INSTITUTE of Museum and Library SERVICES

Library Profile
LIBERAL MEMORIAL LIBRARY

SEWARD COUNTY, KANSAS

Library Profile: Liberal Memorial Library

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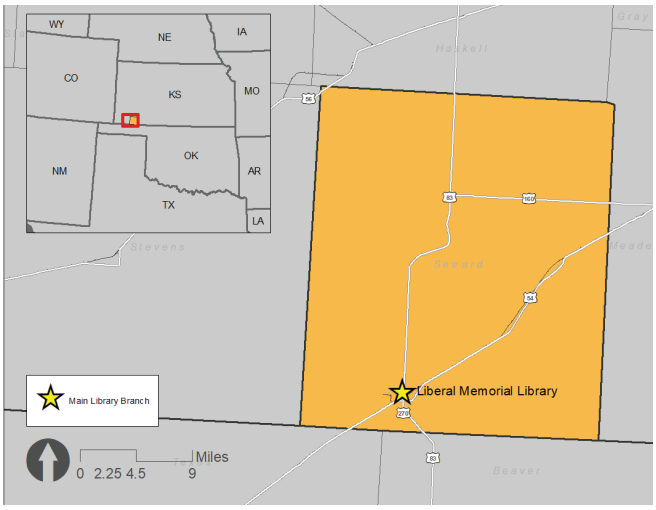
The Liberal Memorial Library (LML) serves Seward County, a rural county in southwest Kansas. LML has a collection of 68,000 items and receives more than 100,000 visits per year. The library has 18 staff (10 full-time, six part-time, and two seasonal employees).

LML serves as a community-oriented hub and safe space that is welcoming to all residents. The library's mission is to promote the development of independent, self-confident, and literate citizens through the provision of open access to cultural, intellectual, and informational resources. LML promotes the wellbeing of residents by supporting multiple approaches to children's literacy development and by collaborating with a range of local organizations to enhance access to resources at the library and in the broader community.



SEWARD COUNTY

Seward County is the 26th most populous county in Kansas (out of 105 counties), with a population just more than 20,000. The county population is majority Hispanic (59 percent), with just more than 30 percent of residents identifying as White. The median household income is about $48,000 a year, slightly less than the national median household income, while the county's 14 percent poverty rate is higher than the national poverty 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
Seward County	23,185	3.0	32.4	4.0	59.0	2.9	1.6	$47,507	14.2

Compared to other rural counties across the country, Seward County students experience extremely high educational needs; these are reflected in students' performance across a range of publicly available measures of success. Seward County fell in the bottom quartile of the School Effectiveness Index.[1] The Manufacturing, Retail Trade, Education Services, and Health Care & Social Assistance industries represent the largest employment sectors in Seward County, employing 65 percent of all working adults.

	Total Labor Force	% Manufacturing	% Retail Trade	% Education Services	% Health Care & Social Assistance
United States*	131,362,978	9.3	10.9	9.2	14.5
Seward County	10,135	35.0	11.0	10.0	9.0

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.*

1 Data elements included in the School Effectiveness Index, along with measures for Seward 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 three current staff and representatives from eight different partner organizations. Site visit interviews conducted with staff and partners focused on understanding library programming and partnerships that support education in Seward County as well as the library's institutional approaches to assessment and sustainability.

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
- 2018 LML Public Library Annual Report
- 2018 Municipal Budget for Liberal, Kansas
- Program evaluations for several LML programs
- Interview notes and related materials collected by the case study team

This site profile includes the following:

- A summary of select LML programming and partnerships that support library customers' access to formal and informal education and the overall educational capacity of the broader community
- LML's institutional approaches to cultivating networks and promoting sustainability for the library
- A descriptive network map that illustrates the scope and variety of connections LML maintains with local partners throughout the county and beyond

LML'S EMPHASIS ON ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION SUPPORTS PROGRAMS AND PARTNERSHIPS THAT ENHANCE EDUCATION SERVICES AND WELLBEING IN THE COMMUNITY

In recent years, the library has taken steps to become more welcoming and accessible to all residents. Multiple interviewees reported that people in the community perceive LML as a safe space, including undocumented people, people with mental health challenges, people experiencing homelessness, and people who speak English as a Second Language (ESL). Recent actions taken by LML to support this include the following:

- Reducing barriers to getting a library card by requiring only a single form of identification
- Introducing more Spanish-language materials and a bilingual story timeProviding outreach to and welcome for people experiencing homelessness
- Creating a Coffee Bar—stocked and sponsored by different organizations on a monthly basis—that offers free coffee and comfortable chairs for reading, using a library laptop, or chatting with other visitors

This welcoming and inclusive environment serves as a foundation for many of the programs and partnerships discussed below. As one partner said, "The library is a safe place for a lot of people, because of their location and because of how they treat people."

