



New Jersey State Library Library Services and Technology Act 2023-2027 Strategic Plan





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Commissioned by New Jersey State Library
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[Cover photograph: Spring Exterior at New Jersey State Library]

Connecting people with information through libraries



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Introduction

The New Jersey State Library (NJSL) serves the needs of a complex and diverse state, and - by extension - a complex ecosystem of libraries. Public libraries are organized and operated quite differently throughout the state, evidencing a blend of municipalities, county structures, regional collaboration, city and suburban environments, and rural and shore communities.

For many years, the state library has prioritized three main programs in their LSTA goals, equally available to all types of libraries. While these three programs carry forward, the 2023-2027 five-year plan is designed to support customization and innovation at the local level. The activities within the various projects will provide resources, tools, and opportunities that libraries can adopt differently based on their needs. Additionally, the activities aim to foster high-quality journeys and experiences that translate across multiple environments.

In developing the five-year plan, NJSL took a holistic view of its strategic objectives and services, which include but are not limited to the Grants-to-States program. The agency is investing in ways to work collaboratively across silos, with an emphasis on marketing and communications, equity, diversity and inclusion, and creating a unified learning organization. The LSTA projects and activities outlined herein will benefit from and mutually reinforce the state's larger portfolio of initiatives.

Thank you to the many individuals who contributed input and creativity to the process. Early on, library directors and library leaders openly acknowledged that different libraries would want very different things when it comes to seeing their LSTA dollars at work. The design team grappled with these tensions and trade-offs, building in feedback loops so New Jersey's libraries can continue to learn about what works best - together - over the next five years.

Mission and Vision Statement

The State Library of New Jersey exists to serve as the principal library of state government. In addition, it builds the capacity of all libraries in the state, and operates the New Jersey Talking Book & Braille Center. The State Library of New Jersey envisions a future in which all New Jerseyans have access to exceptional library services and the information resources they need to achieve their personal, educational, and professional goals.

Needs Assessment

New Jersey population and demographic data included herein was resourced from the 2020 United States Census, the 2010 United States Census (in limited cases where information was not available for 2020), the Municipal Revitalization Index, Migration Policy Institute, FCC Fixed Broadband Deployment 2020 Data Map, New Jersey Department of Labor, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) 2020 Disability Impacts Report, New Jersey Department of Education, Cornell University's Disability Statistics database, World Population Review, New Jersey Division of Elections, New Jersey Department of Corrections, and National Institute of Corrections. Sources of library operations and systems data used to assess needs and goals includes the NJSL 2020 Public Library Report, NJSL LSTA 2018-2022 Five Year Evaluation, focus groups with county public library directors, key informant interviews, and a staff survey distributed to all New Jersey libraries.

