



# Library Profile **MID-CONTINENT PUBLIC LIBRARY**

PLATTE, CLAY, AND JACKSON COUNTIES, MISSOURI

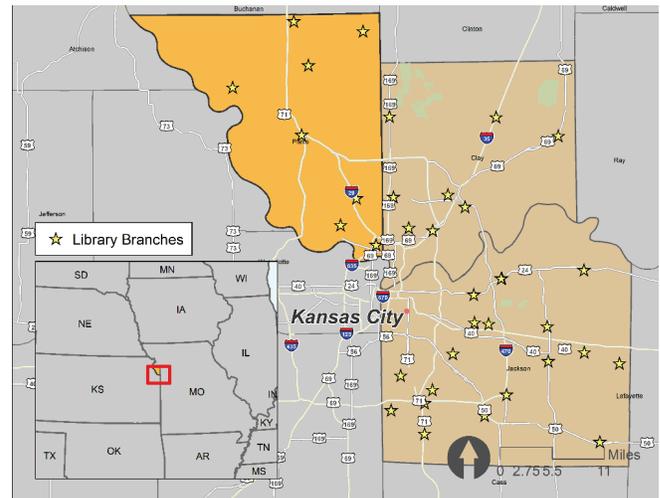
# Library Profile: Mid-Continent Public Library



## PLATTE, CLAY, AND JACKSON COUNTIES, MISSOURI

The Mid-Continent Public Library (MCPL) is a suburban library system located across Platte, Clay, and Jackson Counties north and east of Kansas City, Missouri. While the library system does not have a single branch designated as the main branch, it comprises 31 library branches and serves a member base of 541,831 library cardholders. In 2019, MCPL hosted 2,755,928 in-person visits and more than 5,158,720 website visits. Annual circulation included 2,685,761 physical materials and more than 292,468 digital items.

MCPL's mission is "to enrich our citizens and communities through expanding access to innovation, information, ideas, and inspiration." An emphasis on lifelong learning is embedded throughout its educational programming and partnerships. MCPL programs, events, and resources create opportunities for individuals to learn and grow in nontraditional and innovative ways. By providing supports for educators and students, fostering entrepreneurial networks, and encouraging interpersonal connections



and cultural exchanges through storytelling and genealogy, MCPL creates an inclusive atmosphere where all visitors feel welcome. MCPL promotes and enhances the social wellbeing of patrons by making connections between individuals, business, and organizations in ways that help them learn about themselves, others, and their community.

## PLATTE, CLAY, AND JACKSON COUNTIES

MCPL serves the Kansas City metro area of Platte, Clay, and Jackson Counties, which has a combined population of a little more than 1 million people. The counties' population is majority White, and just under 18 percent of residents identify as Black. The median household income is higher than the national

median household income in Platte and Clay Counties, but it is lower in Jackson County. Platte and Clay Counties' poverty rates are significantly lower than the national poverty rate, while Jackson County's poverty rate is slightly above the national rate.

	Population	% Change in Population (2000–2016)	% White	% Black	% Hispanic	% Asian	% Other	Median Household Income	% Families in Poverty
United States	318,558,162	13.2	62.0	12.3	17.3	5.2	3.3	\$55,322	11.0
Platte County	94,970	28.7	82.4	6.7	5.6	2.6	2.7	\$70,879	5.0
Clay County	233,135	23.9	82.4	5.6	6.5	2.1	3.4	\$63,702	6.7
Jackson County	683,643	6.3	62.7	23.5	8.7	1.7	3.4	\$48,104	12.9

Compared to other suburban counties across the country, K–12 students in Platte County perform well across a range of publicly available measures of success. Platte County fell in the top quartile of all suburban counties on the School Effectiveness Index.<sup>1</sup> Retail Trade, Administrative

Support & Waste Management Remediation Services, Accommodation & Food Service, and Manufacturing represent the largest employment sectors in Platte County, employing 42 percent of all working adults.

	Total Labor Force	% Retail Trade	% Administrative Support & Waste Management Remediation Services	% Accommodation & Food Service	% Manufacturing
United States*	131,362,978	10.9	6.2	8.9	9.3
Platte County	44,104	14.0	10.0	10.0	8.0
Clay County	133,815	2.1	2.5	1.1	4.6
Jackson County	363,974	2.3	2.4	1.5	4.2

Data Sources: 2012–16 American Community Survey five-year estimates; U.S. Census Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD), 2017.