LML offers multiple programs that support early literacy development, including book giveaways, story times, and library tours with activities for all second grade classes in Unified School District 480 (USD), the local school district, and

for local Pre-K programs. Story times and book giveaways seek to expand literacy access and experiences for all the community's children and their caretakers. LML offers visits from the library to school classes to help children connect to books and to orient them to the library itself as a resource. In 2019, LML partnered with USD to integrate its summer reading program with the district's summer feeding program. LML served as a summer feeding site and offered literacy activities to participants, enabling the library and USD to reach more families in need of these services.

LML helps many of its partners extend and deepen their educational services by offering a site for them to host programming that supports learning and skill building among participants. Partners such as the school district, an adult learning center, and the United Way hold meetings or classes at the library. Others, like the adult learning center, a local mental health center, and a shelter for people experiencing homelessness, encourage clients to visit the library to use resources or to practice skills. Library staff provide support for some of these participants (e.g., in practicing social skills or developing a resumé) and access to additional resources. Partners indicated that the library helped their clients gain both academic and social-emotional skills. Key partnerships include the following:

- The Colvin Adult Learning Center uses LML as an external classroom and encourages students to visit to practice English, access books, and learn computer skills.
- USD staff sometimes use LML space to provide services for children who have been expelled. LML has also provided space and literacy activities for the district's summer feeding program. The two institutions offer reciprocal support: USD publicizes LML programs, and LML librarians participate in assemblies and parent nights and attend USD and Chamber of Commerce events for new teachers. LML and USD also collaborate on arranging a library visit for all second grade classes.
- Southwest Guidance Center staff have provided workshops at the library and have consulted on and contributed to adult book discussions on mental health topics. LML provides support for this local mental health center's programming by providing space for displays (e.g., Mental Health Awareness month) and related books. LML supports the Center's Suicide Awareness programming and has sent staff to its trainings.
- The Seward County United Way uses LML meeting space and plans to use LML as a sign-up location for a new book giveaway program through Dolly Parton's Imagination Library program, which mails free books to children from birth until they enter school. United Way's funded agencies also use the library.
- The Kansas State University Research and Extension (KSRE) partnered with the library during the summer feeding program to provide nutrition education for parents. Its extension agent has also provided gardening classes at LML. KSRE staff appreciate that LML's location provides access to diverse communities they have not worked with before, like members of the Guatemalan and Somali communities who live nearby and use the library.
- Stepping Stone Shelter residents frequently use LML as a resource: For instance, residents study there or use the computers to search for work or housing. Some residents who have applied for disability benefits hold required meetings at the library. Library staff also provide support and refer visitors to the shelter if needed. The Coffee Bar provides a welcoming space to relax, read, use a computer, or just get inside during the day. Lastly, the shelter sometimes shares book donations with LML.

LML PARTNERSHIPS AND PARTICIPATION IN MULTIORGANIZATION EFFORTS TAKE LIBRARY SERVICES INTO THE COMMUNITY TO ENHANCE SOCIAL WELLBEING

When community members understand what the library can offer as a partner, they see new possibilities for connecting to the library. The library director observed, "People don't realize what we can do with a partnership . . . we can offer the databases that we have access to for small businesses. They are always surprised with what we can offer. [People] think we just check out books." A partner said, "I had the [LML director] come to one of my staff meetings. People don't realize how broad the library can be. It triggered a lot of thoughts and creative ideas in my staff to allow them to bring up thoughts of what they could do [with the library]."

All partner organizations who participated in site visit interviews wanted to continue working with the library, and during 2019, multiple partners deepened their partnerships. Two partners described the value of their collaboration with LML:

> *"The library makes sense as a location to have that type of [suicide] prevention information and resources there. Everyone will come in and feel comfortable. Farmers, males, the elderly population, teens—they all come here and are also higher-risk populations. If this can be a place for a neutral conversation where people can get help or information, why not?"*

> *"LML has been one of our greatest assets and partnerships . . . I speak highly of our library because they've been so progressive in offering different programs and making sure they are community-wide. It doesn't just target one specific audience. They are so open to new things . . . it's just a bunch of diverse programs that will include anybody, and it's free and amazing to see those efforts being done."*

At the time of the site visit, LML, KSRE, and the Liberal Area Coalition for Families (LACF) were in the process of developing an ambitious new partnership to serve an isolated and high-need community of mobile homes with a large population of children. They planned to initiate a mobile community unit, a vehicle that could connect the community to education and health services and resources. LACF will facilitate grant funding; LML and KSRE will share the vehicle; and LML will use it to provide library services, including story time, literacy resources, and activities for children who cannot easily reach the library after school or in the summer. KSRE will use the vehicle to provide services like nutrition education and smoking cessation classes to support enhanced community health. By spring 2020, the group had secured funding and ordered the vehicle.

