

# STRATEGIC PLAN

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2024-2028

This strategic plan was created in partnership with consultants from WILS:

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# Our Mission

Providing impactful services and building strong relationships to champion the work and missions of our members.

# Our Vision

Thriving communities supported by vibrant libraries.

# Our Values

## MEMBERS FIRST

The needs and ideas of our member libraries are foundational to the work we do.

## INTEGRITY

We do our work and make decisions transparently and honestly, using our mission and values as our guide.

## STEWARDSHIP

We are committed to managing the resources entrusted to us in a responsible manner. We make thoughtful decisions to advance our members' capabilities to serve residents of the system area.

## LEADERSHIP

We approach leadership from a collaborative perspective. We value others' ideas, approach our work with an open mind, and are eager to challenge the status quo.

## EQUITY

We are dedicated to providing our members with an equitable foundation of support and resources. Each of our members sees value in their relationship with and participation in the system.

## RESPECT

We respect our member libraries, staff, partners in local and county governments, and the important work each stakeholder group performs.

## AGILITY

We are responsive to our members' needs and recognize that those needs can change rapidly. We are well-connected to our members, each other, and other library systems. We observe and respond to emerging trends.

## COLLABORATION

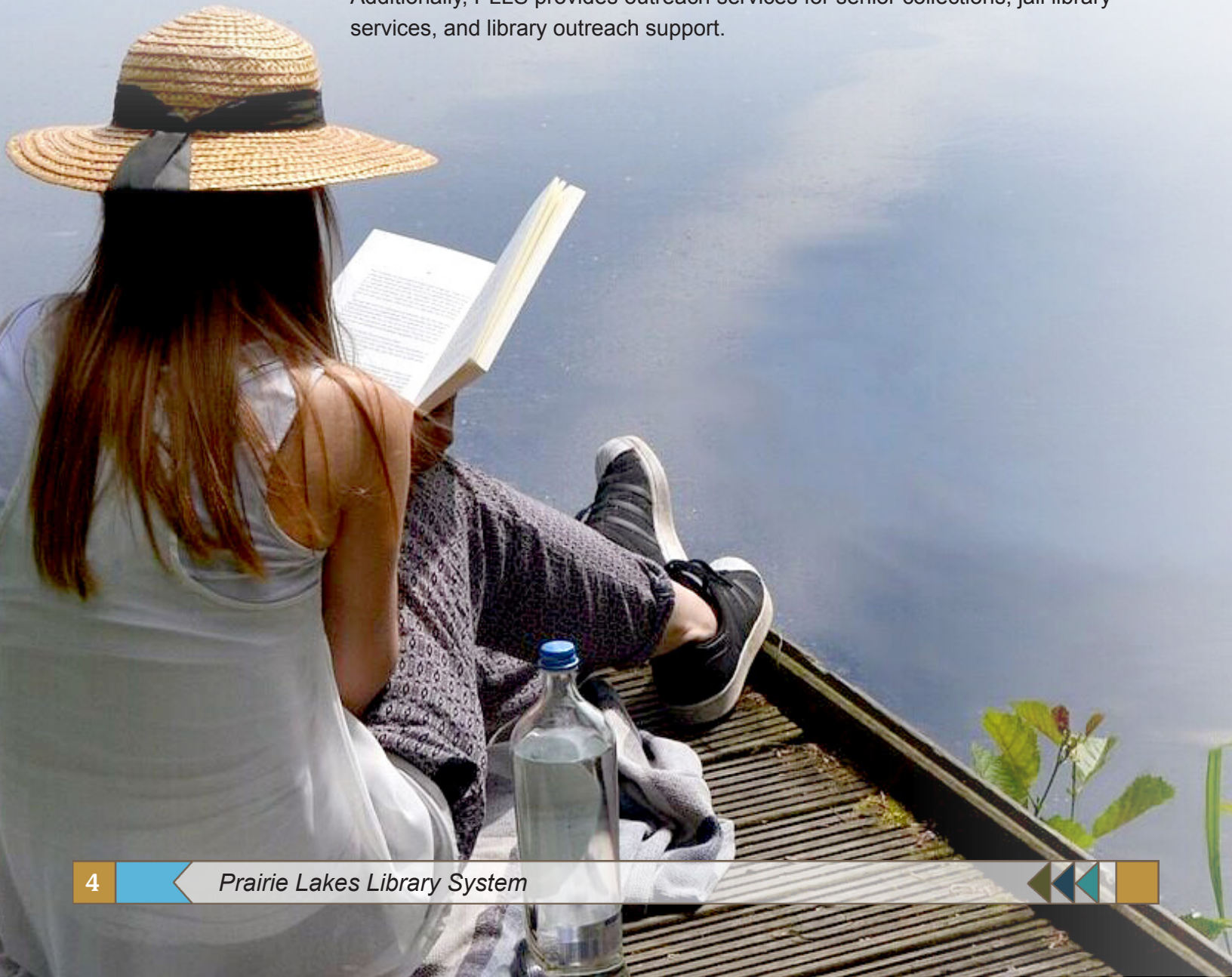
We engage with our members with the goal of connecting them with each other. We strive to create a welcoming environment where every library has the opportunity to thrive.

