

Meredith Public Library Strategic Plan 2025-2029



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I. Introduction

The Meredith Public Library (MPL) completed a building renovation and expansion in 2021. In 2024 the New Hampshire Library Trustee Association (NHLTA) named MPL “Small Library of the Year” based on its ability to connect with the community. In order to maintain this strong bond with the community and grow it further, this Strategic Plan was created.

II. The Strategic Plan Advisory Committee

A. The Process

The Meredith Public Library Trustees and Director attended the NHLTA Conference in 2023 and attended workshops designed to help with the strategic planning process. Using this information, the Library Director created and distributed a public survey of library services that went out to the community through various social media outlets and in the library newsletter in 2023. She then reached out to community stakeholders asking them to assist in advising the trustees on a strategic plan. This team devised questions for two community outreach events including a Soup and Bread Social in the winter and an Ice Cream Social in the summer. These questions were also distributed at various library events and in the library’s online and print newsletter in 2024.

In addition, a SWOT Analysis was completed with the Board of Library Trustees, The Friends of the Library Board and the Library Staff.

B. The Strategic Plan Advisory Team

- *Altrusa Club of Meredith*-Pat McFarlin
- *Friends of the Meredith Library*-Irene Bonner & Cheryl Van Veghten
- *Meredith Historical Society*-Rudy Van Veghten
- *Meredith Public Library Staff*-Erin Apostolos, Karen Henchey, Liz Rohdenburg
- *Library Patrons*-Sarah and Matt Larrabee
- *Meredith Public Library Trustees*-Ann Butler and Maggie Croes
- *Meredith Rotary Club* and *Meredith Chamber*-Wendy Bagley
- *Lakes Center for the Arts*-Carol Gerken and Karen Sobin-Jonash
- *NH Humane Society* and *Friends of the Library* Deb McNeish
- *Local Small Business Representative*-Bonnie Ireland
- *Lakes Region Visiting Nurses*-Rene Speltz
- *Inter-Lakes School Board*-Lisa Merrill
- *Winni Playhouse*-Cory Lawson

After the data was collected and collated, the Library Director drafted a Strategic Plan and distributed it to the Strategic Plan Advisory Committee for feedback. The Director then redrafted the plan incorporating that feedback and sent it to the Board of Library Trustees for feedback and eventual approval on *February 11, 2025*.

III. Summary of results

A. Community. We received feedback from 174 community members in our 2023 Patron Satisfaction Survey, with 94% holding library cards and 45% visiting weekly. Patrons rated the staff very highly, with 87% giving an "Excellent" rating and 12% "Good". Popular requests included expanding the Large Print, Classics and DVD collections. Top program suggestions focused on technology how-to's, arts and crafts, and more evening/weekend events. The survey emphasized how much patrons value the welcoming atmosphere, friendly staff, and expanded facilities. We appreciate the community's input and will use it to shape our future offerings.

Summarizing answers to the 2024 Outreach Questions, patrons appreciate the wide variety of activities available for all ages, including adult programs, craft sessions, genealogy groups, and themed events like history talks. The library's craft and technology programs, such as quilt-making and 3D printing classes, are popular, and the children's programs receive high praise for their age-appropriate content and social opportunities. The library staff is frequently commended for their friendliness and helpfulness, and patrons enjoy the library's welcoming environment with spaces for both relaxation and study. The diverse range of programs, from knitting groups to author talks, keeps patrons engaged.

However, some patrons feel that the library could improve by offering more evening programs and better promoting its events, as some note insufficient public notices. Other concerns include limited library hours, parking challenges, and missed opportunities for seasonal events. On the other hand, most patrons had no complaints about the library services. To improve promotion, patrons suggest expanding visibility through newspapers, targeted media outreach, and partnerships with schools, as well as leveraging digital tools like social media and newsletters.

To enhance outreach and homebound services, patrons recommend recruiting more volunteers and forming partnerships with local groups. They also suggest developing a mobile library service and increasing in-library promotion. Patrons expressed interest in more diverse programming, expanded evening hours, and craft groups, while also requesting personalized communication based on interests. There is also enthusiasm for skill-sharing programs, expanded maker projects, and more child- and family-focused activities.

B. SWOT Analysis of the Boards and Staff

a. The Friends of the Library Board.

b. The Board of Library Trustees.