LML Networks Coordinate Efficient Service Provision, Extend Library Services, and Support Organizational Sustainability

LML actively engages with other community-serving organizations whose coordinated efforts promote the wellbeing of residents throughout the wider area. For instance, LML provides space for and participates in a community forum facilitated by LACF. LACF serves "as a forum for the advancement of community health and services through a networking of government, nonprofits, civic services, and business organizations to identify gaps in community resources and services and to seek out grant possibilities to establish programs where there is a need."[2] LACF convenes monthly meetings of these diverse groups for the purposes of networking and information sharing related to community needs and services.

2 http://www.liberalcoalition.com/

LML has also partnered with LACF on grants to provide space for programming or to implement different grant-funded activities. The library director actively seeks out donations and grants, both locally and at the state level, to support LML programming and special initiatives. These grants have a wide range of formality in terms of the application process and reporting required. Designated funding sources cover specific programs, and LML tries to maintain these funding sources once they are established.

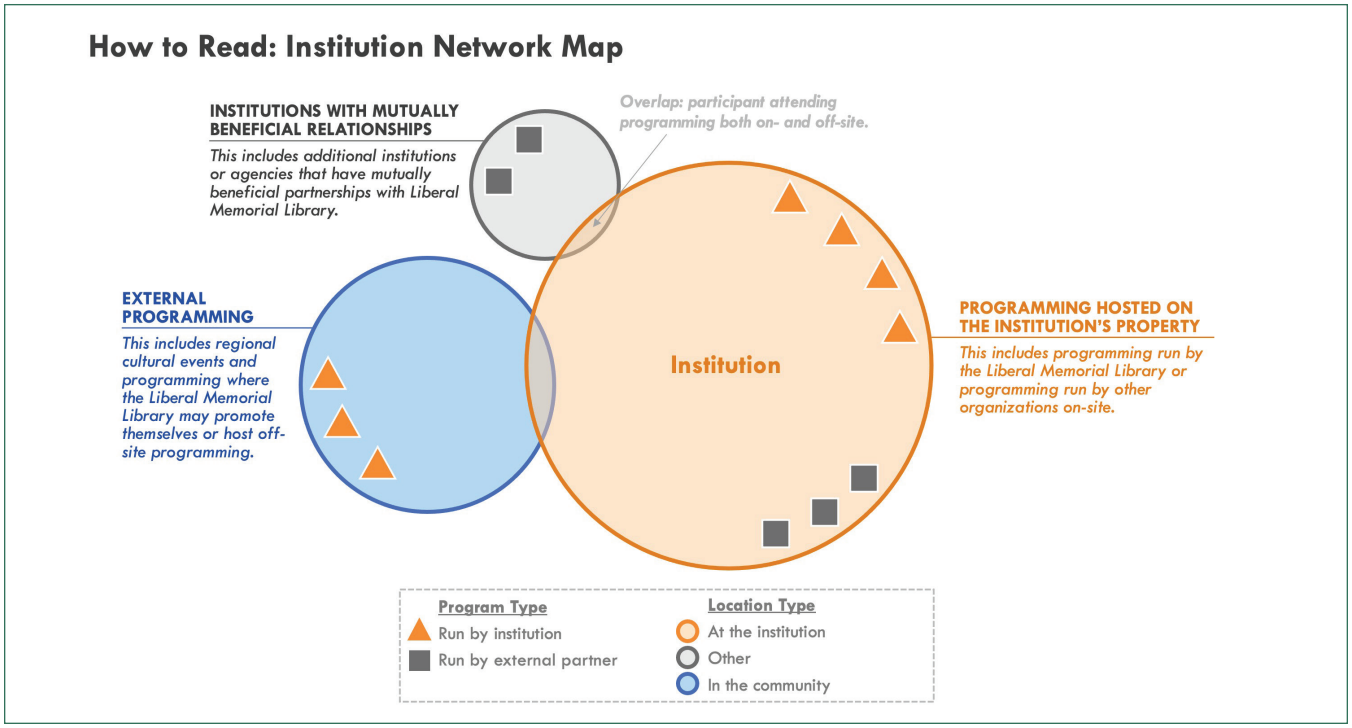
The regional and state library networks also provide important connections for LML staff development and leadership. Through the Southwest Regional Libraries group, librarians meet to share ideas and participate in continuing education. The LML director will play a leadership role in this group as president of the board in 2020. The annual state library conference provides another important professional development opportunity for library staff.

