with traditional 20th century library services in mind, so it's sometimes difficult to offer 21st century services, which are more and more focused on libraries as community spaces. The library does not offer competitive



wages, so it's difficult to recruit talent(ed) people who will stay.” (ACPL staff member, December 2016).

**Primary Opportunities** focus on the need for increased marketing, outreach efforts, community participation, diverse and relevant programs, community-designed spaces and services, attention to morale and retention of staff (e.g. salaries, team building, clear and consistent application of policies and procedures, continuing education and training in teamwork and leadership skills, increased partnerships and collaborations (both public and private), and patron/community access (e.g. locations and possible alternative to fines).

According to one staff member, “We should focus on what we do best, perfect it, and not spread ourselves too thin. I also do not think that the public as a whole is aware of the resources available at the library. We have people almost every day say things like, "I didn't know you had that here!" or "Wow, all of this is free?" (ACPL staff member, December 2016).

**Primary Threats Include:** funding, remaining relevant (e.g. community and county buy-in), offering relevant programs/services, staffing morale and retention (e.g. salaries, training and continuing education, leadership), competition from other online sources, and marketing and outreach.

One staff member noted, “The library will never actually be obsolete, but people may believe it to be. We have to show our non-users what we have to offer. We are not just a place where you get shushed; a building full of boring books” (ACPL staff member, December 2016).

Another suggested, “Since one of our stronger demographics are the older readers, I think a big threat is losing that population. When those people start passing on we will lose one of our main sources of patronage. It will then fall to the next generation to keep coming, and that generation does not really seem to be as involved” (ACPL staff member, December 2016). Regarding staff issues, another staff member commented on the lack





of respect between staff.” (ACPL staff member, December 2016). Finally, a staff member cautioned about losing focus, citing “Relevance when technology allows so much to be available to people online; libraries chasing “the next great thing” and ignoring its core mission; and trying to do too much/be too many things....” (ACPL staff member, December 2016).

### **Patron’s Library Priorities**

When asked, “*What do you believe are the three most important programs and services the Library should provide for Alamance County?*” a total of 151 survey participants responded to the open-ended question. The most important library programs and services identified by Alamance County residents that responded to the survey are #1) Programming for All Ages (e.g. children and youth, GED classes, literacy, Zumba, etc.); #2) Books (all formats); and #3) Technology and internet access. Other priorities included online access and resources, DVDs/CDs, help from staff, magazines and newspapers, and library as space/place.

### **Library Satisfaction (N=344)**

Patrons were most satisfied with the Library’s customer service (M=6.5), location (M=6.2), looks/materials/other resources and service (M=6.2), internet speed (M=6.1), Hours (M=6.1), programs for children and youth (M=6.), computers (M=6.0), printing (M=6.0), programs (in general) (M=5.9), and quiet places to ready, study, or work (M=5.8). Patrons were least satisfied with parking (M=5.3),

marketing of programs and services (M=5.4), access to digital content (M=5.4), social media (M=5.6), providing meeting space (M=5.7), and the website (M=5.8).

### **Most Important Library Services the Past Year (N=344)**

The most important library services over the past year for participants were Library staff customer service and support (M=6.5 out of 7.0), checking out printed books (M=6.3), Wi-Fi (M=5.9), programs and services (children

5 and under) (M=5.5), adult programs (M=5.4), and help with homework for school-aged kids (M=5.1). The least important library services included downloading eContent (e.g. books, audio,





and music) (M=3.6), checking out audio books or music CDs (M=3.9), reference materials (e.g. newspapers, magazines, and other periodicals) (M=4.2)), checking out DVDs (M=4.4), library as place to socialize and attend events (M=4.4), and library public meeting rooms (M=4.6).

### **Future or Extended Services (N=344)**

The highest priority for future or extended services are expanded library web services (M=6.2), wireless hotspots for rural communities without wireless access (M=6.0), programs for active duty military or Veterans (M=6.0), programs on digital literacy (M=5.9), a library mobile app (M=5.8), programs for immigrants or first generation Americans (M=5.8), book clubs/author talks/other cinema and art discussions (M=5.8), programs on different languages and cultures/innovative technologies/local business and entrepreneurs (M=5.7).

### **Staff Future Priorities (n=27)**

When asked to provide their top five future priorities as an open-ended question, the following priorities were identified: 1) **Life-long educational and entertainment resources and programming** (e.g. representative of community needs, relevant, etc.), 2) **Marketing and outreach** (e.g. remaining relevant), 3) **Staff retention and morale**, 4) **Children and youth resources, services, and programming**, and 5) **Technology** – modern, up-to-date, and relevant.

As one participant noted, “As a library, we should be doing all we can to fulfill our goal of promoting lifelong learning and insuring our population has access to resources and information. Investing in early, adult and digital literacy is a crucial component to achieving that goal. As we are here to serve everyone, we need to be sure our library spaces, programs, and collections are inclusive. Prioritizing needs of youth is another critical component promoting lifelong learning and a firm investment in the



communities we serve. Creating more access to digital resources and technology not only keeps us relevant, it can also draw in new users and level the playing field for those who do not have ready access to certain technologies. Creating partnerships in our communities would take



library services outside of the library's four walls and give better access to our communities”  
(ACPL Staff, December 2016).



