A Purpose-Driven Year: Commitment, Community and Connection

"Thank you to all the library staff who have been very helpful to the community even during these tough times. We were able to keep up with our book reading habit and also keep our kids happy with their story books too. A big thanks from all of us to you all!"

"We love living in walking distance to the library, love that we can now visit the library in person and our son especially enjoys scanning books in and out."

"Why I like libraries, answer 1: because I can use the newspaper databases to find the Apple+ article I wanted to read–for free! Thank you as always, @KCLS!"

"This was the one place my teen daughter wanted to go today after her birthday. After a year and a half of being closed, she checked out so many things they wouldn't fit in a bag and we had to carry others."

"This is my favorite place on earth. Well, maybe the second after Disney."

"We have been a member of the King County Library System since 2003. The library has expanded my horizons and all its staff. Service at King County Library System is SUPERB. I feel fortunate to be a member."

"My family basically lives off of the KCLS eBook and audiobook collections. It is legitimately an incredible resource and I'm so grateful for apps like Overdrive and Libby."

"I have been a member of the King County Library System since 2003. The library has expanded my horizons and all its staff. Service at King County Library System is SUPERB. I feel fortunate to be a member."

"This is my favorite place on earth. Well, maybe the second after Disney."
“Thanks @KCLS for caring for our communities and our book lovers.”

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The year 2021 will be remembered by King County residents for a continuing pandemic, unprecedented heat waves and a return to classrooms for teachers and students. Starting in February, libraries began reopening after being closed to the public since March 2020 due to state and public health mandates. This was a long-awaited milestone, but there were many others, as highlighted in this King County Library System 2021 Annual Report.

Throughout the year, KCLS took proactive steps to address community needs, connect with patrons, and to create opportunities for personal growth and success. KCLS was recognized nationally for overall excellence, earning a prestigious Government Technology Special Districts Award for technology innovations and receiving another annual Star Library designation from Library Journal. KCLS aggressively pursued grant funding with great success, securing $1.4 million—a 563% increase over 2020. The grants helped narrow the digital divide through greater access to technology, extended our outreach to communities in need, increased literacy and provided other benefits beyond taxpayer support. KCLS' increased investment in digital materials garnered the highest per capita digital usage of any Library System in the country. The number of registered borrowers increased 18% over 2020.

Throughout the pandemic, KCLS helped patrons thrive, providing innovative online programming, expanding access to items through contactless services, and responding to a wide range of community interests and needs. This included a greater emphasis on diversity, equity and inclusion; health and human services; economic assistance, and steps to reduce our carbon footprint. While the pandemic created significant challenges, we maintained high standards, delivering to patrons the quality and breadth of programs and services they deserve, and which they can continue to expect in the future.

Please enjoy reading KCLS' highlights of an ultimately rewarding year.

Lisa Rosenblum
KCLS Executive Director

“A bright spot in some dark times. Thank you, King County Library System.”
2021: The Numbers Add Up

1,303,930 registered borrowers (18% increase over 2020)

74,956 new patrons

16,911,592 total items checked out, evenly split between digital and physical materials

7.8 million digital titles checked out through OverDrive (eBooks, downloadable audiobooks, online magazines, databases and other resources). OverDrive’s 2021 statistics identify KCLS as the number 2 digital circulating library in the U.S. and number 4 in the world.

1,259,414 patron Wi-Fi sessions

207,524 patron computer sessions

70,039 virtual information services offered through Ask KCLS and Bellevue Library

79,417 patrons served by Mobile Services

5,364 online programs offered with a total of 61,601 patrons in attendance

36,758 patrons attended online events, specifically with schools and community partners

1,919 individuals were served through events at the Children and Family Justice Center
The Covid-19 pandemic entered its second year in 2021, extending the need to adapt on the part of the Library System and the public alike. KCLS responded by taking inventive steps that continued robust online access to its collections, services, resources and programs. The digital collections budget increased by 50% to meet demand.

Patrons utilized curbside service for holds, Surprise Bags, printing and tax forms. Curbside pickups reached 1.3 million by July, when the service concluded. Exterior library lockers installed at two locations allowed 24/7 pickup of items.