## About Prairie Lakes Library System

The Prairie Lakes Library System (PLLS) was established on January 1, 2023. The system serves member and affiliate member libraries in Racine, Rock, and Walworth counties. PLLS is also a member and facilitator of the SHARE Consortium (SHARE). As a SHARE member system, public library cards issued by PLLS libraries are valid at all SHARE libraries in Kenosha, Racine, Rock, and Walworth counties.

Core system services include daily delivery services to member libraries to facilitate resource sharing, consulting in the areas of public information, technology, and youth services, continuing education, interlibrary loan, and support of the shared integrated library system (ILS) used by all PLLS and SHARE member libraries.

Additionally, PLLS provides outreach services for senior collections, jail library services, and library outreach support.



## About the Strategic Planning Process

PLLS was formed after a collaborative merger between the Arrowhead Library System and the Lakeshores Library System. The committee that led the process recommended that the new system develop a strategic plan early in its formation. A strategic planning process would consider all members and stakeholders of the new system and set a clear path for the first years of PLLS.

With this recommendation in mind, the PLLS leadership and board hired WiLS, a non-profit membership organization that works with libraries and library systems throughout the state, to facilitate the process. The system, also based on recommendations made during the merger, used the planning process to engage staff, member libraries, and the system board in developing foundational elements, including mission and vision statements and values.

The process included:

- A system staff Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results (SOAR) session
- Research into member library strategic plans
- A stakeholder survey, which had 61 responses and broad participation across member libraries
- A session with system staff and board representatives to develop mission, vision, and values
- A system board questionnaire
- A member library engagement session

After data collection, the system convened a data assessment team to review the gathered information, attend a data webinar, and identify emerging themes. This group also met to develop the strategic plan's goals, objectives, and outcomes.



## Key Takeaways

The data assessment team identified the following key takeaways from the gathered information. These takeaways are the foundation for the plan's goals and objectives.

### **Core Services are Important**

Strategic planning typically uncovers new projects and services for an organization to undertake. While this proved true for the PLLS planning process, member libraries were clear that the existing core services of PLLS should be maintained and improved upon. More than once, member libraries expressed the importance of technology support, the ILS, delivery, and marketing/communication services. In the survey, nearly 70% of respondents selected the ILS/Sirsi support and provision as their top priority for the system, with material delivery and local IT support also viewed as priorities.

Members also indicated room to grow core services, especially those with a consulting or collaboration focus. Survey results showed that youth services consulting had room for improvement. Youth services were also a topic at the member engagement session. However, members coupled it with other programming support needs; for example, participants expressed a need for increased coordination and collaboration around various types of programming, with PLLS possibly facilitating peer-to-peer groups (i.e., youth services or adult services interest groups) or hiring a dedicated, all-ages programming consultant.

