

Superior Public Library

Strategic Plan
2025-2029

Superior Public Library Strategic Plan

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Adopted February 12, 2025 by the Superior Public Library Board of Trustees

Mission and Values

As a cornerstone institution in our community, Superior Public Library’s mission focuses our efforts as champions of reading, learning, and creating connections to inspire all to grow. The Library’s values guide our daily work and commit us to serve everyone in our community.

Mission

The Superior Public Library helps people in northern Wisconsin achieve personal and community growth by encouraging young readers, inspiring imagination at all ages, and connecting citizens with one another and the broader world.

Values



Accessibility

The library is an accessible and welcoming place for all community members and visitors.



Objectivity

The library provides an up-to-date collection of resources which respects the many different views of the community.



Learning

The library fosters a lifelong love of learning for all ages.



Relevance

With thoughtful stewardship, the library is an essential resource that provides services which are important in the daily lives of community members.

About the Superior Public Library



With our main library located in the heart of Superior's historic downtown and two branch libraries in the villages of Lake Nebagamon and Solon Springs, the library serves the city of Superior and the residents of Douglas County. Like the history of the Superior region displayed in the [thirty-five mural panels](#) in our beautiful building, the library continuously moves forward by innovating and delivering services that grow and inspire our community.

The library is supported by our patrons and our engaged community. We are also supported by an active [Friends of the Library](#) group and an impactful [Superior Public Library Foundation](#). Our diligent and dedicated [Library Board of Trustees](#) ensures that the library is a strong steward of the public good, providing the spaces, resources, and people the Superior community needs to learn, engage, and grow.

Like almost all libraries in Wisconsin, Superior Public Library saw declines in library visits and use during and just past the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting closures. However, in the past two years, the library has seen a rebound in all of our service usage. We are excited to see our community attend more programs, check out more books, and visit the library more frequently, and will do all we can to invite even more use and awareness of our library. Here is just a snapshot of how the Superior community interacts with the library¹:



- In 2023, we had almost 12,000 cardholders - a 17% increase from 2022!
- We had 109,568 visits to the library in 2023 - over 10,000 more than the previous year.
- Just under 160,000 items were checked out at the library, 70,000 of which were children's materials.
- With 110,685 print items in our collection (not to mention audio material, video items, our growing Library of Things, and eBooks) we have, on average, 9 items per cardholder, so we always have something for our patrons!

¹ These statistics are from Wisconsin's Department of Public Instruction (DPI)'s Public Library Annual Report data, which includes data up to 2023.

- 57 cents - that's how much we spend, on average, for each of our physical items. Try getting that deal anywhere else.
- In 2023, we had over 30,000 eBooks uses.
- Our computers were used 7,341 times and our wifi was used over 15,000 times.
- We hosted 222 programs in 2023, with just over 5,300 attendees -- that's an average of 26 people for each of our programs. And, it's about 2,000 more people at programs than in 2022.
- We also attended city meetings, visited our schools and nursing homes, and have built our knowledge and sharing of city and community resources, to make sure our patrons are connected to the services they need, even when we are not the direct provider.

Building on Success

The Superior Public Library made great progress towards the goals and objectives of our 2020-2024 strategic plan. Key successes include:

- We did meaningful work to become a center for community service information and resources. We created a bulletin board and a community resource guide to point our patrons to services and resources in our community. We hired a Community Resource Specialist, who has office hours and attends resource fairs. We have also supported our staff with a variety of training opportunities.
- We collaborated with community partners, including the Douglas County Historical Society, nursing homes in the area, our schools, the homeschool community, the Aging & Disability Resource Center, UW-Superior, and LiveWell WI.
- We developed new services and programming that inclusively meet the community's needs. We completed the DPI Inclusivity Assessment, created book displays aimed at inclusivity, and worked with the city DEI advisory group to make recommendations to the board and the Mayor's Commission on Communities of Color. We also embraced new programming, such as Zine programming, Dungeons & Dragon sessions, and even tie-dye and poured painting.
- We went fine-free as part of our efforts to make access to the library as easy as possible.
- We focused on innovation and implemented new ideas to make the library a more accessible, exciting, and safe destination for all. We shored up our behavior policies and developed our social work approaches and service with empathy. We made practical improvements, like better outdoor lighting to increase safety, and participated in several



safety training sessions. We got out of the library and on our book bike to bring the library to the community.