Library parking lots hosted COVID-19 vaccine clinics with Public Health–Seattle & King County and their affiliates. Recognizing COVID’s economic impacts, KCLS waived overdue fines throughout 2021. With health mandates continuing to limit indoor gatherings, KCLS continued virtual programming and expanded events to the outdoors, including StoryWalks, Story Times and Art Walks.

“Invention from Necessity During a Pandemic

“Thank you for finding ways to serve the community safely and creatively!”
KCLS’ Strategic Framework and its elements were thoughtfully developed after broad input from patrons, community leaders and partners, educators and staff in 2016. It reflects KCLS’ commitment to public service and accountability, and a deep intention to enhance lives, forge connections and strengthen communities. Since implementation in 2018, KCLS has completed more than 50 projects that improve business processes, enhance customer service and increase alignment with KCLS’ values. Noteworthy 2021 accomplishments aligned with goals include:

Goal: Building Communities of Inclusion and Belonging

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)
The KCLS service area encompasses 1.5 million residents and an increasingly diverse population; more than 170 world languages are spoken countywide. The Library System strives to welcome and include all King County residents, meeting the needs and interests of patrons of all ages, abilities, cultures, ethnicities and backgrounds. KCLS formed a new DEI department, hired a new director, created processes to attract and retain a diverse workplace, broadened library collections and DEI programming and services to better respond to marginalized groups.

Welcoming Center ambassadors offer online assistance to U.S. newcomers, and a partnership with the International Rescue Committee and the Afghan American Community of WA will provide re-location assistance for Afghan refugees. Another partnership, Bibliovoz, features a podcast for the Hispanic community. KCLS libraries hosted the filming of a public access TV show, Look, Listen and Learn for BIPOC children and caregivers. Talk Time, another popular program, offers patrons a chance to practice speaking with other English-language learners, and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes fill up regularly.
Goal: Building Communities of Inclusion and Belonging

Reducing Barriers

Accessibility—to technology, services, resources and programs—is one of KCLS’ core values. Staff works diligently to expand patron access in a number of ways. In 2021, efforts included expanding broadband capability and installing Wi-Fi signal extenders (antennas) in the parking lots of 45 libraries. As a result, Wi-Fi connections increased 30% over 2020. Recognizing economic hardships imposed by the pandemic, the Library System continued its waiver of overdue fines, enabling full patron access to library materials and resources. VIA to Transit, a pilot partnership with Metro Transit Service, launched at the Skyway Library to increase access to public transportation. Metro vehicles pick up riders and take them to light rail or transit centers. Digital Navigators provide free, one-on-one mentoring to improve digital literacy, teaching people how to access, analyze and communicate information on the Internet.

“Hallelujah! You are a very essential vital service!”

Social and Health Services

KCLS responded to community needs, working with social and health service organizations to identify and address hardships and socioeconomic disparities. KCLS Mobile Outreach services delivered laptops and Wi-Fi hot spots to residents in assisted living and retirement centers, homeless communities, women’s shelters and other locations. In total, 4,560 residents were served. Active and former military Veterans received mental health, caregiver and other social services through partnerships with community organizations.

KCLS also launched a program featuring trained Peer Service Specialists, who because of their own experiences are able to identify with and help people struggling with mental health, psychological trauma, substance abuse or criminal justice involvement. Patrons also have the opportunity to access health-care providers through Teleconnect, a service that offers videoconferencing in private, personal spaces set aside in libraries.
Goal: Responsive and Inspirational Service

Innovative Responses to Community Needs

During two unprecedented summer heat waves, libraries opened as cooling centers on days they otherwise were closed, offering the public air-conditioned spaces in which to work, read and browse. Amid soaring temperatures on June 28, KCLS opened 10 libraries as cooling centers. More than 2,500 people came in to beat the heat. Throughout the year, the Library System created ways to offer favorite activities and programming virtually for adults, teens and children, with a total attendance of 5,364. Classes included creative pursuits, well-being and literacy programs such as Tell Me a Story and Reading with Rover.