\*Continental figures for total labor force include the 48 lower states and Washington, DC.

<sup>1</sup> Data elements included in the School Effectiveness Index, along with measures for Platte County, can be found at the beginning of Appendix II.

## SITE VISIT PARTICIPANTS AND DATA COLLECTION

In fall 2019, the study team conducted interviews with 19 current library staff and representatives from eight different partner organizations. Site visit interviews conducted with MCPL staff and partners focused on understanding the MCPL programming and partnerships that support formal and informal learning in MCPL's service area.

In addition, the following data were used to create the network map included in this profile:

- 2016 Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) Public Libraries Survey
- Program evaluations for several MCPL programs
- Interview notes and related materials collected by the case study team

This site profile includes the following:

- A summary of select MCPL programming and partnerships that support library customers' access to formal and informal education and the overall educational capacity of the broader community
- A descriptive network map that illustrates the scope and variety of connections MCPL maintains with local partners throughout the county and beyond

## MCPL'S PROGRAMMING ENHANCES TEACHING AND LEARNING FOR EDUCATORS AND CHILDREN

MCPL provides several supports for the Kansas City area's formal education sector. MCPL works in partnership with local schools and educators to boost capacity through its Reading Boosters and Teacher Assist programs.

The Reading Boosters program is part of MCPL's commitment to the citywide Turn the Page KC campaign, which seeks to improve reading comprehension for young students throughout the city and region. MCPL partners with local high schools, A+ (a scholarship program for Missouri high school students), and AmeriCorps to deliver Reading Boosters to children in grades K–3. The goal is to spark a love of reading and for students to build confidence in their reading abilities.

AmeriCorps volunteers, who are placed at the library, train high school student volunteers to be literacy tutors for K–3 students. The high school students learn skills to tutor and support

K–3 students' literacy development and reading comprehension. They are also trained to support different kinds of students, from those who are having trouble developing their reading skills to those with advanced skills who like to read more. Tutoring takes place at MCPL branches, with library staff available to help select grade-appropriate books or answer questions. The program strengthens educational effectiveness for the K–3 students by better preparing them for subsequent years of schooling and building their confidence. It also provides benefits to both young students and teens: The K–3 students get invaluable one-on-one attention, and the high schoolers develop cooperative teaching skills as they support younger children's literacy development. These activities enhance the educational experiences of both the K–3 and high school students while also creating opportunities to strengthen connections between older and younger students—

connections that can build empathy and confidence for these children as they grow.

The library also supports the capacity of local educators through its Teacher Assist program. Ten years ago, the library created this program to provide relevant subject matter materials (books, videos, etc.) to any local educators who requested them. This service helps provide additional resources and build capacity in the educational sector. Teachers in traditional schools, childcare centers, and homeschool settings submit an online form to MCPL librarians, who then collect classroom-appropriate library materials matching the criteria given by the teacher

(i.e., specific subject areas or reading levels). Teachers may request as few as 10 or as many as 50 materials at one time. Teacher Assist also provides customized requests depending on the age or grade level of readers and has created syllabi of library materials for frequently requested subjects.

Educators noted that Teacher Assist helps them to be more effective educators. They learn about available materials, including those best suited to students with individual learning needs and challenges. The service also allows them to spend more time planning their lessons, rather than collecting materials.

## **STORYTELLING PROVIDES INCLUSIVE WAYS FOR DIVERSE GROUPS TO LEARN AND GROW TOGETHER**

Libraries are natural community spaces to collect and share stories. MCPL's Story Center animates this idea by supporting library users to tell their own stories: The Center is a valuable resource for community members to connect through creating, publishing, and sharing stories. Its programs and offerings guide participants through each step of the storytelling process from story gathering to publishing and disseminating the story for the community. Whether it be preserving local or family history, engaging in oral storytelling, writing a memoir, or publishing poetry, the Story Center empowers residents to tell their stories, share them with a wider audience, and become part of a community of storytellers. The Story Center furthers library users' informal learning through storytelling courses that teach participants how to write, edit, and tell stories. Recent studies<sup>2, 3, 4</sup> suggest that storytelling promotes brain health and active memories, serves an effective part in mental health treatments, and fosters social connection among participants. The types of programs available at the Story Center

can, therefore, contribute to individual and community health and social wellbeing.