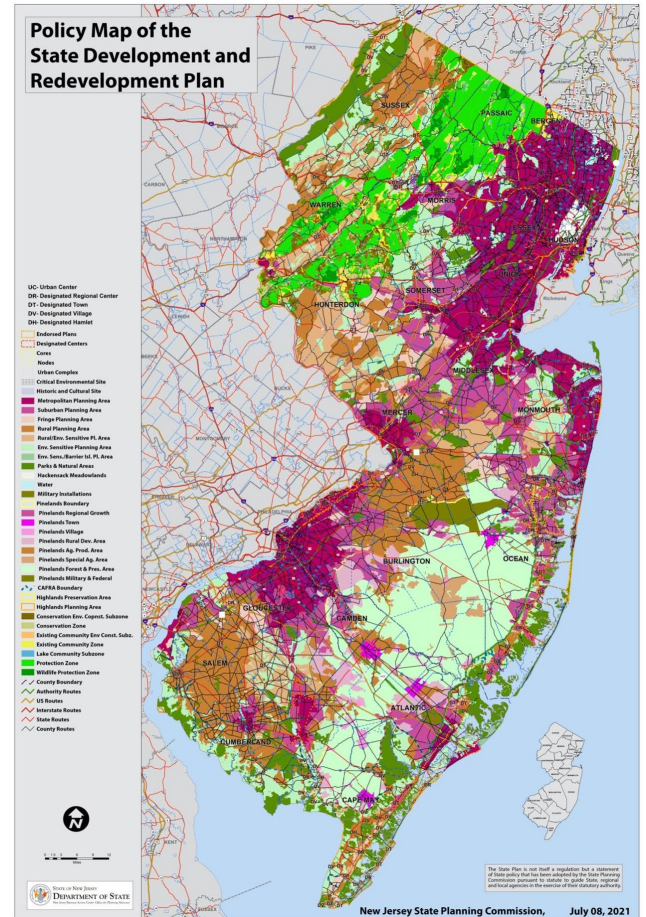
A PICTURE OF NEW JERSEY RESIDENTS

Geography & Demographics

Geographic diversity - The “Garden State” of New Jersey is home to 9,288,994 residents of 21 counties and 565 municipalities with approximately 94% of the population living in urban areas (2010 Decennial U.S. Census - most recent). Over the last ten years, New Jersey’s population has increased by 5.7% with the highest percentage of population growth occurring in Hudson, Ocean, and Essex counties. Between 2020 and 2021, south New Jersey’s rural populations have increased in Cape May (.6% to 1.5%), Salem and Burlington (.1% to .5%). The New Jersey State Planning Commission Policy Map to the right depicts development and redevelopment planning with metropolitan and suburban planning areas most densely mapped in counties adjacent to New York City and Philadelphia. Increases in both urban and rural counties will result in a need for increased library services and resource coordination, especially in rural counties with limited library funding.

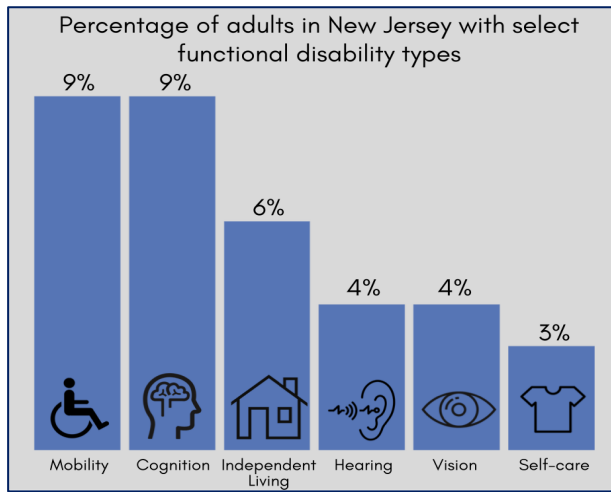
Racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity - New Jersey remains the nation’s most densely populated state and is racially diverse where 55% of the population are solely white, 21% are solely Hispanic or Latinx, 15% are solely Black or African American, 10% are solely Asian, 6% are solely American Indian or Alaska Native, .1% are solely Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and 2.3% of the population is two or more races. Almost a quarter of New Jersey’s population is foreign born (22.7%). In 2019, 43% of foreign-born New Jersey residents spoke English less than “very well” with 32% of the total household population (N=8,370,265) speaking a language other than English at home. Of other languages spoken at home with English spoken less than “very well”, Korean was spoken the most (55%) followed by Portuguese (46%) and Spanish (43%) (2019 Migration Policy Institute).

Age distribution and diverse abilities - The median age of New Jersey residents is 40 years old. New Jersey’s over 65-year-old population is in line with the national trend of 16%, and 22% of New Jersey’s residents are under 18 years old which is the same as the national percentage. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) 2020 Disability Impacts report for New Jersey, 1 in 5 adults (1,415,625 total adults) in New Jersey have a disability with mobility (9%) and cognitive disabilities (9%) affecting the largest number of disabled New Jersey adults. The New Jersey Department of Education reports that as of October 2020, 18% of youth 3-21 years-old who are enrolled in public and private schools have a disability. The highest percentages of student disabilities are classified as having a specific learning disability (5.3%), speech or language impairment (3.76%), other health impairment (3.74%), and autism (1.78%).