The data-gathering process exposed many consulting needs, but often, these needs are unique to a particular library at a particular time. Current system staff members can be tapped to meet these needs, for example, consulting related to annual reports, grants, or marketing and communication, or the system could expand their role as a coordinator, identifying a member with a particular need, and match-making with another member (or board member) with the needed expertise.

### **Ready to Connect**

Whether considering the system staff SOAR, member engagement session, stakeholder survey, or board questionnaire, it was clear that all members of the PLLS ecosystem are ready and excited to connect. 91% of survey takers consider "Improving





communication between and amongst directors and system staff to facilitate increased connections across PLLS” an important/essential role for the system.

This survey result was echoed in the system staff SOAR and member engagement session. Both system staff and member libraries saw the re-establishment of affinity or interest groups as a logical role for the system, and member libraries saw their peers as essential resources and experts. They identified the system as a facilitator, helping directors connect with directors, specialists connect with specialists, and libraries connect with libraries.

Additionally, system staff is eager to find the most effective pathways to improve communication between the system and its members. There is room to build on successful practices, such as technology site visits, to make connections and increase the system’s understanding of member library needs. Member libraries and system staff identified established meetings as a logical starting point for improving communication and connections.

## **Building a Sustainable System**

93% of survey takers either somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “I think the system will be successful both in the short term and into the future.” System stakeholders have faith in the new system, and PLLS can take practical and achievable steps to ensure the system’s success. While PLLS is made up of two former systems that have worked together for years, there is work to be done to build a shared culture between system staff, the system board, and the member libraries. Developing mission and vision statements and system values is a strong step in providing direction and setting expectations for the entire system.

Creating a new system does not end when the first annual plan is submitted, or the website has a new name. It is a long, complex process with many stakeholders and moving parts. Each stakeholder group will need time in the early years of the new system to learn their new roles. The organization will need time to develop the processes and communication pathways to ensure sustainability, transparency, and trust. System leadership must dedicate the time and resources to facilitating the development of these new roles, processes, and pathways.

# Strategic Plan Framework

## Enhancing our Members' Community Impact

The members of the Prairie Lakes Library System provide critical services to their communities. We provide them with the resources, expertise, and information they need to fulfill their important roles.

- OBJECTIVE 1**                      Continue to provide and improve key services that are valued by membership
- OBJECTIVE 2**                      Strengthen our member libraries' ability to provide services, especially those related to programming, that best support their community
- OBJECTIVE 3**                      Increase members' ability to engage with professionally-relevant continuing education opportunities, with a focus on new library directors
- OBJECTIVE 4**                      Improve our members' ability to access timely consulting services as needs arise

### GOAL OUTCOMES

- Member libraries report increased benefits and engagement from PLLS
- Member libraries see increases/improvements in local data points
- Strong attendance at professional development workshops

## Connection-making and Collaboration

The Prairie Lakes Library System is made up of experts at our member libraries and on our system staff and board. A well-connected system is a thriving system, with members finding the support they need when and where they need it.

- OBJECTIVE 1**                      Develop meaningful ways for member directors and library staff to connect with each other on topics of interest and need
- OBJECTIVE 2**                      Increase system engagement with member libraries
- OBJECTIVE 3**                      Enhance system communication efforts to grow awareness of resources, opportunities, and items of interest from the system and profession

### GOAL OUTCOMES

- A greater sense of connection among all system stakeholders; any lingering ALS / LLS mindsets are replaced by a unified PLLS
- More engagement in system director meetings (e.g., an uptick in instances where directors "weigh in" during discussions)



- More committee & task force participation, greater meeting attendance, and a strong flow of ideas between libraries
- Member library questions are answered either by system staff or another library that has faced the same situation