The Story Center also hosts a variety of programs that promote ethnic diversity, inclusion, and informal learning. For instance, the Story Center hosted 1,000 Footsteps Tell the Story, a visual storytelling program in which participants in an English as a Second Language (ESL) program displayed handmade quilts, photographs, and stories at the Story Center. Many of the participants are members of refugee communities, and making quilts allowed them to tell the story of their journey visually. The program culminated in an event in which the quiltmakers or their families told their story of relocating from their home to the Kansas City area.

By highlighting the personal stories of refugees, the program helped promote understanding and empathy and opened up space for conversation; as an artist involved in the program noted, "Stories allow people to see other perspectives,

2 Brain Health and Active Memories: <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/03/100302151242.htm> and <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4330240/>, more general piece: <https://www.verywellmind.com/powerful-anti-aging-and-anti-depressant-effects-of-storytelling-2223891>

3 Mental Health Treatment: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/MHRJ-08-2017-0034/full/html>, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1609406917729291> and <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6910821/>

4 Social Connection: <https://www.hassonlab.com/brain-to-brain-communication>; <https://www.cgu.edu/people/paul-zak/>

create awareness, and view others as human beings.” Others involved in the program also noted that the library was the perfect environment to situate these types of programs: The neutral and open atmosphere allows people to form their own opinions and learn without judgment.

In partnership with the local Metropolitan Community College, the Story Center offers a 12-part storytelling course with a focus on either oral or written storytelling. Participants gain a better understanding of fundamental storytelling principles, forms, and styles. They also gain practical knowledge around creating and editing original stories, different publication

and performance models, and strategies for marketing a personal brand as an author. Throughout the program, participants create original material, swap and critique others’ work, and write a capstone essay. They are awarded a Storytelling Certificate upon course completion. The style of the program emphasizes lifelong learning and local cultural assets—graduates often return to the library to engage with new ideas and stories. Since the course is free to all, it makes nontraditional learning opportunities accessible to a wide audience. It also fosters institutional connections through its partnership with the community college.

## **THE MIDWEST GENEALOGY CENTER FURTHERS PATRONS’ EDUCATION BY TEACHING GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH SKILLS AND OFFERING COMPREHENSIVE RESEARCH RESOURCES**

Another distinctive educational opportunity MCPL offers patrons is its Midwest Genealogy Center. At 52,000 square feet, it is the largest family history library and education center in the United States. Patrons have access to a collection of more than 179,000 historical records, including newspapers, yearbooks, microfilm, and databases. The Midwest Genealogy Center educates patrons on how to use these resources and how to research family genealogy, including both classes on general genealogical research skills and classes on specific topics in genealogical research like Census Records Research, Getting Started with African American Genealogy. Patrons using the Midwest Genealogy Center’s Wi-Fi have free access to the unlimited version of Ancestry.com. Staff members and genealogists are available for tours and to help with retrieval of information. MCPL recently opened an adjacent Community Hall facility, which is home to Community Rooms that can be reserved by local groups for a small fee.

The Story Center and the Midwest Genealogy Center both enhance education of the MCPL community through offering classes and trainings, providing access to specialized materials, and creating opportunities for learners to interact and share what they have learned. The creation, connection, and sharing of stories is a priority for the staff at the grant-funded Story Center as well as for the staff that provide resources at the Midwest Genealogy Center. The Centers offer educational opportunities for beginners as well as experienced researchers, meeting patrons of all levels of education and helping them deepen their skills. Both Centers promote social connectedness by bringing together like-minded people interested in these unique learning opportunities. The resources available to patrons of both Centers encourage self-discovery, interpersonal connections, and cultural exchanges through the promotion of stories—both old and new.

## MCPL HELPS PEOPLE AND BUSINESSES MAKE CONNECTIONS THAT MATTER

MCPL's approach to outreach is to connect with existing community networks, learn about the work that is already happening on the ground, and either support existing activities or fill in gaps identified in the field. There is increasing emphasis on meeting the community where they are—"We had to get out of the mindset that people were coming to the library and find them where their needs are being met . . . we had to go out and be present where they are." One result from this shift in orientation has been the development of a robust partnership between MCPL and the local business community that facilitates connections and supports potential small business entrepreneurs.