- i. Analysis.** Both boards agreed that library strengths are that the Library Director and staff are knowledgeable, skilled, service-oriented, and have an exceptional ability to engage the public and perform outreach. They both agreed that there is strong community support and engagement, that the library has an amazing Friends group that act as fundraisers and volunteers and that the library is respected in the community as evidenced by continued funding and patronage.

Weaknesses seen by both boards included that the parking situation is terrible, with the lot often full due to parking by tenants on High Street or events at the Baptist Church. They both felt that limitation on library hours might be affecting service to the community, yet feared that current demands on the staff will start to outstrip their capacity to serve, as there is not enough staff to meet the demand. Though the library is well-funded through tax dollars, Friends contributions, donations, and income from the library trust, adding more staff might upset the Town Budget Committee and tax-payers who voiced very openly at the last town meeting that their tax burden is too high.

Both Boards felt that there was an opportunity to get more involvement in the library by advocating to schools, parents who attend story time and partnering with businesses and non-profits such as nursing homes and Innisfree Bookshop. They believed the library has a well-equipped Maker Space and that more needs to be done to promote its use to the community. They also felt that the library needs to do more to get the word out about events, activities and spaces. Since Meredith has a large percentage of seniors, they believed that the library needs to outreach more to the places where seniors live and provide more Zoom capable programming for those who cannot drive.

Both Boards saw tight budgets, homelessness, substance abuse in the library and possible changes to the political climate as threats to the library. Loss of key staff or the Library Director, demands on staff outstripping their abilities and time to serve, pay scale and compensation challenges to staff and keeping up with library trends were also perceived as threats. Downtown traffic and lack of parking were also seen as issues.

c. Staff

- i. Analysis.** Staff agree that Library strengths include a Library Director who is “hands off” in a good way, trusting experience and expertise of staff on day to day matters, yet being representative and supportive when needed. They felt that Library programming is amazing, well-branded and appeals to all age groups. They felt that they provided positive,

interpersonal service to patrons via personalized service, patron hand-outs with step-by-step instructions for online services, homebound service, and programming. They believed that they had strong partnerships in the community such as the Altrusa Club, Rotary, the Winni Playhouse, daycares, Inter-Lakes Schools, and the Select Board. They also felt that they had engaged students and school staff through library card sign-ups, adding a bus stop in front of the library, resurrecting a Teen Advisory Board and being a homeschool hub.

Institutional weaknesses included limited patron assistance and a lack of security on the second floor with no phones or communication on that level. There is not enough office space, with six staff members sharing two offices, and not enough meeting or study rooms to meet demand. They felt that the Children's Room wasn't large enough. There were general staffing issues with not enough people on the circulation desk at busy hours. They also felt that there was a lack of visibility of the library by Town officials and employees.

The Staff believed that opportunities include adding additional staff seen as "on demand" or as substitutes for last minute sick calls, hiring a Maker Space expert, having each employee learn a different piece of Maker Space equipment, and expanding hours. They felt the library could benefit from a children's literacy program, parental outreach and an outdoor reading area for children. They also felt we could do more community partnerships such as with local art guilds, historical societies, small businesses and expanding the homebound program.

Though they appreciate the work of the Friends group, they felt a threat was relying too heavily on the Friends for funding and feared that as the group ages or becomes less active, that funding may be lost. Traffic and lack of parking were also seen as threats as was inflation and the price of ebooks and streaming services.

IV. Mission Statement

The Meredith Public Library's mission is to be the cultural heart of Meredith; a gathering place where community members can acquire and share knowledge.

V. Vision Statement

The Library will be a community gathering place, an informational hub, a center for recreational resources, a promoter of literacy and a depository for local history. It will be a safe place where patrons and staff will feel comfortable to be themselves.

VI. Core Values

The Meredith Public Library is committed to:

- a. Serving the community.
- b. Creating partnerships in the community.
- c. Providing learning opportunities.
- d. Developing a broad and inclusive collection that reflects community values.
- e. Encouraging and promoting library usage.

VII. Goals

Goals for 2025-2029 were developed utilizing feedback from the community, staff and boards to help us prioritize the allocation of resources. The Strategic Plan will guide the development and delivery of the Library's programs, collection and services. The annual Action Plan will help us set more detailed supporting objectives and specific timeline based activities.

