

Climbing Up, Moving Ahead

Strategic Plan for Service

Fiscal Years 2011-2013



Mountain Regional Library System
Serving Fannin, Towns and Union Counties

Approved by the Mountain Regional Library System Board of Trustees August 6, 2010

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I. Executive Summary

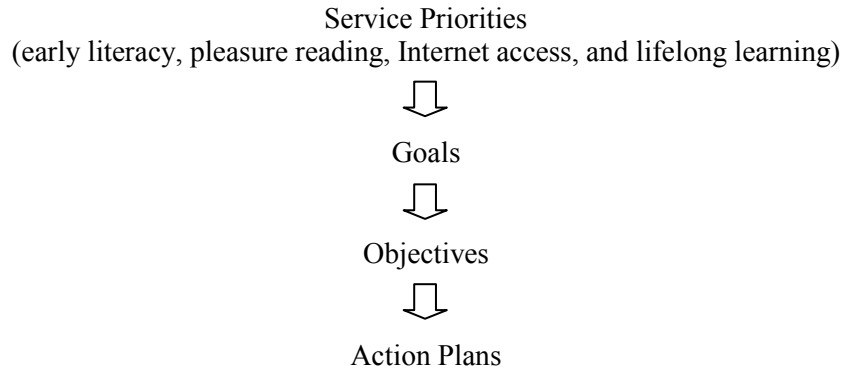
Mountain Regional Library System (MRLS) serves a rapidly growing population of 56,922 in north Georgia with four libraries in the three counties of Fannin, Union, and Towns. Local funding for the library system, historically low, has declined further in the current economy, while library use is greater than ever. Expenditures for library materials hover around a dismal \$1.00 per capita, less than half the average in the state. New or expanded facilities are sorely needed in all three counties, and at present only Union County Library is moving forward with construction. While the library has submitted applications for state funding for facilities in the other locations, those projects will depend on the availability of local matching funds. Staffing levels are low, and there are significant needs for increasing capacity in the library system in order for it to move forward. Despite these needs and limitations, it is clear from the results of a community survey that the library staff do an amazing job in providing friendly and responsive customer service to their users. In short, the library is trying to do everything for everyone with severely limited resources.

In 2010, MRLS hired a consultant to facilitate a strategic planning process, the first in the organization's history. A broad-based planning team including representatives from the library board, staff, Friends of the Library and community, worked with the consultant from April through July to assess community needs, determine strategic direction for the library system, and develop a plan for library service in response to community needs.

A community survey was administered from May 1 through June 30, 2010. The survey revealed that Mountain Regional Library System users are relatively satisfied with the library's ability to meet their needs, although they recognize that funding is inadequate for collections and facilities. There was significant desire expressed system-wide for new, expanded and/or upgraded facilities and more parking. The Public Library Association tool, *Planning for Results*, (Nelson, 2008) identifies eighteen appropriate "service responses" for public libraries. There is general agreement among all groups completing the survey that the following service responses should be top priority:

- Create Young Readers: Early Literacy
- Stimulate Imagination: Reading, Viewing, and Listening for Pleasure
- Connect to the Online World: Public Internet Access
- Satisfy Curiosity: Lifelong Learning

The steps in planning are shown below. Planners established goals and objectives related to the service priorities, and staff identified appropriate activities for the achievement of the objectives. The tagline, “Connect—Learn--Enjoy,” will communicate the library’s vision and image to the community.



In addition to the operational plan, the library has identified three areas for building organizational capacity. The planned initiatives will strengthen the library infrastructure in the areas of **Facilities**, **Planning**, and **Human Resources**, enhancing the library’s ability to successfully implement this strategic plan.

The plan that follows is the planning team’s recommendation to the library board for the direction of Mountain Regional Library System for the next three years. Our library system can no longer be all things to all people; we must focus limited library resources on the services and materials most important to our community.

We appreciate the opportunity to help shape the future of library services for Fannin, Towns, and Union County residents.

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II. Background

Mountain Regional Library System (MRLS) serves a three-county area in north Georgia bordering North Carolina and Tennessee. Towns and Union Counties joined together in 1946 as the Towns-Union Regional Library, with Fannin County joining in 1956. The name was changed to Mountain Regional Library System in 1957.

According to the 2009 fiscal year (FY) data from Georgia Public Library Service (GPLS), MRLS serves a rapidly growing population of 56,922. Since the 2000 Census, the population has grown by nearly 23%, largely from an influx of retirees to the area and the overall growth trends in North Georgia. The MRLS demographic is principally white (97.4%) and married with a median household income of \$39,368. Slightly more than seventy-three percent of residents are high school graduates, with 13% holding a Bachelor’s degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

In the next twenty years, the population of this area is expected to grow by nearly 70%, with the most growth occurring in Union County, at 114%. Population projections through 2030 are dramatic and are reproduced here:

County/Year	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030
Fannin	23,490	25,867	28,189	30,612	33,134
Towns	11,386	12,193	13,088	14,051	15,066
Union	23,014	28,177	34,207	41,486	49,269
Total Region	57,890	66,237	75,484	86,149	97,469

Source: *Georgia 2030 Population Projections*. (2010, March 12). Office of Planning and Budget.

MRLS serves an area that promotes and benefits from tourism, with attractions such as Brasstown Bald and the adjacent Brasstown Valley Resort, the Chattahoochee National Forest, and the Blue Ridge Scenic Railway. Two hours north of Atlanta, the “Gateway to the Blue Ridge” area in which the MRLS operates, attracts both second home owners and retirees from the growing baby boomer market. It is no surprise that the MRLS population is older than average, with persons 65 years old and over averaging 25% of its population, as compared to a 10% average for state of Georgia.

Library Governance & Funding

MRLS is governed by a fourteen-member Board of Trustees to which the three counties have elected representatives. Board members are appointed to county boards by funding authorities. The regional board includes one representative from each funding agency plus 1 at-large member from Fannin County and 2 at-large members from Union County. The following chart shows appointing authorities for the county board members:

Fannin County	Towns County	Union County
Fannin Co. Commission (4)	Towns Co. Commissioner (3)	Union Co. Commissioner (4)
City of Blue Ridge (3)	Towns Co. Board of Education (3)	City of Blairsville (2)
City of McCaysville (2)	City of Hiawassee (1)	
City of Morganton (2)	City of Young Harris (1)	

Source: Mountain Regional Library System Web site, <http://www.mountainregionallibrary.org/>

Georgia library systems operate using a mix of state and local funds. Georgia historically ranks in the top 10 in the U. S. in terms of state funding, and in the bottom 10 for local funding for public libraries. Ratios of local to state funding range from 31% to 97% local funding, or 3% to 69% state funding. For MRLS,

total state funding for FY2007 was \$366,270, and for FY2009, \$362,849, a decrease of approximately 1%. Total local funding for FY2007 was \$657,839 and for FY2009, \$579,358, a decrease of about 12%. Local funds in FY2009 comprised 61% of total funding, with state funds making up the remaining 39%.

While the population continues to grow in these counties, funding for the library system has not. MRLS funding is 25% below the state average of \$22.23 per capita, at \$16.56. Materials expenditures, at \$1.08 per capita, are less than half the state average of \$2.60 per capita.

Mountain Regional Library System Funding, FY2009

	MRLS Funding	MRLS Per Capita	State Avg. Per Capita	National Avg. Per Cap.
State	\$363,392	\$6.38	\$3.76	
Local (Cash)	\$481,370			
Local (In-Behalf)	\$60,471			
Total Local	\$541,841	\$9.52	\$18.47	
TOTAL	\$905,233	\$15.90		

Library Facilities

MRLS includes a Headquarters library (Mountain Regional Library (MRL) in Young Harris) and three branches: Towns County Public Library (TCPL) in Hiawassee; Union County Public Library (UCPL) in Blairsville; and Fannin County Public Library (FCPL) in Blue Ridge.

Union and Fannin County facilities are well below state standards for square footage. The following chart compares existing square feet to the state standard established by Georgia Public Library Service (county population X 0.6).

Facility	Current Square Feet	State Standard (Based on FY2020 Proj. County Population)	State Standard (Based on FY2030 Proj. County Population)
Mountain Regional	11,600 (includes approx. 4,500 sq. ft. for regional services)	(combined with TCPL)	(combined with TCPL)
Towns Co. Library	4,300 (total county 15,900)	7,853	9,040
Fannin Co. Library	6,400	16,913	19,880
Union Co. Library	6,468	20,524	24,635

Sources: *Georgia 2030 Population Projections*. (2010, March 12). Office of Planning and Budget. N. Rall (personal communication, April 19, 2010)

Expansion and renovation of the busiest facility, Union County Library, is beginning now. The new building will have 13,300 square feet and is expected to open in early 2011, thanks to local SPLOST (Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax) funds and a state legislature appropriation of \$1,665,000 last year.

Applications have been submitted for state funding for much needed construction in all three counties. As noted, approximately 4,500 square feet, or 39% of the space, at Mountain Regional is used for regional headquarters to provide services such as cataloging, processing of materials, and administration, to all libraries in the system. This leaves only about 7,100 square feet for public services. The Headquarters

Library hopes to add 1,200 square feet for a meeting/training room and Friends of Library (FOL) book sale area. Towns Co. Library hopes to add an additional 3,000 square feet to the existing 4,300. The local share of funding (SPLOST) for both additions will be on the ballot in November.

Fannin Co. Library is housed in the courthouse and, until recently, was subject to its security rules and procedures. A new separate entrance allows needed expansion of hours beyond weekdays. A building project for a separate library facility is on the state’s construction list and will require local official and state representative support.