New Jersey State Planning Commission 2021
Policy Map

- Metropolitan Planning Area
- Suburban Planning Area
- Env. Sensitive Planning Area
- Rural Planning Area



CDC 2020 Disability Impacts Report Chart

Public and Non-Public		
Disability Category	Classified	Percent
Autism	23949	1.78
Deaf-Blindness	21	0.00
Preschool Disabled	13655	1.02
Emotional Disturbance	6760	0.50
Hearing Impairment	1395	0.10
Intellectual Disability	5423	0.40
Multiple Disabilities	13148	0.98
Other Health Impairment	50264	3.74
Orthopedic Impairment	301	0.02
Specific Learning Disability	71172	5.30
Speech or Language Impairment	50489	3.76
Traumatic Brain Injury	402	0.03
Visual Impairment	365	0.03
Total	237344	17.68

New Jersey Department of Education
2020 Students with Disabilities Enrollment

Income, Education & Employment

Income diversity - New Jersey median household income has risen from \$72,093 to \$85,245 since 2015 and remains approximately \$20,000 higher than the U.S. median household income of \$64,994. The industries earning the highest annual wage are management enterprises (\$174,842), finance (\$133,931), utilities (\$122,184), and information (\$117,433). Industries with the lowest annual wage are food service (\$23,839), retail (\$36,379), arts and entertainment (\$37,988). Counties earning the highest annual wage are Somerset (\$91,866), Morris (\$88,117), Hudson (\$79,639), and Mercer (\$75,664) with Cape May (\$35,378), Ocean (\$42,548), Cumberland (\$43,714), and Atlantic (\$43,772) earning the lowest annual wage (New Jersey Department of Labor 2013-2019 Average Annual Wage Report). New Jersey’s poverty rate of 9.7% is lower than the national average of 12.8%. Childhood poverty affects 13.3% of New Jersey youth aged 18 years and under, 14.4% of children under five years old live in poverty and 13% of children aged five to 17 years old live in poverty. Counties with the highest rates of childhood poverty are Salem (24%), Passaic (23%), Cumberland (22%), Essex (21%), and Hudson (20%).

Educational attainment - New Jersey residents by and large have higher educational attainment than the national average with 40.7% of New Jersey residents holding a bachelor’s degree or higher versus the national average where 32.9% of national residents have a bachelor’s degree or higher; 26.7% of residents have a high school diploma or equivalent. New Jersey has an adult literacy rate of 83% with 17% of the adult population lacking basic prose literacy (2022 World Population Review). New Jersey’s percentage of children enrolled in K-12 schooling is slightly lower than the national average with 65.7% of New Jersey children enrolled in school versus 66.3% of children enrolled nationally.

The employment landscape - New Jersey has an employment rate of 61.8%, which is slightly higher than the 59.6% national average. Most employed residents work for private companies (70.6%), 13.7% of residents are local, state, and federal employees, 7.1% of residents work for non-profits, and 8.7% of residents are self-employed. Approximately 7% of residents work from home and 11% use public transportation to get to work.

Voter registration - The New Jersey Division of Elections reports 6,432,702 registered voters as of May 2022 with the highest number of registered voters living in Bergen (667,035), Essex (564,380) and Middlesex County (561,863).

Incarceration and re-entry - New Jersey has 19 jails and nine state prisons. New Jersey has 12,492 people in the corrections system with 10,260 people incarcerated in the prison complex, 1,139 in the youth complex, and 1,093 in satellite units (halfway houses, county jails, or central medical unit). Ten New Jersey counties (Atlantic, Bergen, Camden, Essex, Hudson, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Passaic and Union) account for 76% of incarcerated people. Essex County is the highest rate of incarceration (14%) (New Jersey Department of Corrections 2022 Offender Characteristics Report). As of 2019, 15,194 persons are on parole and 127,804 people are on probation (National Institute of Corrections).

Technology

New Jersey has more households with internet subscriptions than the national average (88% compared to 85.5% nationally). Most New Jersey residents have access to technology with 93% of households owning a computer and 88% of households connected to broadband internet. In urban areas, 99% of New Jersey locations have three or more broadband providers, whereas 96% of rural locations have three or more broadband providers (2020 FCC Fixed Broadband Deployment Map). Though the majority of New Jersey has broadband providers available, there is a gap with 12% of households not purchasing or not able to purchase broadband internet, which means these households are unable to access digital library resources and information. Libraries in southern New Jersey, many of which do not have broadband access or strong connectivity, are unable to benefit widely from key LSTA funded digital services.

THE LIBRARY ECOSYSTEM IN NEW JERSEY

Government landscape - The governmental landscape, and therefore New Jersey's library services landscape, is extremely complex. There are more than 550 municipalities in the state including boroughs, cities, towns, townships and villages. There are even more public-school districts operating and more than 80 institutions of higher learning ranging from major public research universities to small Talmudic institutions and theological seminaries.