Book groups and author visits were more popular than ever. KCLS also increased online opportunities for social interaction and lifelong learning among seniors and older adults. Post-program surveys found 91% learned something new, and 78% felt more connected to their libraries. By the end of the year, KCLS staff weighed in on their favorite books, releasing the annual Best Books list—a perennial hit with patrons. And a long-time partnership with King County Elections led to another ballot drop box, installed at Kent Panther Lake Library, for a total of 23, helping to make voting secure and convenient for patrons.

“#MyLibrary is also doing amazing online programs like virtual author events, online gaming events, tutoring and more. @KCLS rocks every day of the week!”
Goal: Responsive and Inspirational Service

Education and STEM Learning for All Ages

Teachers, students and parents rely on the Library System for educational materials and resources, and the public turns to their libraries for lifelong learning and enrichment. KCLS continued to support education online during COVID, and after schools reopened in the fall. K-12 STEM learning and other reading, literacy and educational programs for all ages were offered. The Story Times Online page, launched in March, featured 232 English language Story Times (attended by a total 17,429 kids and parents) and 171 World Language Story Times (attended by 5,092 kids and parents). K-12 students got homework help with Study Zone Plus, which drew between 300 and 600 participants a month. Life After High School offered valuable college and career guidance, while free online technology certification courses helped improve patrons’ career prospects. KCLS annual Summer Reading program included the distribution of 24,650 Summer Reading books and 5,000 STEM kits with 4,156,325 total minutes read.

Economic Empowerment

Aware of the hardships many residents faced due to the pandemic, KCLS took measures to increase resiliency and provide opportunities for personal and professional development. These included the Invest in Yourself program and webpage to help residents pursue their career dreams, find a job or start their own business. Patrons also could find Financial Assistance for housing, tuition, rent and other basic needs exacerbated by the pandemic. Your Next Job provides free one-on-one help to patrons, answering job and unemployment questions online or by phone in 11 different languages. In 2021, patrons also received business mentoring from SCORE volunteers, and a Small-Business Support Initiative launched through a partnership with the King County Executive’s Office. KCLS also ramped up employment, small business and entrepreneurial support for Veterans, connecting them with library and community resources.

“Thank you KCLS librarians and staff! I appreciate all you do to provide services and materials to us.”
Goal: Organizational Excellence
KCLS has long been recognized as a national leader for organizational excellence. COVID-19 did not change that. KCLS continued to align planning with public health mandates while consistently seeking ways to improve technology, service delivery and taxpayer accountability, and to respond proactively to such challenges as climate change. The Library System implemented a data warehouse to increase use of business intelligence across the organization, reorganized regional staffing to increase responsiveness to community needs, conducted a patron research survey and upgraded libraries to reduce KCLS’ carbon footprint.

Goal: Strategic Communication
KCLS undertook measures to ensure effective communication with staff as well as with the public. These included a full System-wide integration of Microsoft Teams and Zoom Webinar platforms to ensure connections among staff and with the public. Continuing efforts to connect with staff through virtual trainings and Town Hall meetings allowed KCLS to limit travel and training expenses while still investing in professional development. The Library System also built partnerships and strengthened relationships with volunteers to provide services and resources beyond public funding. These included Friends of the Library, tutors, mentors and Library Advisory Board members.

“It is my humble opinion that the King County Library System is one of the best in the country.”
Other Noteworthy Achievements and Accomplishments

Green Initiative

This KCLS initiative addresses the environmental challenges posed by climate change. KCLS’ Capital Investment Program (CIP) includes projects that move the Library System closer to compliance with Washington State’s Climate Commitment Act and the Strategic Climate Action Plan. These projects center on reducing KCLS’ largest facilities’ Energy Use Intensity (EUI) and help move the Library towards meeting the goal set forth by King County to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) by 50% by 2025 (compared to the 2007 baseline). The Library System also reduced staff printing and moved to paperless invoicing.

Grants

Grant funding of $1.4 million expanded patron access in many ways and addressed needs during the pandemic and beyond. This included federal, local and KCLS Foundation grants directed toward digital equity and connecting with older adults in assisted living facilities and people experiencing homelessness. Funding also supported online education and resources for teachers, students and parents.

