

2026-2031 WNYLRC Member Plan of Service

Data Capture: Member survey, four focus groups

Introduction

The Board of Trustees of the Western New York Library Resources Council (WNYLRC) is in the process of developing the next 5-year Plan of Service that will encompass the years July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2031, which is required by the New York State Library’s Division of Library Development. Of great importance in this planning process is obtaining feedback from WNYLRC’s membership. With the assistance of WNYLRC’s Resource Sharing Committee, WNYLRC developed the 2025 Member Survey encouraging all staff from all our member organizations – academic, hospital, special, and public and school library systems as well as other supporting institutions – to share their opinions about WNYLRC’s programs and services and provide information on what they feel WNYLRC should be focusing on for the near future. The deadline was April 25, 2025. The survey included 13 questions in total. The survey generated 93 member responses. Additionally, four focus groups were held by type. They were:

- April 25, 2025 – Special Libraries and Archival Repositories – 22 attendees
- May 16, 2025 – Public Library/System -
- May 22, 2025 – Academic Libraries -
- May 23, 2025 – School Libraries -

This Executive Summary includes data and anecdotes from both the survey and focus groups. The information included here will help the WNYLRC Board members and Standing Committee members at the June 6, 2025 Planning Retreat develop the goals, objectives, and action steps required by the 5-Year Plan of Service to address needs identified by our members from the survey and focus groups. This Plan also will act as the official “Strategic Plan” for the Council directing the development of new and/or improvement of existing services and programs.

Executive Summary

Overall.....write overall summary based on the survey, focus groups. Keep it concise and short.

2025 Member Survey Analysis

April 2025

Question 1-3

93 members began the survey with 73 completing all questions. Participants included the following:

- College/University staff -(35.5% or 33 respondents)
- Public Library System staff -(30% or 29 respondents)
- Public Library staff – Branch or Association -(10.75% or 10 respondents)
- School Library staff -(9.68% or 9 respondents)
- School Library System staff -(6.45% or 6 respondents)
- Special Library or Archival Repository staff -(5% or 5 respondents)

Among the participants, 87% were full-time employees while 13% were part-time.

Additionally, we collected the role respondents filled in their organization. Here are the top responders:

- Librarians- (53% or 49 respondents)
- Directors- (31.18 or 29 respondents)
- Support staff- (11% or 10 respondents)
- System Directors- (5% or 5 respondents)

Question 4

Loosely based on WNYLRC's Five Strategic Principles, responders were asked to what degree does WNYLRC adhere to or describe WNYLRC today. The percentage of respondents reported that WNYLRC very effectively or effectively adheres to its operational principles:

- WNYLRC willingness to support new initiatives (92%)
- WNYLRC connects diverse libraries (88%)
- WNYLRC provides meaningful professional development (86%)
- WNYLRC advocates on behalf of all members (92%)
- WNYLRC advocates on behalf of my library or organization (87%)
- WNYLRC provides leadership in collaborative projects and services (86%)
- WNYLRC provides value to my library/organization (91%)

- WNYLRC incorporates DEI initiatives into its activities (90%)

Since WNYLRC does not operate with a mission statement, but instead uses these operating principles to guide services, programs, projects, and expenditure, these survey results indicates that WNYLRC is mostly meeting the needs of their diverse clientele.

Question 5

When reviewing the list of services and programs that WNYLRC offers to its members, it was surprising to find that some that often require the most staff management is not as valued as others. The top 10 services of the 23 listed, the most respondents found valuable or very valuable are:

1. Advocacy- (92%)
2. Professional development- (91%)
3. Grant opportunities- (87%)
4. WNYLRC.org website- (87%)
5. Ask the Lawyer services- (86%)
6. WNYlib-l listserv- (86%)
7. New York State Historic Newspapers- (81%)
8. New York Heritage- (81%)
9. Newsletters- (77%)
10. Unconference Regional conference- (72%)

Committees, Ask Us 24/7, social media postings, exploration of new services, and WNYLRC Awards Program were somewhere in the middle. Hospital Library Services were also in the middle at (50%), but it is understandable since it is a program strictly to hospitals and is overall a smaller proportion of membership. However, WNYLRC did survey users of the service to provide a snapshot of how effective and valued the program is to hospital doctors, nurses and other staff. **See section later in this document.**

The bottom five valued services are those that are managed at WNYLRC or a sister council. The ranking of these services may indicate that the audience that these appeal to may be a smaller group of members requiring a niche service, services that require improvement, or services that require better marketing that appeal to a larger audience.