Library Use & Services

For FY2009, the MRLS Annual Report recorded 25,332 active patrons, a slightly higher average than the rest of the state. MRLS provides patrons with a local collection of 105,948 print materials, as well as audio, DVD, and other non-print formats. The Towns County Library even circulates shaped cake pans!

PINES (Public Information Network for Electronic Services) gives Mountain Regional Library cardholders access to the collections of more than 275 Georgia libraries and service outlets. This means they can borrow from 9.5 million books and resources statewide (GPLS, 2010, February 1; GPLS Statistics & Annual Report, 2009). According to statistics gathered from “A current look at Georgia’s public libraries” for FY2009, the MRLS recorded 229,135 patron visits, with 325,028 materials circulated.

Public computers with high speed Internet access are available in each branch of the MRLS until 15 minutes prior to closing. In Young Harris, the MRL has 10 public use computers; in Hiawassee, there are 10; in Blairsville, UCL has 14 public use computers; and in Blue Ridge, 16 public use computers are available. Each MRLS branch also provides 2 computers equipped with Freedom Scientific’s JAWS for Windows screen reading software to assist the visually impaired. MRLS excels in the provision of public-access computers, providing one computer for every 1,000 residents. The national average in 2007 was only 3.55 per 5,000 population served (or 0.71 per 1,000). MRLS recorded nearly 98,000 user sessions of these public access computers for FY2009, an increase of 49.3 percent from the previous year.

Mountain Regional Library System Services & Use Statistics, FY2009

	MRL	TCPL	FCPL	UCPL	TOTAL	Per Capita	State Avg.
Registered Patrons	3,046	3,221	9,786	9,279	25,332	45%	44%
Library Visits	42,539	26,603	75,356	102,336	246,834	4.34	
Circulation (Check-outs)	50,442	37,509	107,314	129,763	325,028	5.71	5.06
Print Holdings	44,162	15,693	25,190	20,903	105,948	1.86	
Reference Questions	20,817	12,742	46,527	16,914	97,000	1.70	
Open Hrs. Annually	2,383	2,235	1,981	2,260	8,859		
Public Computers	12	12	18	16	58	5.09 (per 5000)	3.43 (per 5000)

(continued next page)

	MRL	TCPL	FCPL	UCPL	TOTAL	Per Capita	State Avg.
Computer Sessions	14,432	15,113	27,382	40,795	97,722	1.72	1.59
Staff FTE (full-time equivalent)	9	3	4	4	20		

Source: Georgia Public Library Service, 2010, *A Current Look at Georgia's Public Libraries and GPLS*.

All branches of the MRLS also offer high-speed wireless access for users with laptop computers and other compatible mobile devices, free of charge and available around the clock. However, downloads are restricted to prevent the aging system from being bogged down by too much traffic and locking up on users.

MRLS policies affecting public use of the libraries are published and available online. Other policies and procedures (e.g., the collection development policy, customer service policy, and board policy) need to be created or updated.

Staffing & Staff Development

MRLS operates within the requirements for state aid as outlined by the GPLS. The MRLS Director, Donna W. Howell, reports to the Regional Library Board and manages a full-time equivalent (FTE) staff of 19.35 including 7 full-time and 19 part-time staff members. Four of the full-time staff are state funded librarians with Masters degrees in Library Science (MLS) from ALA-accredited schools.

State staffing standards specify:

The library system employs public service staff in proportion to population as detailed in the table below. Population density per library system is considered in determining the appropriate standard. Staff numbers refer to full-time equivalent (FTE) positions. Forty hours per week constitutes one FTE. Additional staff may be required according to the service responses the library chooses. Libraries with specialized collections and/or services, or those serving populations with unique needs, may also require additional staff.

	Essential Level Staff per 1000 pop.	Full Level Staff per 1000 pop.	Optimal Level Staff per 1000 pop.
1000+ persons per sq mile	.5	.6	.65
250 - 1000 persons per sq mile	.45	.55	.6
50 - 250 persons per sq. mile	.4	.5	.55
Under 50 persons per sq. mile	.35	.45	.5

Source: Georgia Public Library Service. *Georgia public library standards* (2006 January, revised).

Comparing Mountain Regional staffing to this standard shows that MRLS is significantly below state standards at less than 20 FTE staff. With the system population density at 66 persons per square mile, standards would call for the following:

Essential level	23 FTE
Full level	29 FTE
Optimal level	32 FTE

Internal communication among Mountain Regional Library staff is informal. While time constraints prevent having regular staff meetings, MRLS has a listserv for all staff, all staff are required to have email addresses, and all staff, full or part time, are requested to check email daily. Staff members are provided access to 36 dedicated computers to facilitate daily activities and user transactions (P. Johnson, personal communication, 2010). With so many part-time staff, it is difficult to remember who has been told what,

making email and listserv communication methods particularly helpful (D. Howell, personal conversation, March 30, 2010). If something is critical, the telephone or face-to-face communication is still employed and considered by staff as the most effective.

All internal job openings are advertised via email to all staff before outside advertisement. MRLS staff members are provided staff development days quarterly, in which print copies of all updates are provided as handouts, and feedback is solicited on what continuing education opportunities staff members feel they need. A recent example cited was how staff can better deal with angry, frustrated patrons in general which resulted in a staff development session on dealing with difficult patrons and workplace stress.

III. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, & Threats Identified (SWOT Analysis)

A SWOT analysis identifies perceived strengths and weaknesses of the library system, as well as opportunities and threats in the external environment related to the future of the library. Four stakeholder groups participated in the SWOT exercise: Staff (April 19); Friends of the Library (April 20); Library Board members (April 20); and the planning team (May 20). A summary of the results follows.

Internal Strengths

- Staff: MRLS has a wonderful director and staff. They are friendly, service-oriented, dedicated, knowledgeable, and involved in the community.
- Collections: There is a good selection of materials, as well as access to much more through the PINES network.
- Technology: MRLS has good infrastructure and support, including wireless.
- Board and Friends: Friends groups are active in all three counties, and the library enjoys good Board relations.
- Funding: State funding and GPLS (state library agency) assistance are essential.
- Community Assets: These include Young Harris College and North Georgia Technical College.
- Legislative Support: Union County Commissioner Lamar Paris and State Representative and Speaker of the House David Ralston have been especially supportive.
- Facilities: Building programs have been written for new or expanded facilities in all three counties, and the construction projects are on the state list for possible funding. Funding is in place for the renovation/expansion for Union County, with the groundbreaking in May 2010.
- Technology: A fiber optic network is coming to the area through a federal stimulus grant.
- Volunteers: There is an excellent pool of volunteers from which to draw.

Internal Weaknesses

- Facilities: Libraries are too small, inconvenient (especially Fannin Co. because of its location in the courthouse), and offer little public meeting or training space.
- Parking: Inadequate parking space is a serious problem in some locations.
- Staffing: Limited number of staff place a restriction on expanding library programs and hours. There is a need for a branch manager at Headquarters.
- Collections: The budget does not support adequate spending for collections, and many areas of the collection need to be expanded.
- Public Relations: The public is not aware of the offerings of the public libraries. Fannin County government and press seem to have an adversarial relationship with the library.
- Funding: Local funding is inadequate, and salaries are not competitive.

External Opportunities

- Facilities: There is opportunity for library projects to be listed on SPLOST referenda.
- Partnerships: Given time and resources, partnerships with other community groups could be mutually beneficial.
- Technology: A fiber optic network is coming to the area through a federal stimulus grant.
- Volunteers: There is an excellent pool of volunteers from which to draw.
- County Planning: There is an immediate opportunity to feed this planning work into the Towns County Comprehensive Planning process, occurring now.

- Legislative Support: Union County Commissioner Lamar Paris is now President of Association of County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG). Elections may result in some new local officials.

External Threats

- Funding/Economy: Local funding has declined, and the Towns County School Board has withdrawn funding. The overall economy has not yet recovered from the recent downturn.
- Government Relations: The Fannin County Commission and the newspaper are not as supportive of library development as others in the three-county region.
- Perception of value of libraries: some feel that libraries are less important in this digital age.

The challenge ahead is to build on the strengths and remediate the weaknesses as appropriate. The library system needs to be alert to external opportunities while minimizing threats.

IV. Community Survey

Purposes

The community survey was designed to:

- help determine what service responses are considered most important to the people in Fannin, Towns and Union Counties;
- determine primary purposes for which people use the libraries in the region;
- check perceptions concerning how well the library system meets the needs of its users (satisfaction); and
- provide insight into why non-users do not use the libraries, and what might entice them to do so.

Surveys were tailored to and compiled by respondent category:

- Library staff & board members
- Library users and Friends
- Others (non-users) in the service area

Methodology

The survey was created using the Web-based product, Survey Monkey. It went live on May 1, 2010 and was open for data collection through June 30, 2010, in an attempt to include seasonal residents. The URL for completing the survey was widely publicized. Those with visual or physical disabilities that preclude the completion of the online survey could call the library to provide spoken answers to be recorded by library staff. Friends and others were encouraged to distribute the paper surveys, which pointed respondents to the online survey. The survey questions may be found in Appendix A.

Summary of Results

There were 243 responses to the online survey, with 223 surveys completed. Sixteen paper surveys were returned. The majority of respondents were from Union County (68%). Towns County respondents comprised 19%, and 13% were Fannin County respondents. Of the respondents, 14 identified themselves as library staff (2 from Fannin, 7 Towns, and 5 Union), 15 were library board members (3 from Fannin, 6 Towns, and 6 Union), and 97 reported Friends of the Library affiliation (8 from Fannin, 19 Towns and 70 Union). Only 21 respondents said they did not use one of the MRLS libraries.