- We made sure the Superior community was better informed about (and entertained by) all that's happening at and with the library. We established a newsletter, which already has 1,200 subscribers, created library swag, and experimented with special events such as online card signups, National Card signup month, Library Lovers' Month, a Passport Program, and Did You Know features on Facebook.
- We also ensured our staff aligned with community needs and the library's mission. Examples include hiring a new outreach position, increasing conference attendance, library interns, and intentionally finding workflow improvements to improve capacity.
- Our Board of Trustees, Friends Group, and Library Foundation all made big differences in the library's success.



About the Planning Process

Starting in the summer of 2024, the Superior Public Library began a strategic process that evaluated its previous plan and looked to the future. One of the first steps for the library was to form a planning team to inform and guide the process alongside consultants hired from [WILS](#) (Wisconsin Library Services).

Superior Public Library's Strategic Planning Team

Sue Hendrickson, Library Board President

Susan Heskin, Library Director

Ellen Kreidler, Library Board Vice President and Friends of Superior Public Library President

Leslie Mehle, Library Manager of Programs and Partnerships

Garner Moffat, Library Board Member

Lexi Nevin, Library Community Resources Specialist

Jim Purvis, Library Board Member and Library Foundation President

Heather Rickerl, Library Board Member

Erin Schilling, Superior School District and former Library Board Member

Jenny Tahtinen, Librarian and Administrative Assistant

The process relied on robust data and information collection to identify key community and library trends and needs. The data sources included:

A director and staff self-evaluation of the most recent strategic plan. This assessment identified key accomplishments in the previous plan and areas of work to be continued in the next plan.

A planning team landscape questionnaire. The questionnaire asked team members to identify library and community aspirations, issues, and needs.

DPI Annual Report data. The planning team had access to a data dashboard that offered visualizations of key service data for the previous five years and a look at the Superior Public Library compared to a cohort average of similar libraries identified through statistical modeling.

A library staff Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results (SOAR) engagement session. This in-person meeting invited all staff members to identify strengths the library can leverage and areas of opportunity in the coming years.

A library board conversation. Complimenting the staff SOAR, the board conversation gathered information about the community's challenges and aspirations and the library's strengths, opportunities, and aspirations.

A community survey. Nearly 250 community members completed the community survey. This survey was compared to the 2019 survey to identify changes in community perception, awareness, values, and needs and paths for the library to consider in the next five years.

Community Q & A Boards. Installed at each branch location, these boards asked library patrons three big questions (What is Superior’s biggest strength? What is Superior's biggest need? How can the Superior Public Library most help?) by sharing thoughts using notes. The installation collected community input over the course of several weeks.

Stakeholder Interviews. Members of the Superior community were identified by the planning team for WiLS consultants and planning team members to interview. The 22 interviews provided qualitative data and insight into community strengths and opportunities and what catalyzing role the library might play.

Theming worksheets. After the data was compiled, analyzed, and shared back with the planning team, each member completed a theming worksheet to identify overarching themes that became the foundation for the plan’s goals and measurable objectives.



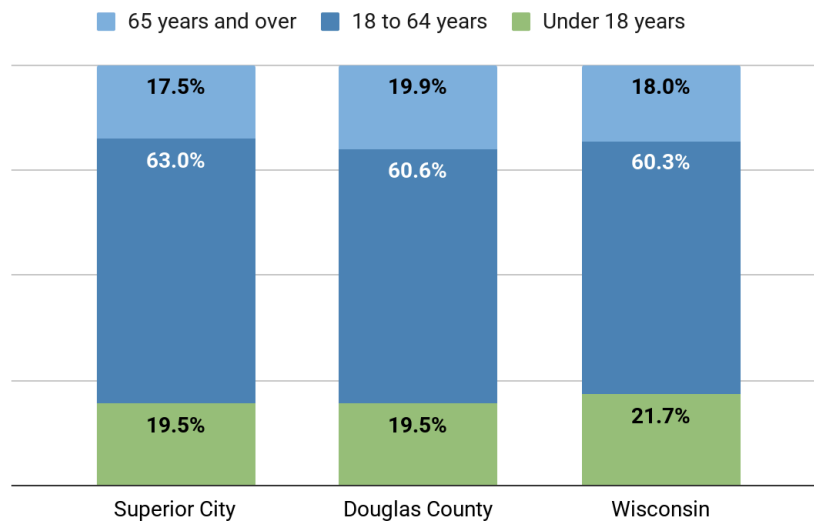
What We Learned

In some cases, the data and information in this planning process clearly showed that the goals and objectives of the 2019-2024 plan were still very relevant to the work today and in the coming years. The data also pointed to new goals, new objectives, and new approaches to the services, spaces, staffing, and resources of the Superior Public Library.