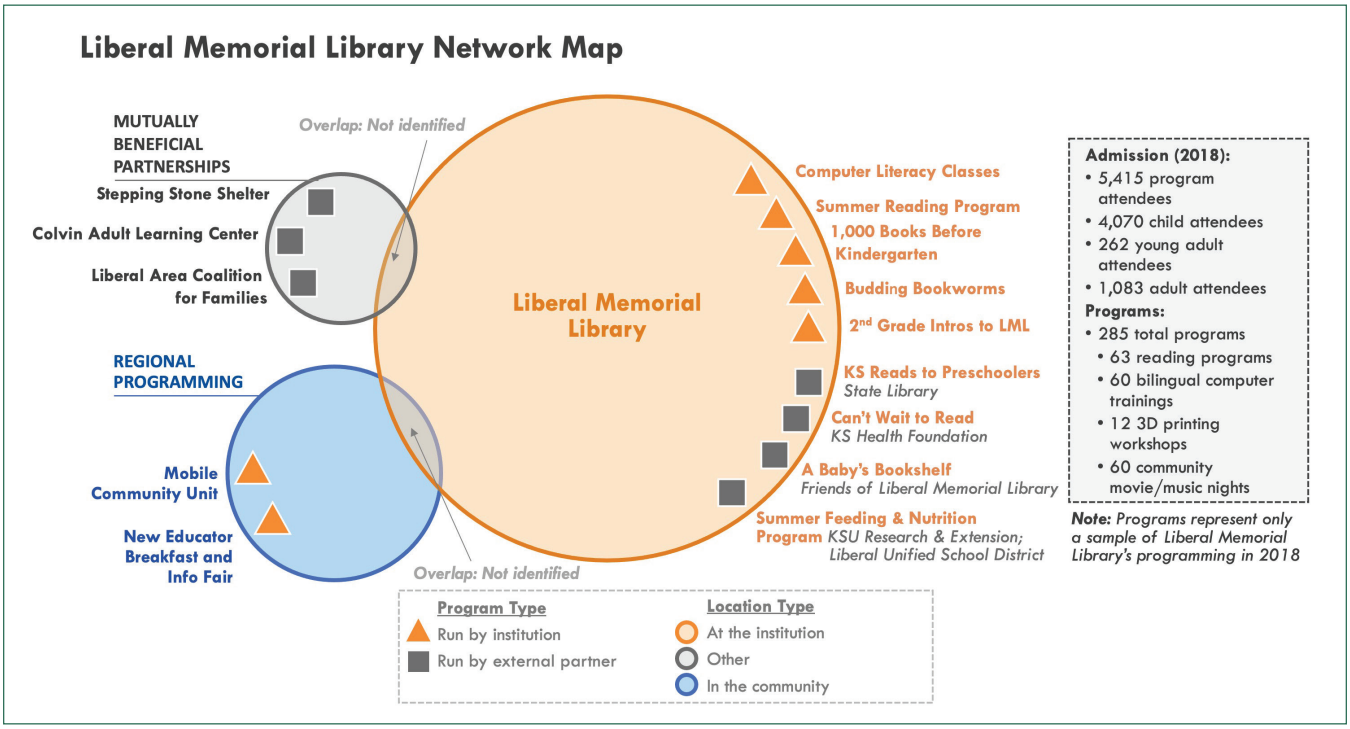
LML plays a central role in its rural community, offering a welcoming safe space for all residents. Local partnerships and networks enhance and extend both library and partner programming. The library's accessible location and accepting environment bolsters its ability to collaborate with diverse community partners; library staff play active roles to enhance partner programs and services. LML supports early literacy development through partnerships (e.g., with schools and early childhood centers) and through a variety of library-developed programming, including book giveaways and story times. LML also serves a wide variety of adult health and learning needs through partnerships with community institutions and by offering both programs and informal consultation with staff. In these ways, LML is both a place to gather and a place where local residents can make new connections, learn and practice skills, and access the resources they need.

LIBERAL MEMORIAL LIBRARY NETWORK MAP

Using data provided by LML, the study team developed a descriptive network map to highlight the different types of connections LML maintains with other institutions in the local community. The map illustrates the relationships between LML and those entities that offer programming at the library itself and those that support cross-marketing efforts or have reciprocal relationships with the library, and it includes examples of off-site, LML-led programming. The map does not provide an exhaustive list of the library's programs but attempts to illustrate a subset of the relationships that the library 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 economic impact of the relationships between LML 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 the library in different ways.





This figure illustrates a *sample* of the connections between LML and other local groups and institutions. Within the orange circle is a sample of programs conducted on the physical property of the library—both programs produced by the library and those produced by others. Within the blue circle is a sample of programs produced by the library and offered off-site in the community. The gray circle represents a sample of institutions and initiatives where the library has reciprocal relationships.