MCPL's Square One Small Business Services (SOSBS) promotes education about small business topics like budgeting, inventory, and regulatory issues; fosters social connections by bringing entrepreneurs together for classes and networking and conducting outreach to immigrant entrepreneurs; and increases economic wellbeing by helping entrepreneurs turn their ideas into profitable, sustainable businesses.

SOSBS began its work by connecting with business development networks through local chambers of commerce (there are 18 in MCPL's service area) and KC Source Link, a nonprofit that helps grow and promote entrepreneurship. After learning what resources were already available to businesses in the area, SOSBS identified food trucks and low-/moderate-income entrepreneurs as groups in need of access to business development programming. SOSBS offers programming like free classes, workshops, resources, and one-on-one support to these audiences. In one program, food truck operators teach other entrepreneurs about their specific business needs and challenges; another class covers marketing concepts. Programs for low-/moderate-income entrepreneurs are designed to be experiential and engaging, rather than

traditional presentations and lecture-formatted classes.

SOSBS provides trainings for these entrepreneurs, including the review of business plans, access to business databases, social media strategies, information on funding and start-up capital, and an emphasis on a broader understanding of local business ownership. Classes are free to access and customized to different learning styles, making them available to a wide audience of aspiring and established entrepreneurs—as one partner noted, "We work with all businesses but [we are] particularly giving access and education to those who don't realize that it exists for them." SOSBS's programs provide a route to economic wellbeing by encouraging individuals to create their own businesses and sources of income. The programs also support creativity and encourage capacity building and education among entrepreneurs.

MCPL's mobile Reading Rocket also "meets people where they are" through connecting families at a subsidized housing development to education and social supports. Reading Rocket was founded in response to challenges faced by families living in "transportation deserts." A mobile early literacy unit began delivering reading materials to a subsidized housing development where it can be difficult for families to access public transit or visit library branches.

Working together with the Community Service League, the service has expanded its activities and now responds to a variety of needs in the community, including year-round education, clothes and food, dental care, childcare, diapers and potty training, and workforce development. The Reading Rocket's Forever Book program gives more than 1,000 children a book each time they visit, as library staff realized that many of the families that they work with have few books in their household. Singing, story times, and summer reading are all elements

of the program, which has become a critical support for education, health, and wellbeing in an under-resourced public housing system. The bookmobile can be found parked in strip mall parking lots, serving as a refuge on hot or cold days and as a place for children to gather

who may otherwise lack activities or adult supervision. The Reading Rocket also maintains an active social media presence to reach a wider, younger, and more tech-savvy audience that may be less inclined to read physical books.

## **MCPL ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS PROMOTE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES AND BRING COMMUNITIES TOGETHER**

MCPL's branches host a broad range of activities and events that promote formal and informal learning for youth of all ages through engagement with Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM); literature; and the arts. Mad Science is an international organization that has a long-standing partnership with MCPL to bring STEM-focused shows and "edu-tainment" to children at the library. The various MCPL branches coordinate and host the events, and Mad Science performs one of 20 different 45- to 60-minute shows. These draw on creative play and problem-solving to get children engaged in STEM concepts, whether it is hands-on science experiments or stories and performances that integrate math and science. Mad Science also organizes age-appropriate coding classes and workshops with materials like Legos or Raspberry Pi (a "tiny computer" used to learn programming), and it offers an all-girls coding group.

MCPL's LitUp Festival is an annual literature and arts festival created by and for teens that connects teen artists in a variety of mediums to other teens from throughout the Kansas City area and to national artists. The LitUp Festival was founded by a teen innovator who wanted to create a space where other teens who love reading and art could gather and connect. They met with MCPL to design an open and welcoming festival for literature and art. Throughout the weekend-long festival, there are keynote speakers from genres like fiction, nonfiction, graphics, and art. Teens interview the speakers about their work in a panel-style

presentation. Librarians work with teens to prepare for these interviews, but the teens decide which questions to ask and interview the speakers at the event. To make LitUp accessible to any interested teens, all festival programming and food are free, and the local transit authority provides transportation.