19. Archival Field Services -(42%)
20. Empire State Immersive Experiences (ESIE)-(29%)
21. Empire Archival Discovery Collaborative (EADC) - (28%)
22. Ask the Archivist- (27%)

23. Empire State Library Network Academic Institutional Repositor (ESLN AIR)- (26%)

Question 6

Instead of asking an open-ended question, the survey provided a list of 23 possible challenges our libraries are facing today. The top 10 extremely challenging or very challenging respondents indicated were:

1. Maintaining appropriate funding- (68%)
2. Relevance d perception of the library/organization by the community- (52%)
3. Significant changes in physical space usage/changes- (52%)
4. Significant changes in collection usage- (47%)
5. Relevance and perception of the library/organization by funders- (44%)
6. Technology – emerging- (43%)
7. Patron needs and how to address them (housing, social services, food) – (42%)
8. Relevance and perception of the library/organization by students- (40%)
9. Maintaining appropriate staffing- (40%)
10. E-resources (vendor pricing, models, patron access) – (40%)

The five least challenging concerns were:

19. Technology issues – training (27%)
20. Technology issues – Broadband (25%)
21. First Amendment audits (19%)
22. Interfacing with law enforcement (18%)
23. Subpoena compliance (13%)

The bottom challenges may be more of an issue for public libraries and yet the largest group of respondents were from the public library branches and systems.

Question 7

The survey asked respondents to identify the topic areas they would most like to see under WNYLRC's professional development program to better prepare the library staff for the future. The top ten out of 21 choices were:

1. Technology – Emerging (Artificial Intelligence, other)- (61%)
2. Grant Writing -(46%)
3. Management skills -(44%)
4. Information and Media Literacy – (42%)

5. Technology – Existing (development tools such as bootstrap, SQL, scripting, HTML) – (42%)
6. Copyright compliance – (39%)
7. Leadership training – (39%)
8. Soft skills (relationship building, communication, teamwork, problem—solving, time management, etc.) – (37%)
9. Marketing and promotion (social media, public relations) – (34%)
10. Policy development – (31%)

The middle group that was not as high on the list included curriculum development, archives and special collections management, database searching, legal expertise, consumer health information, preservation and conservation techniques (book repair).

The bottom five were:

17. Working with a governing body or board of trustees
18. Managing institutional repositories
19. Open data
20. Data curation
21. Procurement

Other comments were:

“I have attended some great webinars already on a lot of the choices you offer here. Technology is always changing and so can always use that information.”

“The selected choices are areas that staff encounter more frequently than the others.”

“CA BOCES provides many professional development opportunities that school librarians may attend, although some find it difficult to do so because of substitute shortages. I like to promote trainings offered by WNYLRC and if trainings were recorded, school librarians may choose this option for convenience.”

“Looking to develop skills with eye on promotion to director or more supervisory role.”

Question 8

WNYLRC already provides extensive services to members, but services change and evolve so it is always good to see what holes the Council is not filling. The survey asked members to check any of the 10 new services listed that WNYLRC could offer within the next five years. The top five were:

1. Consortial purchasing of databases and eBooks (statewide/regional)- (59%)
2. Advocating for better vendor licensing contracts – (55%)
3. Provide expertise on AI and augmented reality services – (46%)
4. Provide grant writing services – (46%)
5. Support statewide catalog to enhance resource sharing among libraries (45%)

The final selections were each under (40%) and included digital preservation support – which was the next highest at 34%. Additional services that received less than 20% support were: expand Empire State Delivery to include delivery of other items, assume collection of IPEDS data, data repository services, and shared storage facility.

Four respondents felt the current services were sufficient. Other suggestions were:

“Our patrons would like more e-newspaper access, and better promotion if we have it. We were sharing Core Collections access with a few other libraries and will sorely miss it because the primary financial supporter is pulling out.”

“Cold storage for microfilm masters; social services help for patrons”

“Group meetings that allow for interactions between different types of libraries for collaboration, ie. School Librarian and Public Librarians. “

Question 9

This open-ended survey question asked respondents to identify trends that will shape library services at your library in the coming five years and which could include societal, environment, technological, political, or other trends. 71 answered this question. By tagging each comment with the subjects, the top five indicators mentioned were:

New technology, AI, environmental crises

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1. Artificial Intelligence – (32% or 23 respondents)

“I expect library funding to continue to be an issue. Artificial intelligence will likely have a large impact, as well as technology development in general. E-resources and fair pricing models remain a big issue. Politically and socially, I think we'll be dealing with large-scale materials challenges, funding challenges and possible violence against libraries and staff members.”

“AI and info/media literacy “

“The negative political climate towards education in general and the rise of AI has been concerned”

“How will people get the information they need, and how well can they determine where it's coming from? AI sounds great but you need to know where it's getting its information from, because you can't always trust the results.”