Overarching Themes

Community needs are constantly changing, and the library needs to be ready and responsive.

There is a substantial senior population in Superior, with roughly 18% of the population over 65. On the other side of the equation, about 20% of the population is under 18. We heard in interviews, the community survey, and Q&A boards that services, collections, and spaces for these two age groups were important to the broader community. There may be places for the library to fine-tune its hours, services, and resources to best align with our community.



There are strengths to grow in Superior and at the library. There is something special happening in Superior. Both the city and the library have embraced a distinct growth mindset. Innovative developments, a reinvigorated downtown, new staff, and expanded talents abound. The library can further embrace, reflect, and be ready for this growth by having well-trained and prepared staff, aligning services with this growth at the city level, and being active in groups that are forming in response to growth, especially those that are focused on the expected influx of temporary workers.

Importantly, community members are incredibly satisfied with the level of service they receive from the Superior Public Library, further indicating that the library has deep strengths they can leverage into the future.

Community members’ perception of the value of the library and its services remained high between 2019 and 2024, with notable increases in the percentage of community members who believe the library exposes people to new things and helps them find information they can trust.

Library Perception Statement	Agreement 2019	Agreement 2024
The library is important for the community.	96%	98%
The library is important to me and/or my family.	94%	95%
The library exposes people to new things.	81%	94%
The library helps people find information they can trust.	85%	91%
The library is effective at promoting literacy and a love of reading.	86%	90%

Outreach and partnership opportunities abound. Along with the library’s growth mindset, it also has a newer outreach position and social worker, both of which rely on and can expand partnerships. Some of the clearest needs we heard relate to a lack of mental health services, drug use, and an unhoused population. The library can’t solve these societal problems, but they can be part of a larger coalition focused on improvements. The library is and can continue to be a strong partner in this area. Schools, senior centers, and the Spanish-speaking community were identified as groups to focus on in outreach efforts. However, the library will want to do this carefully with some parameters in place, understanding that staff capacity limits are very real.

Community members ranked the following service priorities on the community survey:

- #1 - Increased coordination with local schools.
- #2 - Offer more technology skills programming.
- #3 - Offer more job / employment services and programs.

The Superior Public Library can further efforts to be a community hub, welcoming people in through unique, compelling spaces. Placemaking is “a participatory process for shaping public space that harnesses the ideas and assets of the people who use it,” and the desire of staff, board, and community to take part in this process was clear throughout the strategic planning process. The building is beautiful and functional, but there is a desire to improve the outdoor space, create a go-to destination (arts, music, and local history were mentioned by many participants), and make people feel welcome and comfortable - like an extension of their living room.

Community members were asked to rank their priorities for potential changes to Superior Public Library’s outdoor spaces:

- #1 - Improve outdoor seating options.
- #2 - Improve the library’s parking lot.
- #3 - Improve outdoor book drop service.



Strategic Plan 2025-2029

Goal One: Community

We will strengthen our role as a vital community resource, strategic partner, and coalition builder.

Why this Goal

Feedback from the planning process highlighted that Superior and its surrounding areas have distinct social, economic, and health needs that affect the library. The library, in its supportive capacity, plays a significant role in addressing these community needs. Community members, through 1:1 interviews and library Q & A Boards, and staff, through the SOAR conversation, noted that housing, mental health, and social service resources are in demand. The planning process also showed that the library is impacted by recent demographic changes, such as an increase in the senior population, and needs to be prepared for upcoming shifts, such as an influx of temporary workers for a large construction project.

“I love the library. It is here that I have been able to feel some sense of community, simply from welcoming faces and the space to simply exist. I believe any sort of outreach to help the community with health care is an incredible idea. To have trusted information and resources for the community to consume is an invaluable opportunity for the library to offer. I believe it is very important to use easy to understand language, offer a safe space for asking questions, and preemptively find ways to get messages across to people with diverse backgrounds.”