LitUp also hosts a creative contest: At the 2019 festival, 350 individual students submitted 450 works of art and writing. Staff, creative writing majors at local universities, and teen groups from local library branches judge the top three works in each of four categories. The library exhibits the winning works, and winners receive an award and invitation to a VIP reception with the guest authors at the festival. Authors also make visits to local schools, with a focus on underserved areas that may not be able to attend the festival. By consistently providing this programming, MCPL emphasizes its desire to create an open and welcoming space for teen readers. LitUp nurtures cultural assets and builds confidence by inspiring teens and young adults to create and display their own art. The festival also supports intercommunity connections, as teen artists from schools throughout the Kansas City area network amongst each other. Engaging teens can be challenging, and the ongoing commitment to the festival by both MCPL and Kansas City youth reflects the important role the library plays in helping young people connect with their peers, educators, and artists. Through these connections, teens help each other grow, develop, and learn.

MCPL supports wellbeing by offering a variety of programs that promote formal and informal learning in Platte, Clay, and Jackson Counties. The MCPL programming and connections highlighted in this profile empower individuals, businesses, and the broader community to tell their own stories, learn from one another, and support each other in ways that meet individual needs while strengthening community

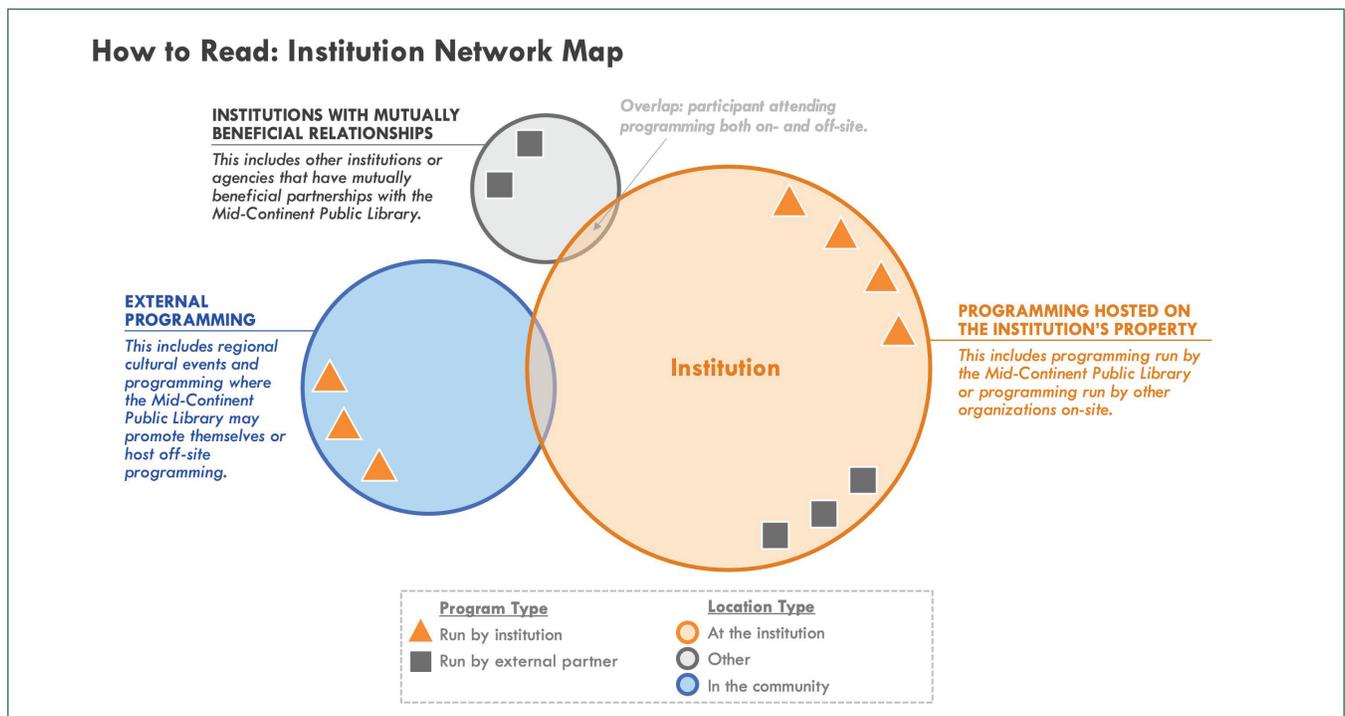
connections. These efforts promote multiple dimensions of wellbeing—from helping individuals learn how to create and grow their businesses to connecting geographically isolated families and communities to information and basic resources. These activities highlight the diversity of ways that MCPL supports and enhances the quality of life for residents and business throughout the region.