Libraries by the numbers - The Garden State is home to nearly 300 separate public library entities (294) that operate more than 400 (438) public library facilities. The public library system is made up of 233 municipal libraries, 42 association libraries that operate in a non-profit status, 14 county libraries, and five joint libraries. Approximately 2,000 school library/media centers serve the students in the state's 600+ public school districts. Private school, academic and special libraries add several hundred more to the mix.

Financial support and disparities - Collectively, local support for public library services in New Jersey is traditionally strong. National statistics from the IMLS Public Libraries Survey (PLS) for 2019 show that the state's libraries enjoyed local per capita support of \$55.66 (operating revenue), high enough to qualify for the 9th position among the states (exclusive of the District of Columbia). That said, the disparities across systems and regions are stark. The Ocean County Library is the highest funded library in New Jersey with an annual budget of roughly \$39 million, presumably due to a high tax base from seasonal shore communities. Somerset County, the second highest, is funded at less than half the level of Ocean (\$18 million). Expenditures of public libraries at the bottom ten positions in terms of local support range from \$9 up to \$33 per capita (with one outlier at the very bottom at less than \$2). Note that federal support per capita is \$0.11. This underscores the point that federal funding is intended to work at scale but does not dramatically impact the per capita funding of any given library.

The third of a mill equation - Public library funding in New Jersey is driven by the real property tax base of a given county, municipality, or locale. Per state library legislation, a municipal or joint municipal library is entitled to receive a third of a mill from their town every year, which is calculated by multiplying .0003333333 by the equalized valuation of all the real property in a town. For county libraries, a fifteenth of a mill is the legislated minimum; however, all counties

exceed this rate. (Monmouth County is the lowest, assessing at approximately a fifth of a mill.) In practical terms, the third of a mill requirement creates ripple effects and consequences across the library ecosystem. If a municipality opts to operate standalone library service, rather than participate in a county system, they take their tax base with them. As a result, municipal libraries within a county often pool resources and wealth, reducing the tax base to fund the county system as a whole.

Consortiums - Consortiums are a significant contributor to service delivery in New Jersey. Currently, six consortiums operate throughout the state. In the most robust example, the consortium provides a suite of services to member libraries that includes an inter-consortium delivery system, continuing education, professional development, advocacy, eResources, and a shared catalog. In the newest consortium, the only shared service is a catalog. Roughly half of the public libraries in New Jersey are supported or served by a consortium, with varying levels of support.

Partners - There is a strong triangle of partnership between NJSL, the New Jersey Library Association, and LibraryLinkNJ, a non-profit organization that receives funding from the state library to facilitate interlibrary loan and delivery across the state. NJSL's government partners include the Governor's Office, the New Jersey Office of Innovation, the Department of Human Services, the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, and the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Thomas Edison State University is the umbrella that houses the state library, with additional opportunities for partnership. NJSL also works with a number of vendors and programmatic partners for the delivery of LSTA programs and has a working list of potential partners ripe for future collaboration(s). Specific to LSTA, NJSL facilitates an LSTA Advisory Council made up of 10 library representatives and directors from across the state. The group meets regularly to provide guidance on strategy, projects, activities, and ongoing implementation.