The Union County Library was used by 71% of the respondents; Young Harris by 36%; 17% reported using the Blue Ridge Library, and 15% use the Hiawassee facility.

Satisfaction among library users is high, with 47% rating the library as extremely effective in meeting their needs and 41% responding that it is mostly effective. Twenty-five respondents (11%) said it was somewhat effective, and only 3 (1%) responded “not at all effective.” Respondents were asked to comment on their choice; a list of comments follows.

More than 76% of respondents use the library at least once a month, with 33% using it once a week or more. Those reporting less than once a month (but more than once a year) use totaled 20%. Eight people (4%) said they used the library once a year or less. Those who don't use the library have a variety of reasons, with the most common (7 responses) being, “have what I need at home or work.” Those who do not use the library could be enticed to increase use if the library offered a comfortable place (12 responses) and provided popular materials such as bestsellers and audio-visual items (12 responses). Community Information also was noted by 6 respondents as being an inducement.

The most frequent way respondents access the library is in person (172 responses, or 83%). Use of the library Web site was the second most frequent primary method, with 21 responses (10%). By far the most common reason for use is to check out materials (73%). Other notable reasons include to use a computer or Internet (7%), find information or use reference books or services (5%) or do genealogy or local history research (5%).

Service responses considered most important by the respondents who are library users are as follows: Early Literacy (45%); Popular Materials (43%); Connection to the Online World (39%); Lifelong Learning (36%); and Comfortable Place (32%). Those twenty-one respondents defined as non-users of the library (frequency of use once a year or less) selected Early Literacy (52%), Lifelong Learning (38%), Popular Materials (33%) and Local History & Genealogy (29%).

The staff's top four priorities for service were Popular Materials (selected by 9 of 14 respondents), Connection to the Online World (8), Lifelong Learning (5) and Using Information (4). Top service response priorities for the library board were Community Information (selected by 6 of the 14 respondents), Connection to the Online World (6), Early Literacy (6), and Lifelong Learning (5). Those identifying themselves as members of the Friends of the Library chose the following top service responses: Popular Materials (53%), Early Literacy (43%), Connection to the Online World (38%), and Lifelong Learning (38%). Among all groups, the fifth choice was Comfortable Place.

No clear pattern of open hours most desired by survey respondents was evident. Generally, night hours (after 6 p.m.) are more requested than early morning hours (before 9 a.m.). It is no surprise that Monday, Tuesday and Thursday were the days most requested for evening hours, but less than 35% desire evening or night hours. Fifty-two (24%) respondents would like to have Sunday afternoon hours.

In response to the question, "What do you like best about your public library?" the major theme by far was the friendly, helpful staff. Of the 212 comments, 106 or 50% were related to the staff. Collections followed (books, bestsellers, materials), appearing in 47 comments (22%). The PINES system/ability to get books not owned by the library system was mentioned in 19 comments (9%). Computer, web, and Internet access was included in 18 (8%) of the comments. The physical facilities/atmosphere (comfortable, inviting, quiet, accessibility, etc.) were noted in 17 of the responses (8%). Fourteen respondents (7%) cited the location and convenience of the libraries. A complete list of the responses is found in Appendix B.

There were 193 responses to "If you could add or change one thing about the public library, what would it be?" Of those, 14 responded negatively (nothing, I like it just as it is, unsure), so these were removed from the total, leaving 179. Major themes in the responses were related to collections, facilities, and hours of operation. Increasing or improving collections (more books, better selection of materials) appeared in 59 comments, or 33% of the responses. Physical facilities upgrades (more space, accessibility, etc.) were mentioned by 52 respondents (29%), and 10 people (6%) referred to parking. Expanding or offering more convenient hours was mentioned in 34 responses (19%). Approximately 17 comments (10%) were related to specific policies, such as check-out period, pricing on used books, and program offerings. A complete list of the responses to this question is found in Appendix B.

Conclusions

While this is not a large or scientifically drawn sample of the population in the Fannin, Towns, and Union County service area, some general conclusions may be drawn from this survey. Mountain Regional Library System staff is clearly excelling in friendly customer service. Most users are quite satisfied with the library's ability to meet their needs, although they recognize that funding is inadequate for collections and facilities. While users appreciate their PINES access to other materials and collections, they want to see the Mountain Regional Library holdings increased. There is significant desire system-wide for new,

expanded and/or upgraded facilities and more parking. Staff noted that many of the comments reflected a lack of awareness of what the library already offers, indicating a need to better publicize library services.

There is general agreement among all groups that the following are service priorities (listed in priority order):

- **Create Young Readers: Early Literacy**
Children from birth to age five will have programs and services designed to ensure that they will enter school ready to learn to read, write, and listen.
- **Stimulate Imagination: Reading, Viewing, and Listening for Pleasure**
Residents who want materials to enhance their leisure time will find what they want when and where they want them and will have the help they need to make choices from among the options.
- **Connect to the Online World: Public Internet Access**
Residents will have high-speed access to the digital world with no unnecessary restrictions or fees to ensure that everyone can take advantage of the ever-growing resources and services available through the Internet.
- **Satisfy Curiosity: Lifelong Learning**
Residents will have the resources they need to explore topics of personal interest and continue to learn throughout their lives.

Beyond these emphases, **Visit a Comfortable Place: Physical and Virtual Spaces** is also an important role for libraries, in the view of the survey respondents.

Because of the small sample of non-users completing the survey, little can be learned about that potential market segment. Further study of those who do not use the libraries in the area is warranted.

V. Strategic Issues and Outcomes

This section provides definitions of these terms as well as the issues and outcomes (goals) selected by the planning team.

Strategic Issues

Strategic issues:

- are policy questions or critical challenges important to the survival, success, and development of the organization.
- are of interest to the organization and its stakeholders at the current time.
- are important (long-term impact and solutions), rather than urgent (short-term crises).
- relate to the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats identified.
- are things the organization has some control over or can do something about.
- usually involve conflicts of one sort or another.
- may relate to one or more of the following:
 - effectiveness of programs
 - extent of participation in programs by community
 - adequacy of resources (staffing, funding, etc.)
 - changes in cost of resources (staff, materials, facilities, etc.)
 - changing laws or regulations
 - effectiveness of governance, leadership, management
 - nature of public relations and community goodwill
 - competition for services and programs

The planning team identified the following strategic issues for the 3-county area:

- **Unemployment and economic difficulties are widespread.**
- **The high proportion of population over 65 years of age places strain on the infrastructure and tax base.**
- **Rapid growth, proportion of tax-exempt property, and political unwillingness to raise taxes mean that community infrastructure lags behind the ever-growing need.**
- **Statistics that affect funding for the region are skewed higher by seasonal resident income levels.**

Strategic Outcomes (Goals)

Strategic Outcomes, or Goals:

- are the key results to be achieved in order to maintain a viable organization now and in the future.
- are organization-wide in scope.
- describe desired changes in attitude, behavior, knowledge, skill, and/or life condition of the users of the organization.
- build on strengths or correct weaknesses.
- are never bound by time.
- may be supported by one or more objectives.

Based on the four service priorities, the staff and planning teams have selected the following strategic outcomes for focus:

1. **Children from birth to age five will participate in library activities that help ensure that they enter school ready to read, write, and listen.**

- 3. Parents and caregivers will have the resources they need to foster a love of reading and learning in preschool children.**
- 4. People of all ages will be able to quickly identify and obtain in-demand and other materials, in a variety of formats, that enhance their leisure time.**
- 5. People of all ages and income levels will have readily available, free, high-speed access to the Internet and other online resources that satisfy their needs for digital connections.**
- 6. People of all ages will have materials and services they need to pursue personal interests and satisfy their desire for lifelong learning.**

VI: Strategic Objectives and Action Plans

Part VI is the operational plan, providing definitions of terms and detailing the objectives and action plans that flow from the strategic issues and outcomes.

Strategic Objectives

Strategic Objectives:

- support one or more of the strategic goals.
- provide measurement criteria to evaluate success.
- may be supported by one or more action plans.

The numbered goals are repeated below with lettered objectives that support them. All objectives are written for Fiscal Year 2011 (July 1, 2010-June 30, 2011) unless otherwise noted.

- 1. Children from birth to age five will participate in library activities that help ensure that they enter school ready to read, write, and listen.**
 - a. Circulation of Easy books and materials will increase by 5%.
 - b. The library will offer 30% more preschool programs than in FY10.
 - c. Annual attendance at preschool programs will increase by 30%.
 - d. The number of outreach programs to preschoolers (visits to daycares, etc.) will increase by 20% over FY10.
- 2. Parents and caregivers will have the resources they need to foster a love of reading and learning in preschool children.**
 - a. The library will offer at least 10 programs to help parents and caregivers of preschool children foster a love of reading and learning in the children.
 - b. Attendance at these programs targeted to parents and caregivers will exceed 100.
 - c. Ninety-five (95)% of parents and caregivers who complete a satisfaction survey will rate the programs “Good” or “Excellent.”
 - d. Circulation of preschool activity kits will increase by 50%.
- 3. People of all ages will be able to quickly identify and obtain in-demand and other materials, in a variety of formats, that enhance their leisure time.**
 - a. Annual circulation of new books (to be defined) will increase by 10%.
 - b. Annual circulation of fiction and audio-visual materials will increase by 10%.
 - c. The average length of time between a user request for an item and the item’s availability will not exceed 21 days, as measured by the Document Delivery Survey (Van House, 1987, *Output Measures*).
 - d. Patrons will find the subject, author or title they are looking for no less than 70% of the time, as measured by a Materials Availability Survey (Van House, 1987, *Output Measures*).
- 4. People of all ages and income levels will have readily available, free, high-speed access to the Internet and other online resources that satisfy their needs for digital connections.**
 - a. The number of computer uses (sessions) will increase by 10% from FY10 to FY11.
 - b. Less than 10% of patrons completing a satisfaction survey will indicate that they had to wait for a computer.
 - c. Eighty (80)% of patrons completing a satisfaction survey will rate the software products available on library computers “Good” or “Excellent”.