2. Funding (32% or 23 respondents)

“Changing reading habits of students. Political climate surround diverse titles. Funding.”

“The school where I work is in big debt. This means that I see the students only every other week. I am responsible for over 800 students alone! I am constantly behind on all of the management duties that need to be done.”

“The trend of libraries as a place for social services, as well as other community support, without increasing our funds and resources will lead to continued increased pressure for libraries to be multi-functional entities.”

“I expect library funding to continue to be an issue. Artificial intelligence will likely have a large impact, as well as technology [logical] development in general. E-resources and fair pricing models remain a big issue. Politically and socially, I think we'll be dealing with large-scale materials challenges, funding challenges and possible violence against libraries and staff members.”

3. Political (32% or 23 respondents)

“Changing reading habits of students. Political climate surround diverse titles. Funding.”

“Political. helping the community understand outcomes of policy change on local, state and federal levels”

“Societal, technological, of course political and the ability to change to the needs of the community.”

“As an association library our worry is the current political environment affecting our school district voting numbers for our budget. “

“The negative political climate towards education in general and the rise of AI has been concerned”

4. Societal/social issues (15% or 11 respondents)

“There has been an increase in homelessness in our area. Helping those who need to find housing and work as well as food and clothing is a needed service to work on providing.”

“societal and political trends. communities looking to local community libraries for ways to support their educational/social service needs. “

“Loss of federal government services such as reduced staffing of the SSA are likely to have an enormous impact on public libraries, as recipients/applicants look to libraries to help with accessing and navigating electronic portals. Funding cuts due to federal and state cuts will likely be an issue for all of our libraries. Problems with homelessness, drug addiction, and mental illness are a daily challenge for public libraries, especially in urban areas. “

“AI, societal division”

Question 10

This open-ended survey question asked respondents to identify the biggest obstacles that libraries will face in the coming five years. 71 answered this question. By tagging each comment with the subjects, the top five indicators mentioned were:

1. Funding

“Based on current events, possibly their very existence, funding, and AI potentially replacing librarians”

“Library de-funding; AI”

“Funding loss due to political changes/demographics”

“\$\$\$\$ and government control in areas where libraries are best equipped to make decisions and act upon them..”

“I think funding will be the biggest obstacle. Hopefully, Novel NY will continue funded by the state but some of my school librarians have had their library budget reduced this year to meet budget needs elsewhere. Advocacy is ongoing.”

“Funding gaps, publishers rising prices, increased need and usage of databases, no American governmental support or participation, unstable economy, staffing fatigue.”

2. Political

“Political interference.”

“Funding and political climate challenging library diverse book collections”

“The biggest obstacle will likely be funding cuts either due to political pressure or trying to backfill other cut programs”

“Political atmosphere and funding”

“Political and economic disruptions.”

“The political climate is going to be tough for the next few years thus preventing growth. Considering the ILMS has been upended, you will have to deal with funding while assisting with providing resources for patrons regarding finding employment, supplemental income, small business, etc. On a positive note, I would love to see New York make it illegal to challenge/ban books. Apparently, Bill A4859 is stuck in Assembly as of 2/2025.”

3. Relevance

“With the demographic cliff, colleges are likely to have fewer students. That, combined with a likely recession, will lead to financial stress. This is on top of decreasing relevance in the eyes of administrators. AI is also a big obstacle and may draw users away from the library.”

“The college understanding the amount that the library does for the faculty and students with a very limited staff. We need at least 2 more full-time librarians.”

“Perception among the general public of what libraries do and provide, the expectation for libraries to fill the gap to provide services to underserved populations”

“Relevance”

4. Current Federal Administration

“Horrible policies by the current president who does not understand the importance of libraries. Horrible attitude of current president toward anyone who is smarter than he is which is 99% of the population”.

“Interference from the Fed”

“Musk and Trump's race to make us into the dumbest nation on Earth by dismantling our educational and cultural resources at breakneck speed; climate change and the potential for increasing environmental disasters.”

“Current presidential administration”

Question 11

This open-ended survey question asked respondents to identify trends that will shape library services at your library in the coming five years and which could include societal, environment, technological, political, or other trends. 8 answered this question. By tagging each comment with the subjects, the top five indicators mentioned were:

“Thank you for recording/archiving so many of the webinars you present. I usually can't attend them on the days offered but will always go back and scroll through the older ones and watch them later. I find them very helpful.”

“Fear that Libraries will lose the open, free, opportunity for intellectual and creative thinking and discussion.”

“I think you are all a wonderful, passionate group. Kudos for your continued support of our local libraries!”

“You're doing a great job, especially with advocacy and continuing education! Thank you for what you do.”

Special Library/Archival Repositories Focus Group Analysis
April 24, 2025 - WNYLRC