-2024 Community Survey Respondent

Staff expressed a goal to better connect with underserved community members and groups, expand outreach capabilities and resources, and envision a branded outreach vehicle and book kiosks in various locations around town. The staff and board are enthusiastic about exploring and embracing the concept of extending the library's presence beyond its physical building and integrating it throughout the community.

Goal 1 Objectives	Action Opportunities and Strategies
<p>Cultivate our coalition approach to social service needs in Superior and continue to be a center for community services, information, and resources.</p>	<p>Develop, support, and leverage connections with service agencies, law enforcement, charitable groups, and healthcare organizations.</p> <p>Continue to expand social work and community services, including our existing communication and sharing tools within the library.</p> <p>Provide Memory Care support.</p>
<p>Leverage staff expertise and resources to grow outreach services and be more present in the Superior community.</p>	<p>Utilize the library outreach position and skills to reach and meet changing community demographics and needs (e.g., homeschoolers, aging population, rural residents, temporary workers, college and university, the school district, etc.).</p> <p>Continue to build book bike use.</p> <p>Offer select services outside of the building campus, tying into existing community events.</p>
<p>Build strong connections with critical community partners, especially our schools and organizations that support senior residents.</p>	<p>Develop and grow connections with school library staff, teachers, student volunteers, and homeschool groups to determine how the library can best support their jobs and needs.</p> <p>Build awareness with students, parents, and schools through direct outreach.</p> <p>Continue partnerships to support aging adults (e.g., memory cafes, collaborating with the senior center and the Aging & Disability Resource Center, etc.).</p>

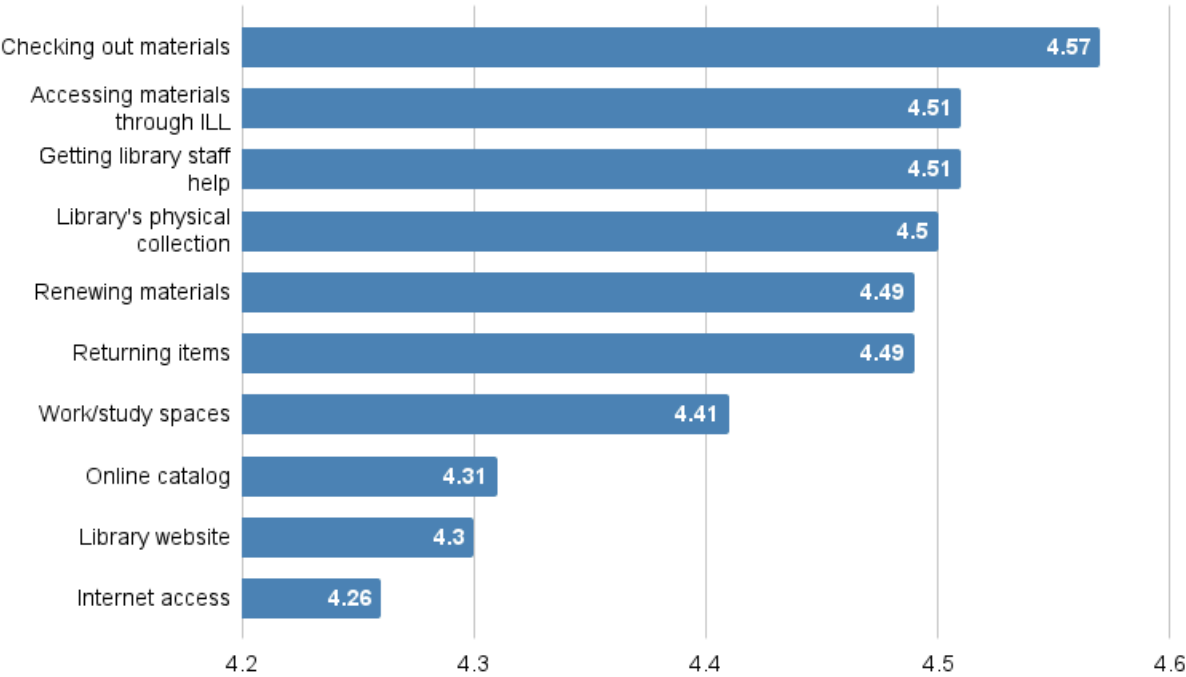
Goal Two: Services

We will continue to improve our services with a focus on being responsive to the needs of our continuously evolving community.