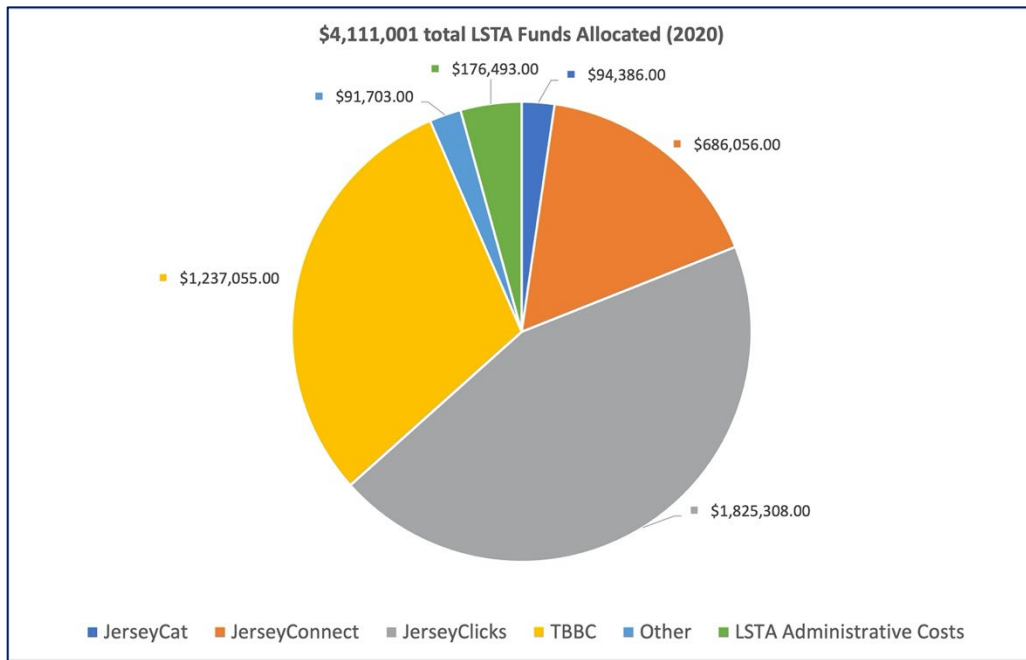
HOW LSTA DOLLARS SUPPORT NEW JERSEY LIBRARIES AND RESIDENTS TODAY

In 2020, NJSL spent \$4,111,011 to deliver LSTA funded projects to New Jersey libraries and patrons. The three projects receiving the largest amount of LSTA funding are:

JerseyClicks providing statewide library users access to 23 databases spanning an array of content including genealogy, newspapers, academic, and language learning resources that allow library users to meet their personal, educational, and occupational goals. JerseyClicks served as a vital source of information access during the pandemic with 42,843,057 user sessions in 2021 alone.

The Talking Book Braille Center (TBBC) providing direct statewide library services to New Jersey's print disabled population of 3,357 registered users by circulating 354,022 BARD (Braille and Audio Reading Download) audiobooks and magazines. TBBC administers LEAP (Library Equal Access Program) which provides assistive technology training for visually impaired persons over 55 years-old through eight LEAP Technology Learning Centers housed in local libraries. NJSL is piloting a Braille Reader project in partnership with the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled providing 100 handheld braille readers that download BARD database audiobooks and magazines.

JerseyConnect Statewide Technology Program providing technology services to New Jersey public libraries including low-cost internet access, web hosting and infrastructure, and technology services with 23 libraries utilizing all JerseyConnect services and 363 libraries (80%) using at least one JerseyConnect service.



The remaining \$362,582 of LSTA funding was used for “Other” projects (\$91,703), administration (\$176,493), and staffing for the JerseyCat interlibrary loan project (\$94,386) with project delivery services primarily funded through state match funds. New Jersey Statewide Statistics, LYRASIS membership and digitization services are categorized as “Other” projects in the *NJSL 2020 LSTA Project Funds Allocation* graphic.

The NJSL 2018-2022 LSTA Five-Year Plan evaluation provides key findings for LSTA goal performance and informs proposed project outcomes for the next five-year LSTA plan period. The evaluation was conducted by Linda Hofschire, principal of LJH Consulting, LLC and includes data for fiscal years 2018-2020, the period where data was available. To meet the needs of staff and patrons, NJSL carried out 89 activities that satisfied three IMLS focal areas: Institutional Capacity (47% of activities), Information Access (37% of activities), and Lifelong Learning (16% of activities). Over half (53%) of all activities had library workforce as the target audience. During the 2018-2020 evaluation period, NJSL used 96% of the total LSTA funds (\$12,392,824) to achieve Goal 1: Information Access (60% of LSTA budget), Goal 2: Institutional Capacity (2% of LSTA budget) and Goal 3: Lifelong Learning (34% of LSTA budget). The remaining 4% of LSTA funding was allocated to administration.

According to the evaluation, NJSL was successful in achieving Goal 1: Information Access through the delivery of seven projects that provided convenient access to information resources and are relied upon by libraries to extend information resources to library patrons. NJSL also achieved Goal 2: Institutional Capacity, primarily through the JerseyConnect program, which supported 80% of New Jersey libraries with one or more technology offerings that built capacity to provide additional service to their community. Though Goal 3 projects were associated with positive outcomes (Summer Reading, 90%) and provided critical services for the print disabled population (TBBC, 75%), these projects as a whole only partially achieved Goal 3 due to the programs’ highly targeted audience which restricted broad lifelong learning service offerings.