## **What Would Change about ACPL and Your Branch?**

When asked what staff would most want to change about ACPL, the three primary responses reflected the same as their overall priorities – 1) Staff retention and morale; 2) Improved marketing and outreach and; 3) Life-long educational and entertainment resources, services, and programming. For specific changes at their respective branches, staff also added - Safe, efficient and adequate use of library buildings and spaces -- including parking, lighting, furniture, and community space.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the comprehensive community and staff feedback, the following 12 recommendations are suggested:

1. Maintain strong print collections in children, young adult, and adult fiction.
2. Continue strengthening e-Resources and access to those resources through mobile apps, a more robust website, and digital literacy training and programming.
3. Prioritize children and youth resources, services, and programming – design specific strategies for Spanish-speaking youth and families because of this community’s unique needs; emphasize teen spaces and assistance with homework and/or areas to study or for group collaboration.
4. Continue offering innovative and relevant programming to the community with an emphasis towards tying programming with library resources that supplement programing (e.g. capitalize on interest by providing additional resources on topic that can be circulated).
5. Prioritize staff retention and morale – while salary disparities are being slowly addressed, focus also on other key drivers of staff morale such as training, articulation and adherence to consistent internal policies. Emphasize quality over quantity to allow staff more time to focus on fewer projects. In addition, promote discourse around potential concerns such as safety, space issues, staff infighting, etc. that staff identifies.
6. Prioritize economic and workforce development services, resources, programming, and partnerships/collaborations.
7. Continue investing in modern technology paying attention to trends that suggest physical computer usage in libraries are decreasing because more people have their own devices, which presents alternative opportunities for increased access and service to patrons.
8. Explore cybrary or technology satellite branches strategically place in rural communities with no broadband access.
9. Prioritize marketing and outreach, implementing a “rebranding” campaign focused on educating the community on all that the library has to offer and that dispels the old stereotype of libraries as dark, dusty places for books staffed by “shushing” librarians. Emphasize access to state-of-the-art technology.
10. Explore maker-spaces and maker-kits that focus on early childhood development and literacy, STEM/STEAM/STREAM, innovation, and entrepreneurship (e.g. 3D Printer, etc.).



11. Focus on the lifelong learning continuum in both educational and entertainment areas. This was the top priority for both patrons and the staff. The Library supports providing opportunities to positively impact patrons' quality-of-life across their lifespan. Library as space (e.g. Hunt Library, etc.), user experience, and third place/destination (e.g. Barnes & Noble, Internet cafes, etc.) continues to be a growing trend in libraries and ways to create this should be explored
12. Consider exploring branches in both the southern and western end of the county, both of which are currently underserved.



## Alamance County Public Library Strategic Plan 2017-2022

### Vision

**Providing Possibility. Creating Community.**

### Mission

**To provide learning opportunities for all members of our community to be successful in living a larger life by nurturing the heart and the mind.**

### Core Values

- 1. Approachable and Inviting**
- 2. Knowledgeable and Professional**
- 3. Open Minded and Respectful of Diversity**
- 4. Supportive and Positive**
- 5. Resourceful and Innovative**

### Core Competencies

- 1. Inviting and convenient spaces**
- 2. Professionally curated collections**
- 3. Literacy-inspired programs and resources**
- 4. Professional and knowledgeable Staff**
- 5. Access to today's technological resources**

### High Priority Goals

Alamance County Public Libraries will provide:

- 1. Access to high quality, trusted information and knowledge across the lifespan**
- 2. Inviting, convenient, and user-friendly spaces and services**
- 3. Innovative educational programs**



## High Priority Goals and Objectives

Alamance County Public Libraries will provide:

- 1. Access to high quality, trusted information and knowledge across the lifespan (Ongoing)**
  - 1.1. Provide vibrant and relevant resources and services in a variety of formats.**
  - 1.2. Provide adequate staffing levels with knowledgeable and well-trained staff by Fall 2018**
  - 1.3. Provide training, development and mentoring of staff**
  - 1.4. Establish partnerships with local agencies to provide educational and growth opportunities for graduate student interns and volunteers by Spring 2018**





## 2. Inviting, convenient, and user-friendly spaces and services

- 2.1. Pursue adequate revenue to support all collections (ongoing)
- 2.2. Physical or Mobile Location within 10 miles of all citizens by Fall 2020
- 2.3. User-friendly and ADA compliant presence
- 2.4. Promote library services and resources





### 3. Innovative educational programs

- 3.1. Develop services that will provide opportunities to increase levels of literacy and education of the community
- 3.2. Develop programs that will provide opportunities to increase levels of literacy and education of the community
- 3.3. Develop locations (both physical and mobile) that will provide opportunities to increase levels of literacy and education