## MID-CONTINENT PUBLIC LIBRARY NETWORK MAP

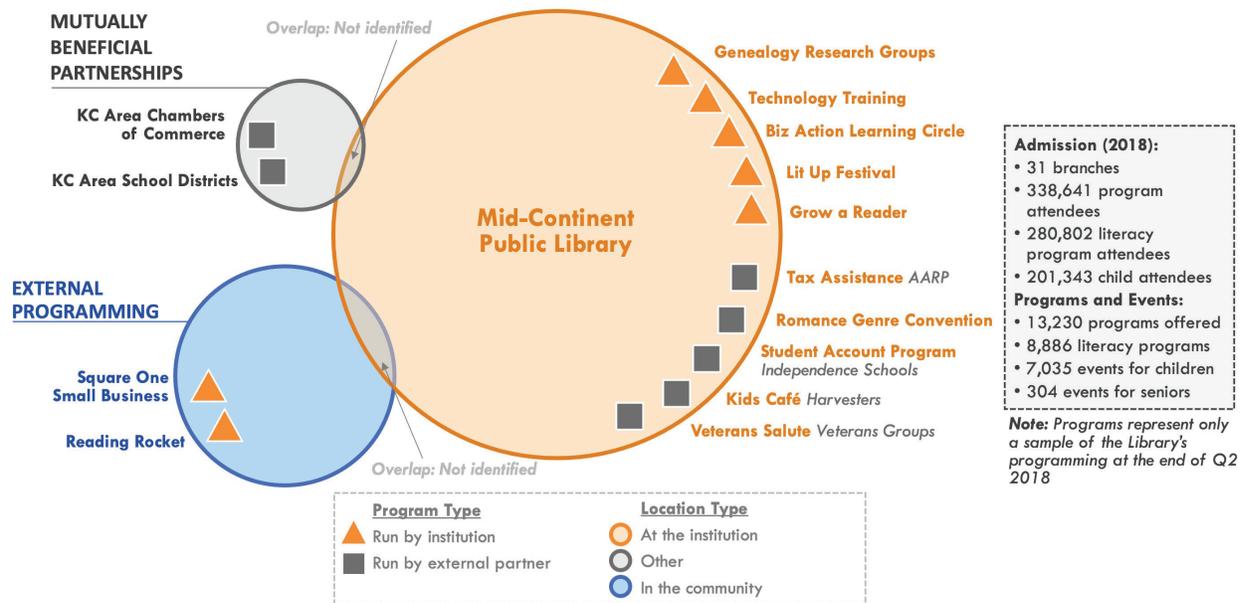
Using data provided by MCPL, the study team developed a descriptive network map to highlight the different types of connections the system maintains with other institutions in the local community. The map illustrates the relationships between MCPL and those entities that offer programming at the library itself and

those that support cross-marketing efforts or have reciprocal relationships with the library system, and it includes examples of off-site, library-led programming. The map does not provide an exhaustive list of MCPL programs but attempts to illustrate a subset of the relationships that the system maintains.

*NOTE: The network map is purely descriptive. The connections represented on the map do not necessarily, and are not intended to, provide estimates of the duration, durability, intensity, or broader impact of the relationships between MCPL and any single entity, or the broader network itself. The goal of the network map is to represent the range and diversity of different types of institutions that connect to library in different ways.*



## Mid-Continent Public Library Network Map



The figure above illustrates a *sample* of the connections of the more than 13,000 programs offered across MCPL's 31 locations. Within the orange circle are a small sample of programs conducted on the physical property of the institution—both programs produced by the institution and those produced by others. Within the blue circle is a sample of programs produced by MCPL and offered off-site in the community. The gray circle represents a sample of connections with other organizations that have mutually beneficial relationships with the library.