- a. **Invest in Staff Development and Support**
Focus on staff well-being by addressing space constraints, ensuring adequate staffing levels during peak times, and providing ongoing training, including Maker Space expertise.
- b. **Expand Access and Hours of Operation**
Enhance accessibility by extending hours, including weekends and evenings, to better serve working individuals, families, and seniors.
- c. **Foster Community Partnerships**
Build and strengthen partnerships with local organizations, nursing homes, schools, and small businesses to extend outreach and create more collaborative programs.
- d. **Enhance Safety and Accessibility**
Improve safety measures, including better lighting and parking lot upgrades, while ensuring spaces are accessible to all, especially seniors and those with disabilities.
- e. **Increase Green and Outdoor Spaces**
Develop outdoor spaces with picnic tables, benches, and a reading area to create more comfortable and inviting areas for patrons to enjoy the library outdoors.
- f. **Broaden Program Offerings**
Diversify programming to include activities tailored to different demographics.
- g. **Strengthen Library Promotion and Visibility**
Expand marketing efforts through newsletters, podcasts, social media, and town official engagement to increase awareness and usage of library resources.
- h. **Secure Sustainable Funding**
Reduce reliance on the Friends group for funding by pursuing grants, increasing endowment contributions, and exploring new revenue-generating programs.
- i. **Adapt to Technological Changes**
Keep pace with technological advancements by maintaining up-to-date digital offerings, enhancing the Library of Things collection, and ensuring staff and patrons can effectively use these resources.

- j. **Preserve and Celebrate Local Heritage**
Create programs and events centered on local history and culture, appealing to both residents and tourists while reinforcing the library's role as a community hub.

VIII. Action Plan for 2025

Invest in Staff Development and Support.

- Collaborate with team members to identify peak times of service and when more help is needed. Develop a plan to address those concerns.
- Fully develop a policy and procedure manual that can be placed on the shared drive.
- Perform a Salary Analysis utilizing libraries in NH of a similar size.
- Develop a Succession Plan and identify staff development needs in order to enact the plan.

Foster Community Partnerships

- Collaborate with Inter-Lakes Schools and Lakes Region libraries to promote *The Americans and Holocaust* Traveling Exhibit.
- Develop *The Lakes Regions Reads* around *We Were the Lucky Ones* by Georgia Taylor. Invite Lakes Region libraries and the Wright Museum to participate.

Enhance Safety and Accessibility

- Ask representatives from the Meredith Police Department to analyze the building and grounds in order to address staff and patron concerns regarding safety. Develop a plan to address these concerns.
- Redesign the Teen Zone to better suit the needs of that demographic making it more user friendly, accessible and sound-proofed as much as possible.

Broaden Program Offerings

- Develop Programming around *The Americans and the Holocaust* traveling exhibit in conjunction with *The Lakes Region Reads* for all age groups.

Strengthen Library Promotion and Visibility

- Research other means of promoting the library in the community. Create a Public Relations Plan for 2025.
- Promote the Maker Space to the community by increasing learning opportunities for patrons and staff.

Adapt to Technological Changes

- Develop a plan for implementing a "Library of Things".
- Identify areas where staff need more hands-on training such as in the Maker Space. Implement a plan for that training.

Increase Green and Outdoor Spaces

- Reach out to community civic groups such as the Greater Meredith Program or Rotary for assistance on a plan for an outdoor area at the High Street Entrance.

Preserve and Celebrate Local Heritage

- Develop a plan to digitize the *Meredith News*.

IX. Measuring and Communicating our Progress

The Library Director and Board of Library Trustees will annually review the Strategic Plan. The Library Director will report on the progress of the Annual Action plan in the library's Spring newsletter and the annual Town Report.

X. Plan Approval

On February 11, 2025 the Meredith Public Library Board of Trustees approved the library's Strategic Plan for 2025-2029 as well as the Action Plan for 2025.

XI. Library Director's Acknowledgments

Thank you to everyone who helped to contribute to this plan including the Library Staff, Board of Trustees, Friends of the Library and members of the Strategic Plan Advisory Committee. Thank you to the members of the community who took time to give their feedback through surveys and meetings. Finally, thank you to the New Hampshire Library Trustee Association for providing a very helpful workshop on strategic planning and to Priya Ratham, Director of the Shrewsbury Public Library, for sharing her plan at that workshop and for offering sage advice. Thank you to Dr. Marc Bard whose watercolor of the Meredith Public Library building illustrates the front of this plan.