WHAT WE HEARD

The research team took special care to hear from a variety of library staff across multiple counties and regions of New Jersey.

From February through April 2022, Advancing with Purpose conducted a needs assessment of public library directors, library staff, and consortium members to understand the benefits and challenges experienced by libraries participating in NJSL LSTA projects. The team spoke directly with customers of the Talking Book and Braille Center, which is the second largest program in terms of funding. Research methods and participation are summarized as follows:



2022 Needs Assessment Participant Distribution

Surveys - administered a 22-question survey to staff members of 21 county libraries and received 193 total responses. Survey responses were collected from March 14th through March 31, 2022 and took an average of 14 minutes to complete.

Focus Groups - held four focus groups with County Directors (9 participants), Small Library Directors (4), Consortium Directors (5), and Talking Book Braille customers (5).

Individual and Small Group Interviews –conducted eight individual and small group interviews with NJSL staff (3) and library directors (5 interviews; 8 participants)

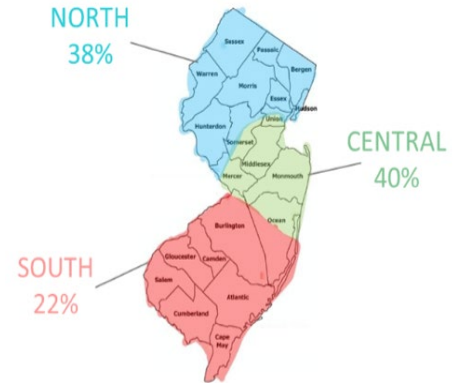
The primary goals for the needs assessment were to:

- Test awareness and knowledgeability of LSTA-funded programs among library staff at the local level.
- Assess the value of LSTA-funded programs among library staff at the local level and test assumptions of what is important to library directors when it comes to how to best supplement their programs with federal dollars.
- Identify gaps in program offerings and areas of need to inform future changes in the distribution of LSTA funds to New Jersey libraries.

Survey Respondents

There was a strong distribution of survey responses across the state with North and Central New Jersey receiving near equal distribution (38%, 40%) where South New Jersey had a lower response rate of 22%. The majority of survey respondents work for a public library (96%) and responses were equally distributed between management (50%) and library staff (50%).

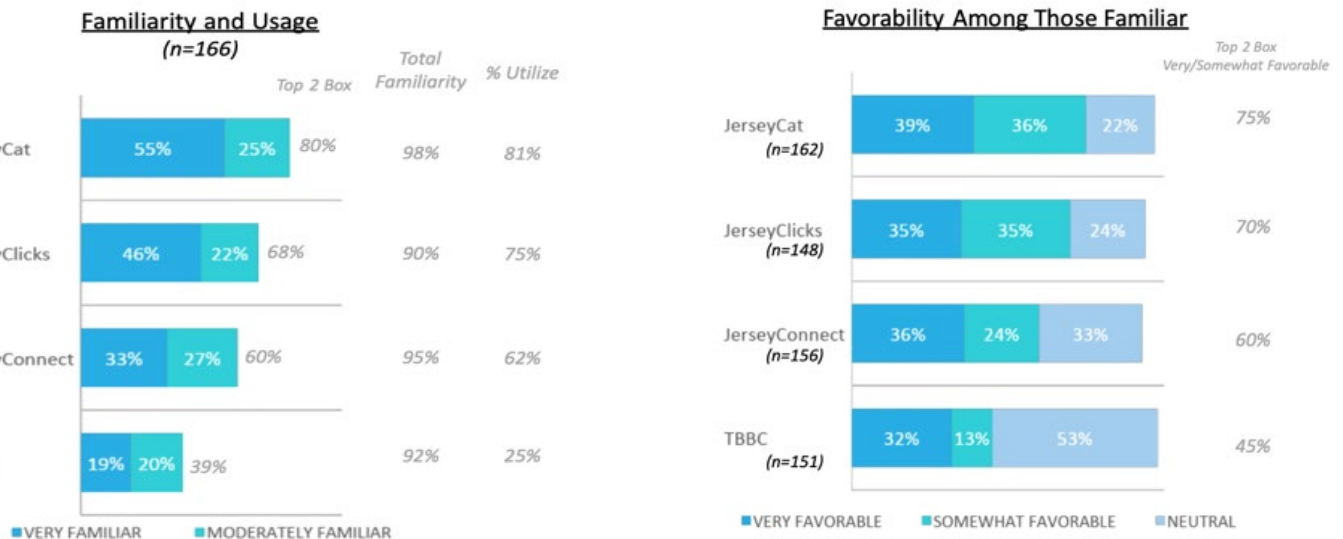
Of public library respondents, the majority of responses were received from libraries serving a population under 100,000 residents (86%) with 14% of respondents serving a population over 100,000 residents.