Why this Goal

The community survey indicated high satisfaction with the Superior Public Library's services, particularly in finding materials, receiving assistance from library staff, and utilizing work/study spaces. Despite the overall high levels of satisfaction, community members, staff, and board members shared numerous ideas for new services and approaches, including programming suggestions and hours of operation. Both staff and board members have expressed a willingness to experiment and innovate, while carefully balancing community needs with the library's capacity.

Satisfaction with Superior Public Library's Services



Scale: Very dissatisfied (1) to Very satisfied (5)

“The library is my favorite resource in the city. It is a true community space that brings people together and offers vital services without the obligation of purchasing something.”

-2024 Community Survey Respondent

Goal 2 Objectives	Action Opportunities and Strategies
Develop services, resources, and programming that inclusively meet the needs of the community.	<p>Increase access to and knowledge of technology and how to use it.</p> <p>Focus on digital content and eBooks to build a larger electronic collection.</p> <p>Offer “drop-in” programs on a regular basis to provide many opportunities for connection.</p>
Generate, test, and implement new service ideas to make the library a more accessible, exciting, and safe destination for all.	<p>Examine hours and programming times in conjunction with staffing capacity to best meet community needs.</p> <p>Perform continuous learning and engagement; stay in touch and informed to meet community needs.</p> <p>Provide drop-in activities, particularly those suited for senior community members.</p> <p>Help Superior shine by showcasing performers and artists.</p>

Goal Three: Environment and Experience

The library will be a place where our community members can explore, connect, and feel at home.

Why this Goal

The Superior Public Library is a beautiful and beloved building with ample parking, easily accessible shelves, artwork, and a lovely atrium. However, staff, board, and community members have expressed ideas for enhancing spaces and experiences. The planning process repeatedly highlighted the importance of improving outdoor spaces, including better parking, comfortable seating, and a more conveniently placed book drop. Additionally, there is a strong desire for the library to become a key destination, particularly by supporting the growing arts and music community and providing unique experiences in a distinctive space.

Improvements to the library's physical space and layout should be complemented by fostering a culture of welcome. Community members should be able to easily navigate and feel at home within the library.

“I absolutely adore the Superior Public Library and would love to see the facilities expand to offer additional multipurpose spaces for community use, a makerspace, an art gallery, additional indoor play space, and a demo kitchen.”

-2024 Community Survey Respondent

Goal 3 Objectives	Action Opportunities and Strategies
Improve our understanding of library spaces, community needs, and capacity to design changes that effectively meet varied community needs.	Perform a space analysis to evaluate the facility and its use and reallocate space. Establish a routine for reporting and reviewing feedback and data to ensure continuous improvement and responsiveness to community needs.

Goal 3 Objectives	Action Opportunities and Strategies
<p>Enhance existing and develop new spaces to keep experiences fresh, exciting, safe, and increasingly accessible.</p>	<p>Supplement parking lot improvements with expanded outdoor presence (i.e., seating, concert spot, etc.).</p> <p>Update the children’s play area.</p> <p>Continue the focus on inclusivity in physical spaces.</p>
<p>Develop staff approaches, services, and signage that create a welcoming atmosphere for our community, encouraging them to stay and engage with the library.</p>	<p>Design and place clear, friendly, and multilingual signs throughout the library.</p> <p>Conduct regular customer service training focusing on inclusivity and hospitality.</p> <p>Host community events and open houses to welcome new visitors and build relationships.</p>

Goal Four: Internal Supports

We will work to align our resources and capacities to embody and communicate the library’s mission, staff needs, and the goals of this plan.

Why this Goal

We heard frequently in this process that more than anything else, the community values the staff of the Superior Public Library. When asked via Q & A boards what the biggest strength of the community is, many participants noted the staff, sometimes by name. The library also knows that our volunteers, including our Board members, Friends, and members of our Foundation are integral pieces of our success. In order to successfully reach the goals of this strategic plan and embody the mission and values of our library, the library must be well-supported and organized.

“I am beyond thankful for the library and while I know in the end money plays a huge role on what’s ahead I know there are visionary people who work tirelessly to provide our community with the wonderful services you do. I trust you will continue as we, as patrons, feel your passion and commitment loud and clear though the wonderful activities and services you provide. We appreciate you, Superior Public Library!”