- d. Ninety (90)% of patrons completing a satisfaction survey will rate the speed of online connection at the library “Good” or “Excellent”.
- e. Eighty-five (85)% of patrons completing a satisfaction survey who required staff assistance during their computer use will rate that assistance “Good” or “Excellent”.
- f. Bandwidth usage will not exceed 90% of capacity during peak library computer use periods.

5. People of all ages will have materials and services they need to pursue personal interests and satisfy their desire for lifelong learning.

- a. Circulation of nonfiction materials will increase by 5%.
- b. During FY2011, the library will offer a minimum of 10 programs designed to help participants pursue learning about topics of interest.
- c. Attendance at these programs will exceed 100.
- d. Ninety-five (95)% of attendees completing a satisfaction survey after a program will rate the program as “Good” or “Excellent.”

Action Plans

Action plans:

- specify actions for the upcoming year that will help the library accomplish the objectives, thereby moving the library toward the desired outcomes.
- assign responsibilities and deadlines for each of the activities planned.
- should each include a budget.
- should each include a plan for evaluation.
- are developed by staff using a format similar to the following.

Activity Name: _____

Goal(s) and Objective(s) Supported: _____

Evaluation: _____

Budget: _____

Steps to Complete Activity (Plan, Communicate, Do, Measure, etc.)	Timeline (By When?)	Responsibility (Who Will Do?)

VII. Capacity Initiatives

The staff planning team members (Susie Brendle, Teresa Haymore, Donna Howell, Peter Johnson, Debbie Phillips, and Sandi Vaughan) were asked to individually complete Library Capacity self-assessment instruments. A copy of the instrument is found in Appendix C. There was a remarkable amount of agreement among the respondents, and three areas were seen as particularly critical for capacity-building at this time: Facilities, Planning, and Human Resources. Following are the activities that the staff team would like to begin this year.

Facilities

1. Make the best use of the space we currently have.
2. Improve signage.
3. Look for creative solutions, e.g., adjust the library's open hours to facilitate parking when competing with other agencies or businesses for parking space.
4. Continue to plan for new construction and additional space.
5. Be alert to opportunities for facilities grants.

Planning

1. Keep the planning document "up front" and monitor progress.
2. Make planning an agenda item at every staff and board meeting.
3. Develop a comprehensive continuing education plan for staff that relates to the strategic plan objectives.
4. Solicit more stakeholder and community involvement in planning to help identify what is most important to the community.

Human Resources

1. Institute a regular program of performance evaluation, and tie performance to the strategic plan.
2. Identify skills needed to implement the plan and hire new employees who bring the right mix of skills.
3. Work toward offering a competitive salary package.
4. Develop a comprehensive personnel policy.

APPENDIX A: Survey Questions

INTRODUCTION

The Mountain Regional Library System is developing a strategic plan for service to help ensure that we are meeting your needs. If you are a resident of Fannin, Towns, or Union County, use one or more of the public libraries, or work or own property here, please help your community by completing this brief survey. It should take no more than 5-10 minutes of your time. Your answers will remain confidential and be used to plan responsive public library service that makes our community a great place to live! Thank you.

SECTION 1: ABOUT YOU

1. Please tell us where you use the public library. (Check all that apply.)

- Fannin County
- Towns County [if checked, branches to subquestion]
 - Which library in Towns County do you primarily use?
 - Mountain Regional Library (Young Harris)
 - Towns County Library (Hiawassee)
 - Use equally
- Union County
- Don't use public libraries in these counties (branches to Non-User section)

2. Please check one if you are

- an MRLS staff member
- a member of a library Board (county or regional) for MRLS

(These 2 categories branch to Staff & Board section.)

- a member of a Friends of the Library group in Fannin, Towns or Union Counties

(This category branches to Friends & Users section.)

3. Please tell us how often you typically visit a public library in Fannin, Towns, or Union Counties.

- once a week or more
- once a month or more
- more than once a year, but less than once a month

(These 3 categories branch to Friends & Users section.)

- once a year or less
- have never visited a public library in this region

(These 2 categories branch to Non-User section.)

SECTION 2: QUESTIONS BY RESPONDENT GROUP

Staff & Board Section

3. Here are several service responses that libraries can offer. Which 3 do you think are *most* important for this library to offer in your community? [allow only 3 responses]

- help local businesses and nonprofits thrive

- offer a comfortable, safe and welcoming space
- help students succeed in school
- offer public Internet access
- provide recreational reading, viewing and listening materials suitable for leisure time
- introduce preschool children to the joy of reading and foster early literacy
- provide information for lifelong learning
- help people learn skills for finding, evaluating, and using information
- help people make informed career and job choices
- offer programs and services that celebrate diversity, promote cultural awareness
- provide fast facts and answers to reference questions
- offer information about the community and local services, including tourism and travel information
- help people explore their roots with local history and genealogy services
- help adults and teens learn to read and write
- help people be informed citizens to more effectively participate in the democratic process
- help people make informed life choices with information on health, wealth, and other issues

Friends & Users Section

4. How do you most often use library services? (Check the one answer that is most often true.)

- visit the library facility
- call the library staff on the phone
- e-mail the library staff for answers to questions
- use the library Web site or online resources
- take advantage of the homebound delivery
- use Talking Books or Library for the Blind services
- other (please specify): _____

5. What is the *main* reason you use the library? (Check the one answer that is most often true.)

- homework or schoolwork
- be in a comfortable place to do whatever I want
- help with employment, finding or applying for a job
- work on genealogy or research local history
- meet with others (informally, book club, business meeting, etc.)
- check out materials (books, audio, DVD, etc.)
- use the photocopier
- find information, use reference books or consult reference staff
- use a computer / the Internet
- read magazines and/or newspapers
- help with my job or business
- other (please specify): _____

6. How effective would you say the library is at meeting your specific needs for service?

- Extremely effective—couldn't be better, almost always meets my needs
- Mostly effective—could improve a few things to better meet my needs
- Somewhat effective--needs improvement, meets my needs sometimes
- Not at all effective—service would need major overhaul to meet my needs adequately

Please comment on your answer: [comment box]

7. Here are several service responses that libraries can offer. Which 3 are *most* important for this library to offer you? [allow only 3 responses]

- help local businesses and nonprofits thrive
- offer a comfortable, safe and welcoming space
- help students succeed in school
- offer public Internet access
- provide recreational reading, viewing and listening materials suitable for leisure time
- introduce preschool children to the joy of reading and foster early literacy
- provide information for lifelong learning
- help people learn skills for finding, evaluating, and using information
- help people make informed career and job choices
- offer programs and services that celebrate diversity, promote cultural awareness
- provide fast facts and answers to reference questions
- offer information about the community and local services, including tourism and travel information
- help people explore their roots with local history and genealogy services
- help adults and teens learn to read and write
- help people be informed citizens to more effectively participate in the democratic process
- help people make informed life choices with information on health, wealth, and other issues

Non-User Section

4. Please tell us where you live, work, go to school, or own property.

- Fannin County
- Towns County
- Union County

5. What is the *main* reason you do not use a library in the Mountain Regional Library System? (Check the one answer that is most often true.)

- don't really know what they have to offer
- not enough time
- use another library (college library, public library in another county, etc.)
- too far or inconvenient location for me
- not open when I want to use it
- the facility is not accessible for people with disabilities
- have what I need at home/work (books, information, computer)
- hard to find a parking place
- don't like the atmosphere
- never thought about using the library
- other (please specify): _____

6. Here are several service responses that libraries can offer. Which 3 do you think are *most* important for this library to offer in your community? [allow only 3 responses]

- help local businesses and nonprofits thrive
- offer a comfortable, safe and welcoming space
- help students succeed in school
- offer public Internet access
- provide recreational reading, viewing and listening materials suitable for leisure time
- introduce preschool children to the joy of reading and foster early literacy
- provide information for lifelong learning
- help people learn skills for finding, evaluating, and using information
- help people make informed career and job choices
- offer programs and services that celebrate diversity, promote cultural awareness
- provide fast facts and answers to reference questions

- offer information about the community and local services, including tourism and travel information
- help people explore their roots with local history and genealogy services
- help adults and teens learn to read and write
- help people be informed citizens to more effectively participate in the democratic process
- help people make informed life choices with information on health, wealth, and other issues

7. Which of these services (if any) would make you reconsider the library's value to you, and prompt you to visit your local library? Check all that apply.

- help local businesses and nonprofits thrive
- offer a comfortable, safe and welcoming space
- help students succeed in school
- offer public Internet access
- provide recreational reading, viewing and listening materials suitable for leisure time
- introduce preschool children to the joy of reading and foster early literacy
- provide information for lifelong learning
- help people learn skills for finding, evaluating, and using information
- help people make informed career and job choices
- offer programs and services that celebrate diversity, promote cultural awareness
- provide fast facts and answers to reference questions
- offer information about the community and local services, including tourism and travel information
- help people explore their roots with local history and genealogy services
- help adults and teens learn to read and write
- help people be informed citizens to more effectively participate in the democratic process
- help people make informed life choices with information on health, wealth, and other issues

SECTION 3: FINAL THOUGHTS:

What one thing do you like best about the library? [text box]

If you could add or change one thing about the library, what would it be? [text box]

THANKS

Thank you for your time!