2022 Survey Respondents

LSTA Program Familiarity & Favorability

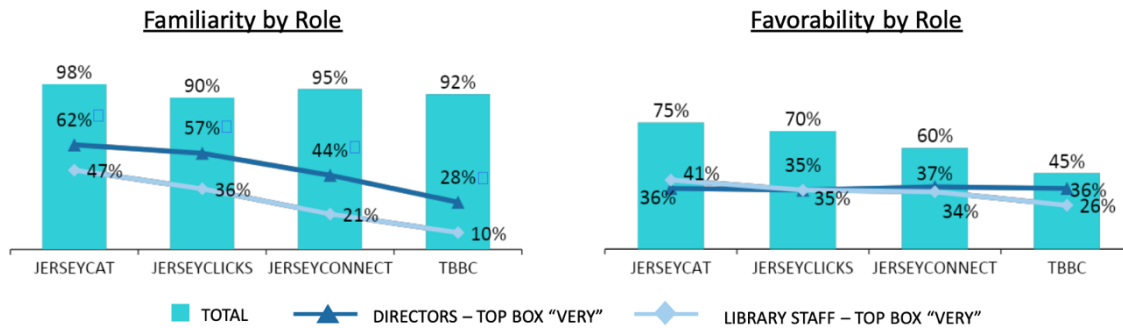
NJSL library staff have high overall familiarity with LSTA funded projects (94%). According to top box survey ratings of *very familiar* to *moderately familiar*, JerseyCat was the service most familiar to and well utilized by library staff (80% and 81% respectively), followed by JerseyClicks (68% and 75% respectively) and JerseyConnect (60% and 62% respectively). TBBC was the least familiar service and least utilized by library staff (39% and 25% respectively). Note that increased staff familiarity with TBBC would likely result in downstream use by customers; however, staff are not the primary audience or end users for this service.



2022 Survey Respondent LSTA Project Familiarity, Usage, & Favorability Ratings Chart

JerseyCat and JerseyClicks are viewed as the most favorable of LSTA-funded projects (75%, 70%), followed by JerseyConnect (60%). TBBC stands apart with library staff having no strong opinion regarding the benefit of this service (45%), presumably due to staff being less familiar with the program. TBBC is a program directed primarily at end users with a specific profile of needs. To gain additional qualitative data, the research team held a focus group with TBBC

customers. Participants described the life-changing implications of TBBC programs, along with a desire for advocacy and awareness to reach more intended beneficiaries. They highlighted how new technology innovations are game changers for the community, along with the value of having timely access to new releases in digital format. The group emphasized that their constituency is not a monolith, including newly blind seniors and children receiving service through schools. In their own words, participants said: “TBBC is about independence and knowledge - learning is knowledge, and knowledge can be turned into power, and power can be turned into confidence.”



2022 Survey Respondent LSTA Project Familiarity & Favorability by Role Ratings Chart

When looking at familiarity by library role, library directors were significantly more familiar (48%) with all LSTA projects than staff (29%). However, among staff that are aware of LSTA project, directors and staff share similar favorable opinions about the projects (36%, 34%). The gap in familiarity of LSTA projects among staff demonstrates an opportunity to increase staff awareness and training on what these projects offer and how best to utilize their services.

LSTA Program Importance & Performance

JerseyCat, JerseyClicks and TBBC all deliver on important areas of information access and meeting customer’s educational needs. Opportunities to increase service use and awareness among library staff rests with increasing ease of use and navigation (86%) coupled with increased staff training (68%) and technical support (67%). Incorporating customer feedback into project development across all projects was identified as an area of important improvement to 67% of survey respondents. Below is a breakdown of performance by key project.