A $364,480 American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) grant will provide funding for five important projects: the installation of additional library lockers for contactless pickup of materials; a new production studio to increase online programming; outfitting 13 existing library study rooms with videoconferencing equipment; upgraded technology to enhance public access to the KCLS Board of Trustees, and expanded language translation services. Other local and KCLS Foundation funding provided Wi-Fi hot spots and laptops to high-needs communities, supported childhood literacy and broadened patron access to library resources.
The mission of the KCLS Foundation is to advance literacy, learning and libraries for everyone in our communities. As a 501 (c)(3) organization, we do this through advocacy, fundraising and grant-making, supporting the efforts of KCLS libraries and library staff to meet vital community needs.

During 2021, as the second year of the pandemic unfolded, those community needs significantly increased. More children and students experienced learning challenges. More adults faced financial insecurity and economic hardship, and older adults suffered from isolation. Higher numbers of individuals and families experienced homelessness. Fortunately, through the generosity of donors, the Foundation was able to fund programs that addressed people’s needs with life-changing programs, advancing literacy, lifelong learning, digital equity, economic empowerment, healthy living and more. These programs would not have been possible without donor support; we are very grateful.

The KCLS Foundation provided a total $1.2 million in 2021 to fund 19 social impact and outreach programs that benefited thousands of people in our local communities. For example, donations enabled our library staff to meet the needs of people in more than 50 homeless camps. In one camp, services helped two-thirds of the population secure housing. Our library staff also found ways to virtually connect students and teachers to advance literacy and help offset the adverse effects of the pandemic on learning. In addition, donations allowed us to pilot a program in White Center to meet the learning needs of more pre-kindergarten children.

On behalf of the KCLS Foundation employees and Board of Directors, I would like to thank all of the donors who made it possible for us to better serve our communities in 2021.

Ken Ryals

Executive Director, KCLS Foundation
In 2021, revenue grew 1.8% over the prior year, primarily due to increased property tax revenue. Prudent fiscal management held spending to 84.5% of the budget and allowed KCLS to maintain a solid financial position while investing in the services and resources that have the most significant impacts on our communities.

The Finance Department continued to improve tracking and transparency by enhancing and retooling KCLS’ core financial system, JD Edwards, to enable more efficient monitoring of grants and projects. Other milestones include receiving the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award from the national Government Finance Officers Association, and establishing a new procurement division.

While the COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact the in-person use of libraries, KCLS maintained its controlled hiring and the elimination of substitute shifts. These efforts resulted in personnel savings of approximately 14% from the original budgeted amount. Library closures, reduced discretionary expenditures, and supply chain disruptions further decreased non-personnel operating spending by approximately 17%. Similarly, capital expenditures were 32% below budget due to unforeseen constraints in the national supply chain, which caused multiple project delays.

Each year, the Washington State Auditor conducts a Financial Statements Audit and Accountability Audit. The Financial Statements Audit examines whether KCLS has properly presented its financial statements with no material misstatements. The Accountability Audit assesses areas of risk specific to KCLS or topic areas identified for all state agencies.

KCLS has received clean audits (“no findings”) every year since 1994.

**Expenditures**

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<td>Library Materials</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building Related</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Operating Expenses</td>
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<td>FMS Capital Investment Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local Property Tax</td>
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<tr>
<td>All Other Sources</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
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**Revenues**

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<td>98.1%</td>
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Governance: Board of Trustees

Ron Higgs, Chairman
Pamela Grad
Anne Repass
Harish Kulkarni
Srini Raghavan
Lalita Uppala

Library Administration

Lisa G. Rosenblum, Executive Director
Maria Bassett, Executive Assistant
Julie Acteson
Angelina Benedetti
Nicholas Lee
Cynthia McNabb

Angie Miraflor
Deputy Director of Public Services
Dominica Myers
Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
Danielle Perry
Director of Human Resources
Sergio Razo
Director of Information Technology Services
Greg Smith
Director of Facilities Management Services
Cecie Streitman
Interim Director of Library Operations
Tracey Thompson
Director of Collection Management Services

“I appreciate all the library locations throughout the county. I know KCLS did so much to adapt during the pandemic. Thank you for being a resource for all of us!”