APPENDIX B: Detailed Survey Responses

Question 11: How effective would you say the library is at meeting your specific needs for service?
(Comments section) (Responses 71 through 81 are from paper surveys.)

- 1 I. Could use a scanner to complete projects 2. Offer computer classes: How to set up for writing letters, How to do simple designing of posters etc. for projects.
- 2 I can always find books I want to read, though sometimes a certain author is at another branch. It's a little inconvenient right now not to be able to request books from other libraries in the system while the Blairsville location is being renovated.
- 3 I always find something I want to read ... and, if I'm looking for a specific book, they order or wait list my request if it's not available.
- 4 More DVD movies and fiction titles
- 5 A larger selection of books would be nice, but access to books from other libraries in the PINES system helps.
- 6 I and others have been very disappointed by the total neglect of the vintage record section at the Young Harris facility. This material may be of no interest to staff but the personal taste of staff is not the reason for the existence of the library.
- 7 Don't always find what I want. Can go online, but have to wait if the book is available.
- 8 Perhaps the inter-library loan program is the problem, because I am not always able to obtain the books I need. I know that participation in PINES is optional, and, unfortunately, we don't have interstate loans (or do we?).
- 9 I really enjoy the items my library offers and the inter-library loan system. However, I would like to be able to access e-books.
- 10 Offer wider range of materials as larger libraries in cities do. Example: Asked if there were any plans to offer video games as this encompasses such a large number of youth plus adults and would get people to use the library that might not have before. Response was negative. Several local people would donate the items to get this service instituted but there was no interest in this proposition.
- 11 A number of classics--Elie Wiesel's Night, Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance--are not available except by special request. The library needs more room so these classics can be on-site.
- 12 Being a member of PINES is an asset. A book not available here can usually be obtained.
- 13 I often travel to other libraries in Hall county, Dawson county because they have a bigger variety of materials.
- 14 The staff at young Harris is very helpful They smile and make you and children feel welcome. The staff at Union could use a lot more smiles.
- 15 With the combination of PINES and the local collections, almost always has what I need, however, Fannin NEEDS MORE SPACE and a LARGER COLLECTION. One of my favorite things to do at any library is to 'browse' for things I didn't know I wanted to read or check out, until I see them.
- 16 Hoping the new library has wider aisles and more books to choose from.
- 17 I know you can request a book and have it come from another library which renewed my faith in using the library because at my first few visits the selection was very poor for current books as well as Reference books-- for hobbies as well as info. books. I wonder how many others may not know you can get a book from another library. I use the Books on Tape alot and am glad more books are on CD now since so many cars don't even have tape players now.

The evening hours and Saturday hours really need to be brought back in order to serve the community better.
- 18 My answer is true thanks to www.gapines.org. I strongly recommend that use of the state online catalog be emphasized by the library system. It's an AMAZING community resource that a lot of people don't know about and/or understand. I look forward to the day when PINES offers ebooks so I have a good reason to spend money on a reader! (I'm a computer savvy, retired person on a fixed budget.)
- 19 I would like to have current books available sooner. When I request a newer book, there is always a very long wait.
- 20 I would love more book selections. Many, many more books, and an Oxford English Dictionary,
- 21 The level of patron service is excellent. The staff are knowledgeable and pleasant!

- 22 selection of books seems to be getting smaller in comparison to audio or video material
- 23 Need a better selection of new books.
- 24 I would enjoy having more and a greater variety of books and reference materials in my local library, but I understand that money is a limitation for this.
- 25 the staff at the hiawasee library are very knowledgable and friendly
- 26 1. would like for library to be able to identify me without card for purpose of checkout. 2. get email notices about books requested before book gets on hold shelf (so it's not available when I'm there).
- 27 The limited operating hours. My children have a hard time doing research for school assignments because the library closes at 5pm and isn't open on Saturdays.
- 28 more "quiet areas" to sit while reading
- 29 I have been using the library in Fannin county for over twenty years. Sometimes I have to go over to Union county because the selection of titles is short and because of the size of Fannin library, limits the number of books, especially non-fiction titles. Also, the hours of operation are limited to the working hours of courthouse employees! This is ridiculous. A separate entrance could be cut into the front of the library where the meeting room exists. The room is not used much.
- 30 Hours are too narrow a time frame- close early, no weekends. When are school kids supposed to visit?
- 31 I research genealogy in many States, none in Georgia however. So, what you previously had in your small collection of genealogy services is not of much help to me. Murphy, NC library has a much better genealogy department where I can find books of interest. I do hope Union County can expand their Genealogy dept some day soon.
- 32 the fact that it is possible to get almost any book, even if my home library doesn't have it, is an enormous advantage.
- 33 Free use of the public meeting room is very important to nonprofit organizations. Disappointed that YH library no longer allows this. Miss the room at Blairsville. Hope after the renovation it will be available again.
- 34 I would like better access to books on CD. Although there are interlibrary loans, some libraries apparently won't loan and some books, especially histories, are not available in Union County at all.
- 35 The staff at each of the libraries are great and helpful. I really couldn't ask for more there. However since I travel to and from ATL daily to work I would enjoy more audible books on the new disks.
- 36 I am frequently amazed at the knowledge of the staff. They answer questions I had no idea they would know the answers to.
- 37 More recent books
- 38 parking not always available - more hours would be helpful
- 39 Would love for the library to expand their genealogy section PLUS have access to at least one of the paid genealogy sites i.e. Ancestor.com
- 40 Problem finding books that deal with topics such as financial, best sellers dealing with politics, finance, etc. Example would be "Animal Farm" dealing with the meat industry. Also current books dealing with these topics.
- 41 Insufficient material resources
- 42 Why did you pack up the Union County Library and move it months before any work began to happen on the Library Building? Explain in the North Georgia News.
- 43 Increase the number of new books in circulation
- 44 Wider selection of books.
Categories for non-fiction listed on the ends of the book cases or on a poster. For example, show where "cook books" are or have a chart showing the number of the section where they can be found.
- 45 The book club that usually meets at the UCL was formed by FOUCL and I have enjoyed and been enriched by it for all these 7 years!
- 46 The staff at the Towns County Library is EXCELLENT and always very helpful, professional, and courteous. The only concern I have is the limited selection within the actual library. This is resolved in part by the ability to go online and request books from other libraries within the system, and I have used this service many times. While the majority of the books have been received within a reasonable time (between a few days and two weeks) there have been at least two times that I remember where books I reserved at other libraries were not received for many weeks. In fact, once, I had to request the book three times before it was sent from another library.
- 47 Fannin Library hours are AWFUL - no nights or weekends.

- 48 I try to minimize my trips into town and feel that I would better be able to do this if books could be checked out for longer than 2 weeks. Sometimes I call in to renew but maybe need only two or three extra days so my trips are not minimized very much.
- 49 This is a great library for a small community. I'd like it if they had more current best sellers, but I know that keeping up with those is expensive for a small library system. On the other hand, I like the broad selection of older fiction, and the in-depth selection on local-interest topics, such as quilting and gardening.
- 50 whenever i need something , the ladies are very helpful.
- 51 I live in Hiawassee and 95% of the time go to that branch. However, I have joined the Friends a couple months ago and now go to the YH branch for Friends mtgs and book sales as well. IThe librarians at the Hiawassee branch know me by name and always go above and beyond their usual duties for me.
- 52 I would still like a wider selection of books that are newly published. I must say, however, that the library has shown vast improvement over the past few years with this.
- 53 The library is in dire need of more books--paper and audio. It's almost impossible to find new books. Also, there really needs to be an on-line search and request available for your materials.
- 54 I would like to see longer hours of operation, but do understand the financial limitations
- 55 whenever I want something specific not on the shelves, it is provided thru Pines ... when I have to drive somewhere for 2+ hours, I get an audio book. The selection is good. And, one time I left town without a book but picked one up on Conyers via Pines for the trip back.
- 56 Increase the library's inventory of books, CDs audio books. The Pines system is wonderful, but it would be even better if the books were available at all the libraries.
- 57 To difficult to park and too short hours and limited reference materials.
- 58 I say somewhat because the short hours, and closing on the weekends.
- 59 The public libraries are one of the most excellent resources for the community and the schools. It is used by many people who otherwise would have no access to a computer, written materials such as books and periodicals. It is my wish that more money could be funded into this wonderful facility.
- 60 There is only one member of the staff that is the least friendly. They are not ready to help. And when they do it's as if I am bothering them.
- 61 The only reason I say it is not extremely effective is because of the staff in Union Co. I have talked to others about this. Let me say I know none of them personally. Hannah is the ONLY one to EVER be proactive and helpful, as well as the ONLY one who is ever friendly. I can't believe how many of the others seem like I am a huge imposition for asking a question or even ready to check out. I saw a woman walk up to the desk to check out and the 2 librarians (mostly middle aged or older ladies) were talking about a personal matter, finished their conversation some minutes later and then just looked at her without offering to help. This is not that unusual. It just happened recently so I could think of a specific example. I don't want to beat a dead horse but some of these ladies have been downright hateful!
- 62 needs access to more audeo books,
- 63 some of the libraries are better than others. Young Harris is best and Union County is worse, in my opinion.
- 64 Towns County Library is limited on space. Need a good children's reading/computer area.
Need more space for books, resources, computers, etc.
- 65 We need more light and it is very crowded.Much of the large books on art etc are on top and its not easy to get to them.
- 66 Given the limited scope of the question, I checked "mostly" -- meeting "my needs" is not the most burning issue for me. Our local libraries meet SUCH a variety of community needs: computer services (especially for hikers and travelers), the PINES system, that can find just about anything, any where and get it to you. Certainly, everything could use some "improvement," but there is nothing fundamentally lacking in our local libraries.
- 67 Increase hours when library is open for use.
- 68 Everyone is extremely pleasant, knowledgeable and cooperative. I enjoy using the Union County Library
- 69 I am in child care and sometimes cannot find the kind of material I need. I have to do lesson plans and sometimes don't find the exact things I need.
- 70 We are in the midst of change at Union , so not everything is there now, or at least things I want. We will hopefully have a bigger and better facility with more books soon.
- 71 Can't come in on Saturday or after 5:00