## Cultivating our System

A positive and unified organizational culture is crucial for fostering a healthy work environment, strong relationships, and achieving long-term success for the system and all of its stakeholders

**OBJECTIVE 1** Protect the financial health and sustainability of the system through effective budgeting, resource allocation, and transparent financial reporting

**OBJECTIVE 2** Develop mechanisms to put newly established mission, vision, and values into practice

**OBJECTIVE 3** Foster close ties between the System Board and its stakeholders to build a shared understanding of its role to facilitate efficient, appropriate, and impactful decision-making and actions

**OBJECTIVE 4** Create and enhance connections between the system and local, county, and state entities to educate and promote awareness of the vital work undertaken by libraries and the system

### GOAL OUTCOMES

- Confidence in the system
- A sense of pride in PLLS
- The strategic plan is integrated into system decision-making and is a living document with clear, achievable, and meaningful activities
- Member libraries report increased benefits and engagement from PLLS
- Productive System Trustee meetings

## Implementation, Assessment, and Communication

The planning process produced many project or activity ideas, some that are currently happening and some that will require time to develop and implement. Working with the staff and board, the Prairie Lakes Library System Director will prioritize the system's actions to meet the needs of our membership in the most effective and meaningful ways possible. These activities will be annually reviewed, assessed, and, where necessary, modified to ensure that they continue to align with the needs of our membership and the system's capacity.

The director will also develop an ongoing schedule to regularly review the implementation of the strategic plan with staff, board, and membership. This may take the form of surveys, questionnaires, or meeting discussions, and the system will update the plan's activities based on lessons learned and changes in the environment.

The director will additionally establish a regular communication schedule to provide updates on progress, highlight achievements, and make any adjustments to the plan using existing communication channels such as the system newsletter, emails, and meetings.



# Acknowledgments

Without the dedicated staff, board, and membership of the Prairie Lakes Library System, this inaugural plan would not have been possible. Many people took time to complete a survey, fill out a questionnaire, attend a meeting, and share their ideas for the best path forward for our new system. We sincerely thank all of the voices who made this plan and took the time to offer us guidance.

In particular, we would like to thank the system staff for their investment in developing this plan. They both directly participated and helped support the work that went into creating this plan.

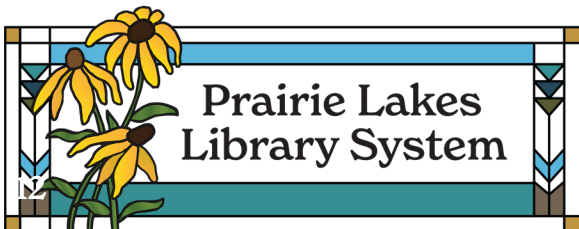
The system would also like to acknowledge and thank the following individuals who reviewed the data collected, identified themes, and developed the goals and objectives of this plan:

Joe Davies	Member Library Director from Racine County
Sara Strunz	Member Library Director from Rock County
Chad Robinson	Member Library Director from Walworth County
Adam Dinnes	System Trustee from Rock County
Sue Lea	System Trustee from Racine County
Mary Nugent	System Trustee from Walworth County
Steve Ohs	System Director

Finally, the system would like to acknowledge our dedicated and thoughtful board:

Stephen Brace	Assistant Treasurer Trustee At-Large, Rock County
Nathaniel (Nat) Coffman	Trustee At-Large, Racine County
Adam Dinnes	Trustee At-Large, Rock County
Joanne Laufenberg	Walworth County Supervisor
Sue Lea	Trustee At-Large, Racine County
Robert N. Miller	Vice-President Racine County Supervisor
Mary Nugent	Trustee At-Large, Walworth County
Linda Schubring	Trustee At-Large, Racine County
Annette Smith	President Trustee At-Large, Rock County
Gary Tilleros	Treasurer Trustee At-Large, Racine County
Bill Wilson	Rock County Supervisor

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