-2024 Community Survey Respondent

Goal 4 Objectives	Action Opportunities and Strategies
Ensure staff have balanced workloads and the training and support they need to best serve the community and meet the vision of this plan.	Carefully consider capacity as new services or projects are considered. Leverage the interests and talents of staff by offering them the opportunity to become more involved, while acknowledging that participation is voluntary and recognizing the importance of those who fulfill their core job responsibilities. Continue creating and having useful and team-building staff development days.

Goal 4 Objectives	Action Opportunities and Strategies
<p>Enhance partnerships with the Friends of the Library and Foundation and examine, implement, and promote diverse volunteer opportunities to support the library's work.</p>	<p>Explore opportunities for volunteers to help with information on electronic, literacy and job services needs.</p> <p>Continue to build on the library's increased use of volunteer help and collaboration for projects, programs, and funding.</p>
<p>Explore and implement more flexible and creative approaches to staffing and organizational structure to increase the library's capacity to meet service needs.</p>	<p>Work with the city and/or other partners to facilitate/explore some workarounds or creative ideas to add library staff / capacity.</p> <p>Examine existing programs in the county that could be utilized (i.e. job coaching services) to be a site for job and/or skill training with external partners looking to place workers.</p>

Goal Five: Communications & Marketing

We will enhance the library's visibility with compelling and effective marketing and communication efforts to help solidify us as a go-to destination.

Why this Goal

Since the last strategic plan, the Superior Public Library has significantly raised awareness through enhanced communication and marketing activities. The library has adopted new communication methods, including a successful newsletter and a strong social media presence. As communication channels and community needs are continuously evolving, it is essential for the library to build on its successes and continue its communication, marketing, and advocacy efforts to remain relevant and be recognized as the community's welcome center.

Goal 5 Objectives	Action Opportunities and Strategies
<p>Identify new marketing strategies to increase visits, new users, and awareness of library services and offerings.</p>	<p>Increase awareness of our many programs and services by reaching outside the building with both proven and new marketing strategies.</p> <p>Promote services beyond books and reading and increase library usage as a community third space and bring in non-users or infrequent library users.</p> <p>Develop outreach/marketing strategy that includes regular local media spots, a marketing budget, more radio ads, paid Facebook ads, etc.</p>
<p>Build our “brand” as a welcoming destination and community partner.</p>	<p>Design communications that lean into messaging that focuses on the library as a welcoming place and a community living room.</p> <p>In preparation for the influx of workers, create introductory marketing materials, welcoming the new, temporary community members (and their families) to the area and the library.</p> <p>Consider marketing and communication materials in multiple languages.</p>

Goal 5 Objectives	Action Opportunities and Strategies
<p>Increase engagement with various community members and stakeholders to develop a broad team of advocates to support the library's long-term success.</p>	<p>Engage with community members, local businesses, and government officials to highlight the library's essential services and programs.</p> <p>Raise awareness of the library's contributions to the community (public presentations, social media efforts, and participation in local events) to build a broad base of support.</p>

Implementation, Communication, and Assessment

The Superior Public Library Director and staff, in consultation with members of the Superior Public Library Board, will prioritize service goals and coordinate activities from the strategic plan to develop annual action plans. The management team, the staff, and the library board will routinely review the strategic plan progress as meeting agenda items. Decisions regarding implementation will be made by the director, staff, and board members based on potential impact; available resources, including funding and staff time; and future changes that may arise from ongoing efforts to listen to the community and local, state, and national trends in library service.

Acknowledgments

The voices of Superior and Douglas County are reflected in this plan from the hundreds of people who contributed their time and ideas as part of this process by responding to our community survey, taking part in interviews, and sharing ideas through the Q & A boards. The library sincerely thanks those who offered their ideas and time. Your feedback was invaluable to the process.

The Library Director and Board thank the strategic planning team for its commitment to the Superior Public Library and the development of this plan. In addition, special thanks to the staff of the Superior Public Library. Their knowledge of the community they serve and the library not only helped shape the plan but will be vital to its successful implementation.

Finally, the library thanks Melissa McLimans, Laura Damon-Moore, and Kim Kiesewetter from WiLS (Wisconsin Library Services) for providing planning process management, data analysis, and facilitation services.