- 72 The staff is helpful. They get in the new books, they can borrow books from other libraries.
- 73 Great staff!
- 74 Blue Ridge library's parking is awful and with summer here, almost impossible. Plus summer people take up inside (and computers) too.
- 75 Needs to be open more hours, we need a free standing library!
- 76 Better hours, parking
- 77 Everyone here are so kind and more than helpful! They truly are a God send
- 78 Need more hours open during the week and especially on Saturdays.
- 79 Needs more books.
- 80 PINES system gets most books I want and at a speed OK with me. Librarians (Hiawassee and Regional) are great. Very helpful and pleasant.
- 81 Computers up to date and effective, atmosphere pleasant, ordered, friendly.

Question 14: What do you like BEST about your public library? (Responses 199 through 212 are from paper surveys.)

- 1 The staff is very helpful
- 2 The staff -- wow, wow, wow. They are terrific!
- 3 Great, helpful staff!
- 4 The helpful staff.
- 5 the paperback book swap.
- 6 Staff willing to help to get materials if Union Co. does not have what I want
- 7 being part of Pines
- 8 books
- 9 PINES access
- 10 Very pleasant and helpful staff.
- 11 Accessibility of material
- 12 Quiet
- 13 Donna Howell
- 14 The librarians
- 15 Being able to access any book through the on-line hold system, and the fact that it is well supported by local officials and the public.
- 16 Quiet atmosphere
- 17 The availability of fiction and non-fiction reading material & the friendly and knowledgable staff.
- 18 friendliness
- 19 The spacious, quiet and comfortable atmosphere.
- 20 computers and the books the staff are always every helpful
- 21 The comfortable reading nook with the couches near the new releases.
- 22 I just love a place to check out books and not have to buy them.
- 23 Offers latest bestsellers.
- 24 There are always new books coming in.
- 25 computers
- 26 Central location but not lack of parking
- 27 Well organized and helpful staff.
- 28 the pines system where you can use one library and return books at another
- 29 The staff at young harris - very friendly and helpful. They give ideas for books and make you feel welcome.
- 30 Friendliness of the staff
- 31 The staff--applies to all four libraries in the region.
- 32 Friendly and Helpful people who work there.
- 33 book requests

- 34 I can get books from PINES libraries all over the state.
- 35 Location -- right in town.
- 36 The staff
- 37 that's its here!!! and the staff is helpful...
- 38 Being able to read just about any book I want by reserving it on PINES and having it delivered to the local library. What a wonderful service!
- 39 Lots of books available for checking out
- 40 Friendly Staff
- 41 The staff is very nice and very helpful in answering questions, finding information, etc.
- 42 The friendly staff - always available and ready to help.
- 43 Access to borrowing books
- 44 Our library provides a quiet atmosphere conducive to browsing and reading. A knowledgeable person is readily available to answer my questions.
- 45 Variety of books
- 46 convient
- 47 convenience, friendly staff
- 48 friendly staff
- 49 friendly staff
- 50 internet access
- 51 IT CARRIES MANY LARGE PRINT BOOKS
- 52 staff
- 53 I have not been to a public library in some time; I work at a university with full library access and I am near the state and national archives during the week
- 54 Staff helpfulness and friendliness---eager to serve patrons
- 55 Very friendly and helpful staff, family atmosphere
- 56 library staff
- 57 Can find books I do not want for my home collection.
- 58 checking out new books
- 59 The helpful, cheerful and knowledgeable staff are always ready to help me find the material I request, or to order it from another library for me.
- 60 the books
- 61 The employees are courteous and knowledgeable.
- 62 The friendliness of the staff and their willingness to help the customer.
- 63 friendliness
- 64 Being able to use the internet.
- 65 Being able to access materials through the web rather than making a trip to the library to find out if a book is in.
- 66 Staff
- 67 Access to all kinds of reading materials.
- 68 staff, internet access, media other than books, on line books
- 69 The books, I read a lot.
- 70 Atmosphere of pleasant, helpful staff
- 71 access to PINES books
- 72 Friendliness of library.
- 73 Friendly and helpful employees
- 74 Friendly staff
- 75 friendly, helpful people
- 76 No particular things
- 77 it provides good service
- 78 The folks working at the libraries. Whenever I visit the library in YH the staff is so helpful. And the library provides helpful info regarding our community.

- 79 Knowledgeable staff and services offered.
- 80 Helpfulness in finding materials and books
- 81 availability of a variety of references, materials, fiction.
- 82 Helpful, friendly staff
- 83 It's accesible
- 84 The friendly staff.
- 85 Friendly folks. Internet available. Comfortable safe feeling
- 86 Accessibility
- 87 Comfortable, inviting for me and my kids
- 88 able to get current reading material
- 89 helpful staff - availability of materials
- 90 It is free
- 91 Helpful staff
- 92 Helpful staff
- 93 Online access to order books
- 94 Close to home.
- 95 The great staff
- 96 The friendly staff.
- 97 Clean and quite
- 98 Its existance
- 99 computer access
- 100 The community spirit that is tangible every time I visit.
- 101 BOOKS, also it is a place to go and people are friendly
- 102 The relaxing einvironment
- 103 The staff--always helpful and pleasant
- 104 Elaine Delcuze
- 105 Availability of best selling books
- 106 having available the latest novels and public interest books.
- 107 Friendliness
- 108 Helpfulness of staff
- 109 The high quality of the staff, especially those at the Towns library.
- 110 The availability of reference material when needed
- 111 Wide selection of quality books available for free - locally and through PINES loan - for myself & my child. Another fabulous feature is the ability to renew, request, & search from home on the PINES website.
- 112 books
- 113 The staff
- 114 That we have one in our community and that the staff is helpful
- 115 Friendly helpful staff
- 116 The staff
- 117 Librarians are friendly and ready to help.
- 118 I have rarely used the library, therefore have little experience on which to base an answer,
- 119 children's section, summer reading program
- 120 love checking out books
- 121 Not for myself because we have internet service at home, but I think having internet service available for the public is a very good idea. Children and adults often need to do research and have no internet access available. At least it is an option for them to use the public library.
- 122 Frindly, helpful people.
- 123 personel available to answer questions....
- 124 BOOKS
- 125 It's a quiet place to think and read.

- 126 availability of various resources and books
- 127 access to business equipment I do not have in my residence. High quality copier, printer, scanner, et al.
- 128 The staff and the support they get from the community
- 129 1. In depth selection of local-interest non-fiction (gardening, quilting, etc)
- 2. Public Wi-Fi access
- 130 the ladies are very friendly and also very helpful
- 131 Current newspapers & Magazines
- 132 The people that work there.
- 133 I appreciate the friendly, helpful staff who are always willing to help you find what you are looking for.
- 134 Helpfulness, good selection of magazines and books
- 135 If the book that I want is not available, the library gets it for me.
- 136 convenience
- 137 quiet, not crowded, staff very helpful
- 138 Location and convenience
- 139 convenient location and hours
- 140 The staff.
- 141 I love the friendly service. The ladies are terrific and helpful.
- 142 Staff
- 143 Willingness of staff to help you.
- 144 Jan =)
- 145 The staff
- 146 The friendly and helpful staff.
- 147 offers information and entertainment
- 148 The availability of internet access and computer use
- 149 convenience of location in Union County
- 150 STAFF
- 151 The ability to order books from other libraries if they are not in stock at Fannin County library.
- 152 helpful staff
- 153 friendly attitudes and faces
- 154 availability of books for check out
- 155 the staff
- 156 peaceful place in which to work
- 157 THE PEOPLE ARE HELPFUL
- 158 Staff
- 159 Cannot really answer as I have not been in there in a while.
- 160 The great books
- 161 The welcoming, friendly, and knowlegable staff
- 162 friendly, helpful staff
- 163 Internet use
- 164 library employees -- really!
- 165 It is a very relaxed place to go to find books, surf the net.
- 166 World wide web
- 167 The nice selection of NEW books we constantly receive.
- 168 Helpful staff!
- 169 People
- 170 ease of holding and getting material
- 171 Friendly, helpful staff
- 172 Support from staff
- 173 Checking out books I want to read and DVD'S.

- 174 The book sale room
- 175 How helpful the staff is to get books and materials that are not on hand.
- 176 It offers a variety of informational materials for pleasure reading, research, and self help.
- 177 well located
- 178 The fact that it's there. Public libraries serve so many, and
and make a real difference in the lives of citizens in the community.
- 179 availability of materials
- 180 The staff is always willing to help in a friendly way, whatever the reason.
- 181 It's available with helpful personnel.
- 182 latest bestsellers available
- 183 info center
- 184 convient location
- 185 friendly, convenient, efficient, reliable
- 186 The availability of reference books and materials.
- 187 Availability of materials
- 188 Friendly and helpful staff
- 189 Always Friendly and Helpful
- 190 It's available and librarians are helpful
- 191 Pleasant staff
- 192 I do not go in often because get many reading materials from church library, but am proud of our local library. We
used it often when I had children at home.
- 193 The availability of good books.
- 194 It's free.
- 195 friendly staff
- 196 helpful workers
- 197 Computer access, people
- 198 The friendly staff.
- 199 It has or can get about any book ever written
- 200 Locations
- 201 books, computer access
- 202 books
- 203 the employees
- 204 access to computers and the Internet
- 205 book options
- 206 child friendly!
- 207 the staff is quick 2 help me with all my needs. Can't speak highly enough of library or staff.
- 208 helpful employees
- 209 convenient location
- 210 the friendly, informative staff
- 211 PINES system gets most books I want at a speed OK with me; librarians (Hiawassee & Regional) are great--very
helpful and pleasant
- 212 all the above (referring to service responses)

Question 15: If you could add or change one thing about the public library, what would it be? (Responses 180 through 193 are from paper surveys.)

- 1 Just ready for the new building, but other than that ---not a thing. My Union County Library is friendly, personable, accomodating, and a great source of information and entertainment. It's wonderful!
- 2 Better handling of new best sellers.
- 3 Small conversational areas.

- 4 more variety
- 5 Absolutely nothing
- 6 later hours
- 7 More book titles
- 8 More evening hours and opening on Sunday afternoons
- 9 A larger inventory of books on social and religious issues/studies.
- 10 Make it more accessible! With more material!
- 11 More books; more large print selections
- 12 More books
- 13 A larger non-fiction collection. The larger facility is going to be great for adults and kids.
- 14 Extend hours of operation to evening
- 15 parking
- 16 Provide more, and more level, parking.
- 17 there is nothing i would change about our library
- 18 I would like to have access to e-books.
- 19 Video games.
- 20 Hours-The library is rarely open after 5 p.m. and never open on Saturdays.
- 21 more activities for children, especially on Saturdays
- 22 Not destroy donated research/expensive books without notifying donor-don't like seeing them for a dollar or quarter on the sales tables
- 23 Open during evenings and Saturdays.
- 24 extend the 2 weeks to 3 or 4 weeks for books -
- 25 more variety for teens and young adults. longer hours on Saturdays and maybe Sun afternoons. Longer check out times - 3 weeks instead of 2
- 26 More technical help
- 27 More space for Fannin, the HQ library, and Hiawassee (I think Union will be OK for some years after their present renovation.)
- 28 More of everything
- 29 better parking!
- 30 I'd like it to be open once a week till 9:00 p.m.
- 31 Having to go through the metal detector
- 32 More money for books and expansion
- 33 better parking!!! in Hiawassee, more space for good browsing....
- 34 Having a publicity campaign for PINES and adding reserved book storage shelves at the library (because they'll be needed when folks understand the service being offered).
- 35 Have more new releases (books) available.
- 36 I really do not know what I would change.
- 37 Have more of the current books available
- 38 NO loud political discussions by staff members audible to library users. Not everyone in the community shares the same political opinions as vocal staff.
- 39 Include more of the recent best sellers for adults as the budget permits!
- 40 more current best sellers
- 41 more current novels for check out
- 42 increase print material and books on cd
- 43 better selection of books
- 44 more and a greater variety of books
- 45 MORE COMFORTABLE AREAS WHERE ONE COULD SIT
- 46 open on Saturday
- 47 Unsure
- 48 Add a private children's area and meeting room

- 49 Enlarge the library in Hiawassee
- 50 more emphazise on reading books, less on computers
- 51 I thought it was nice just the way it was and I loved the For Sale room where I could buy discounted books they were no longer using.
- 52 more books!
- 53 I can't think of anything that wouldn't require an enormous infusion of cash. I think our library does very well, considering budgeting constraints.
- 54 sitting area
- 55 The location. It is very inconvient to find parking especially on days when court is in session. Those days you have to walk long distances which those with disabilities arent able to do. Also, the library isn't able to stay open after the courthouse closes due to the requirements of security.
- 56 I would like to be able to browse the online system wide catalog and select DVDs to be sent to pick up here in Blairsville.
- 57 more computer facilities
- 58 Just waiting for the new library in Blairsville. The temporary library is too small.
- 59 increase hours
- 60 I would like to see a larger library, located in town, not out on some highway in the country next to a filling station!
- 61 hours of operation
- 62 Area for meetings, workshops with a system for showing power points, pictures etc. to people.
- 63 not in the courthouse
- 64 Have more space.
- 65 Make available a free public meeting room
- 66 Open more hours
- 67 Better access to books on CD
- 68 Nothing, They are changing for the best on their own.
- 69 bigger
- 70 Update the interior of the YH library and update both the interior and exterior of the Hiawassee library.
- 71 Open later at times.
- 72 Have more recorded books on CDs. (if that form is available)
- 73 More genealogy and local history
- 74 A really good librarian in charge
- 75 Add space for a Friends Book Store.
- 76 Bigger children's section or maybe more computers available to students
- 77 nothing
- 78 More books on cd to listen in the car
- 79 The hours.

The location, the security checkpoint can be cumbersome

- 80 more parking
- 81 Make it easier to check out a book if you do not have your card with you
- 82 Parking
- 83 More genealogy information
- 84 More worldwide selection of books and other reading

materials

- 85 It's not open when I get off work and they don't have much of a selection of fantasy, science fiction or paranormal books.
- 86 More material resources: books, space
- 87 More room!
- 88 a more quite place to read

- 89 Get the remodeling done!!!
- 90 wider newspaper selection, i.e. Atlanta Constitution
- 91 More room for computer space so they aren't so close to each other.
- 92 more best sellers
- 93 The parking lots are extremely limited.
- 94 Have it open at least one night a week.
- 95 Larger selection of used books for sale at more reasonable prices; perhaps \$2 for hardcover, \$1 for paperback.
- 96 need duplicate cards for dual sets of car keys, there is no tolerance if one forgets card.
- 97 Update the interior of the Young Harris library
- 98 a quiet corner to read, without bustle.
- 99 More space
- 100 Have a coffee cafe
- 101 A larger selection of books
- 102 Make the library staff more aware of what's going on in the community around them.
- 103 More kids programs. I know that space is limited with the temporary quarters at UCPL, but I would love to see more flexible time slots for story time. For example, maybe a Tuesday morning geared for younger kids and a Thursday afternoon or Saturday morning for older kids. The MWF morning time slot conflicts with preschool hours & the noon time slot makes for hungry, sleepy, grouchy toddlers. Also maybe some new themed programs to attract more kids and families to attend. The books for babies party sounded great, but my toddler was too old to participate.
- 104 more shelf stock of recently published books
- 105 more time and more reference materials
- 106 Better hours (Like weekends or evenings)
- 107 More books, more rooms for tutoring
- 108 More new books
- 109 more contemporary books in non fiction category
- 110 same as above
- 111 more up-to-date books. many reference materials/non-fiction are dated. the small section of new books seem to be checked out or on waiting list.
- 112 add the e-services; lend books electronically
- 113 It's been a year or more since I used the library so I don't know any specific thing that would make it more beneficial. Maybe having more current books and movies available for check-out.
- 114 enlarge... very crowded..
- 115 Nothing
- 116 larger selection.availability of fictional selections
- 117 The library assumes people know how to research, access publications, email and surf the net and what the net is all about. Structured instructions on how to access all the valuable information in the library and through vehicles available at the library.
- 118 Size: Larger to incorporate more books. more community needs, and more outreaching
- 119 3 week checkout period instead of 2 week.
- 120 No Changes
- 121 Nothing needs changing
- 122 I feel that we desperately need to have our library improvements finished so that they can have a larger and more efficient setting.
- 123 More space---Book reviews and community forums---Better outreach to the community
- 124 Maybe lengthen the hours open, but I do understand that this takes money
- 125 extended hours
- 126 location-make more accessible for elderly & handicap and hours more useable for students
- 127 More craft information
- 128 larger selection of books, magazines & DVD's
- 129 Open more hours (M-F until 8pm and Saturdays until 2pm)

- 130 I would like more books from a wide selection of authors.
- 131 More fiction
- 132 More books!! More popular books, newer books, more diverse selection.
- 133 Remove the constant battle to provide adequate funding.
- 134 Longer check-out periods.
- 135 More access to newer books.
- 136 Friendlier staff in Union Co. I feel that I am bothering certain ones by asking a question. Also a smile would be nice, but not required.
- 137 Space which we'll have in the new/renovated library
- 138 Increase the library's inventory of books, CDs, and audio books.
- 139 larger separate library - more reference materials, more books - easier access.
- 140 hours on Saturday and some evenings
- 141 larger, which is in process at this time
- 142 help increase the selection of books
- 143 open more hours
- 144 UP TO DATE BOOKS
- 145 Bring back the card catalogue
- 146 Again, cannot answer.
- 147 the hours
- 148 I like it just the way it is
- 149 More resources
- 150 More books to choose from
- 151 In the Union County Library, please hurry up and complete the improvements to the library's home. It's too crowded where they are currently.
- 152 It would be nice to have more computers, new ones. The library also needs extra funding to buy more printed materials.
- 153 Make it truly handicap accessible. Not just ramp to sidewalk. It needs an automatic door opener for those in wheelchairs and the doors wide enough to enter. Outside doors need automatic opener. Not depend on your patrons to open doors for the handicapped as in the old building. Needs true handicap rest room, where the door is easy both ways and the room large enough to turn around in a wheelchair. Thanks for asking.
- 154 Union County: Employees who appreciate their jobs and know they are not only in the BOOK business but also in the PEOPLE SERVICE business.
- 155 New facility
- 156 more audeo books, and tapes
- 157 Add more space
- 158 open more in the evenings
- 159 For the people that work there, to be a little nicer.
- 160 More parking facilities
- 161 Have a bigger meeting room/auditorium for programs of educational, historical, community nature.
- 162 More hands on type activities for children and adults. Once a month workshop to familiarize adults and young people on how the library works, how to access online services, organization of materials for easier access.
- 163 more light
- 164 One day a week for extended hours. Or a Saturday morning. Sometimes working folks just can't get there during normal working hours. We could be available to another whole segment of our community. (It would need some advertising!)
- 165 More book and media space, lots more room for storage and displays. More room for children's hour.
- 166 Enlarge.. it's jammed full now!!!
- 167 have access door that does not go through a security check
- 168 extended hours
- 169 longer checkout time

- 170 parking could be better
- 171 More current books
- 172 Open Sunday
- 173 enlarge... sooo crowded!!!!!!
- 174 Better priced used books
- 175 Add more educational information on early childhood education.
- 176 Better hours.
- 177 Have the Towns County, Y.H., fly the American flag on their flag pole!!!! several groups have given them flags over the years. They haven't flown the flag for years. This year it was up for memorial day only.,
- 178 Be open later in the evening.
- 179 location, space
- 180 Location
- 181 more parking spaces
- 182 hours
- 183 more room
- 184 a free standing library and more hours!
- 185 more room for the books I like to read
- 186 longer hours, access 7 days a week
- 187 access!
- 188 bring library and staff home with me!
- 189 additional hours of service
- 190 more hours (evening and Saturday)
- 191 The library in Hiawassee needs to be larger
- 192 more \$ for more hours, perhaps thru even stronger action by Friends of Library and by close/frequent contacts with relevant politicians.
- 193 that the librarians would be paid more!

APPENDIX C: Library Capacity Self-Assessment Instrument

Library Capacity: Assess, Analyze, Address

There are many facets of organizational capacity. In addition, a variety of factors can influence an organization's needs and abilities at any time, including:

- Age and developmental state of the organization
- Size and growth rate of the organization
- Environment in which the organization functions
- Funding and support for the organization

ASSESS

Take a snapshot of your current organizational capacity. Rate your library on each aspect below, using the following scale: 1=Excellent; 2=Good; 3=Fair; 4=Needs Improvement

Governance

- ___ 1. The board of trustees is engaged.
- ___ 2. The board regularly participates in training and development activities, including self-assessment.
- ___ 3. The library director and/or other board members conduct orientation for new board members.
- ___ 4. The constitution and bylaws documents are up to date and reflect current practice.
- ___ 5. The board effectively oversees library policies, programs, finance, and operations.
- ___ 6. The board conducts an annual performance review of the director.
- ___ 7. Board agenda, minutes, and other documents are available to the public and the staff in a convenient and timely manner.

Leadership

- ___ 1. The director is alert to changing community needs and realities.
- ___ 2. Library policies are up to date and employees have received training in implementing them.
- ___ 3. Managers regularly participate in continuing education for management and leadership skills.
- ___ 4. The library has a succession plan in the event of the loss of top leadership.
- ___ 5. The library director is a respected and active participant and leader in the community, and maintains strong connections with local elected officials and the library's constituents.
- ___ 6. The director works effectively in concert with the board.

Financial Management

- ___ 1. Funds are allocated in accordance with priorities in the strategic plan.
- ___ 2. Budget and financial information is regularly shared with managers and the library board.
- ___ 3. A minimum of 1/12th of the library operating budget is kept in reserve at all times.
- ___ 4. There is an annual financial audit or review by an outside professional.
- ___ 5. The fundraising responsibilities of the library, the board, the Friends and foundation are clearly defined, respected, and observed by all parties.
- ___ 6. Donors are promptly acknowledged and recognized.

Human Resources

- ___ 1. The organization is able to recruit, train, and retain capable staff.
- ___ 2. The library has a new employee orientation program.
- ___ 3. The library offers a competitive salary and benefit package.
- ___ 4. Job descriptions reflect the organization's plan for service and are kept up to date.
- ___ 5. Evaluations of staff performance are completed at least annually and are tied to the strategic plan.
- ___ 6. Personnel policy is clear and up to date, consistent with state and federal law, and available to all staff members.
- ___ 7. Staff development is available as needed to staff at all levels of the organization, and the library spends no less than 1% of its payroll budget on continuing education.
- ___ 8. The library has an active and well-organized volunteer program.

Internal Operations

- ___ 1. There is a culture of open and frequent communication.
- ___ 2. Day-to-day operations are as effective and efficient as they can be.
- ___ 3. Appropriate information is available, shared, and used effectively for decision making.
- ___ 4. Technology is adequate and appropriate for meeting operational needs.
- ___ 5. The library provides equipment and materials that employees need for optimal performance.

Facilities

- ___ 1. Library buildings are spacious, comfortable, and welcoming.
- ___ 2. Facilities are well-located for visibility and use by the community.
- ___ 3. There is adequate parking at all locations.
- ___ 4. A health and safety audit is performed annually in each facility.
- ___ 5. A program of preventive maintenance is in place.

___6. Libraries meet state size standards of 0.6 square feet per capita.

Planning

___1. The library has a current strategic plan.

___2. The strategic plan is used to make decisions about the library's programs and services.

___3. The library has a vital mission and a clear understanding of its identity.

___4. The library is able to engage in regular, strategic reflective thinking and planning.

___5. Stakeholders are involved in strategic planning.

Evaluation

___1. Every program and service offered by the library includes an evaluation component to measure and describe results.

___2. The library maintains a comprehensive list of data elements collected and how they are used.

___3. There is a mechanism in place for providing regular status reports on library objectives to the board, the staff, and the community.

___4. The library submits evaluative data, such as annual report information, to state and local funding authorities and grantors in a timely manner.

___5. The library participates in the Public Library Data Service program sponsored by the Public Library Association.

Marketing and Community Relations

___1. The library has high visibility in the community.

___2. The library effectively uses print and electronic media and employs clear, strategic messages to communicate with the public.

___3. The library has a recognizable logo, tagline, and/or image that is used consistently in promotional materials.

___4. The library offers information about its services and programs in formats appropriate to the community.

___5. The library has a marketing plan.

___6. The library has a clear process and criteria defined for entering into partnerships with other agencies and organizations.

ANALYZE

1. In which category did you have the most 3s and 4s?
2. An improvement in what area would be most strategic at this time? What is most needed or will result in the greatest benefit? Is there anything that would be relatively quick and/or simple to improve?
3. What are the underlying reasons for the 3s and 4s? Do you see any common patterns that could be addressed, affecting more than one item?
4. What capacity issue are you struggling with most? What keeps the organization from moving forward?

ADDRESS

Determine which items you are able to address in the short term (this year), medium term (within 3 years) and long term (within 5 years or more). Rank them in order of priority, based on your analysis.

1. Item to be improved:
2. Here's what we'll do:
3. Who, how and by when?

Repeat these three steps for each item you've chosen to address. Congratulations! You're on your way to enhancing your library's performance.

APPENDIX D: Strategic Plan Resources

Books, Articles, and Documents

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Web Sites

Georgia Public Library Service: <http://www.georgialibraries.org/>

Mountain Regional Library System: <http://www.mountainregionallibrary.org/>

U.S. Census Bureau, American FactFinder: <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

WebJunction, Strategic Planning: <http://www.webjunction.org/strategic-planning>

Community Links

Local government

- [City of Young Harris](#)
- [City of Hiawassee](#)
- [City of Blairsville](#)
- [City of Blue Ridge](#)
- [Towns County Government](#)
- [Union County Government](#)
- [Fannin County Government](#)
- [Clay County North Carolina](#)
- [Rabun County Government](#)
- [White County Government](#)
- [Cherokee County North Carolina](#)

Chambers of Commerce and Local Travel & Recreation

- [Towns County Chamber of Commerce](#)
- [Blairsville Union County Chamber of Commerce](#)
- [Fannin County Chamber of Commerce](#)
- [Clay County NC Chamber of Commerce](#)
- [Rabun County Chamber of Commerce](#)
- [White County Chamber of Commerce](#)
- [Suches, Georgia Information](#)
- [Hiwassee River Basin Directory](#)
- [Northeast Georgia Mountain Travel Association](#)
- [BlueRidgeHighlander.com](#)

Health Services Agencies

- [Union General Hospital in Blairsville](#)
- [Fannin Regional Hospital](#)
- [Chatuge Regional Hospital](#)
- [Murphy Medical Center](#)
- [Northeast Georgia Health System](#)
- [Georgia Health Go-Local](#)

Historical Societies

- [Towns County Historical Society](#)
- [Union County Historical Society](#)
- [Rabun County Historical Society](#)
- [Northeast Georgia History Center at Brenau University](#)
- [Georgia Health Go-Local](#)

Educational Facilities

- [Towns County Schools](#)

Union County School System
Fannin County Schools
Young Harris College
North Georgia Technical College
John C. Campbell Folk School
Toccoa Falls College Epworth Campus
Appalachian Technical College

Source: Mountain Regional Library System Web site,
<http://www.mountainregionallibrary.org/community.html>