Areas of Satisfaction

- JerseyCat: accessibility to different information sources.
- JerseyClicks: information access and meeting customers’ educational, professional, and recreational needs.
- JerseyConnect: adds unique value in supporting library operations and providing a sophisticated technology service.
- TBBC: meets customers’ recreational and educational needs.

“TBBC is a wonderful service, it changes lives, but only a small portion of our population utilizes it.”

“This is an essential service but there is a branding issue. Staff are not totally familiar, it needs better promotion.”

“I'd like to have training around how to use JerseyCat. I'd like to have webinar videos that staff can watch or meetings to update us on stuff. This may exist already but I can't find it.”

Areas for Improvement

- JerseyCat: ease of use (56%), modernizing technology (42%), and providing adequate training for staff (44%).
- JerseyClicks: ease of use (53%), improvements in information and content (49%), and increased understanding of services available and how they work (47%).
- JerseyConnect: more education and transparency into how services operate and function (82%).
 - Improvement to services related to internet speed and access to bridge digital divide (35%).
 - Upgrades to modernize technology and improve user interface experience (33%).
- TBBC: better understanding of service offering and how it works (86%).
 - Increased customer feedback (57%).
 - Clarity on who to refer to TBBC services and how to make the referrals (57%).

"I would say JerseyConnect is very important to us. It saved huge when small libraries are not able to host their own server and to have in-house IT service team."

"(JerseyClicks) paid databases such as Consumer Report, Brainfuse, Ebsco, are great resources for our patrons. It would be a financial burden if a small library like ours are to pay out of pocket. We won't be able to afford (it)."

Future Needs and Value-Add Services

- Library staff most valued Zoom video conferencing (87%) and Brainfuse (74%) delivered through CARES Act funding.
- Library staff have future need for eBooks (82%).
- Continuing support for these services would be highly valuable to libraries.

"Things like Zoom platform and Brainfuse are hard to replace when you become dependent on these services."

Summary of Key Themes

NJSL Library Leadership reviewed the findings from the needs assessment alongside the recommendations from the 2018-2022 LSTA evaluation. The group surfaced areas of continuity, such as prioritization of statewide access to information resources, repeated requests for statewide marketing strategies, and ways that evaluation and feedback loops could better inform programs and plans. The group distilled five key themes to inform the design process going forward.

Summary of Key Themes



The qualitative and quantitative research from the needs assessment resulted in five key themes

HOW LSTA DOLLARS MIGHT BEST SUPPORT NEW JERSEY LIBRARIES IN THE FUTURE

To identify how LSTA dollars might best be allocated to address key themes identified in the needs assessment, the NJSL team participated in a series of design sessions to explore solutions based on eight guiding questions. The questions were intentionally formatted to unlock organizational curiosity about opportunities, before shifting to problem-solving and solutions.

1. How might we tailor and/or scale LSTA programs for differently resourced libraries?
2. How might we provide attractive opportunities to test, pilot, and innovate at the local level?
3. How might we increase awareness and understanding of LSTA funded services and resources for library staff?
4. How might we provide tools and resources to our libraries, partners & collaborators to help them better assess and evaluate their successes and progress?
5. How might we further EDI goals into programs for libraries to help serve a constantly changing and underserved population?
6. How might we encourage innovation within our key LSTA programs?
7. How might we improve the customer journey and end-to-end experience for each program?
8. How might we empower library staff to be knowledgeable ambassadors of (LSTA) programs and services?

After a brainstorm and sense-making phase, staff refined results to create the overarching goals, projects, and activities as presented in the next section.

Goals & Projects

Guiding Principles of the NJSL 2023-2027 Plan

The New Jersey State Library uses Federal Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funds to help support library service across the state. Our goal is to provide a great return-on-investment for New Jersey libraries:

- We focus on high priority areas that would be inefficient or cost prohibitive for individual libraries to undertake alone.
- We invest in programs that help less well-resourced libraries and residents.
- We encourage innovation and experimentation in New Jersey libraries.

GOAL #1 - FACILITATE GREAT END-TO-END EXPERIENCES WITH LSTA PROGRAMS

Projects	Electronic Resources	TBBC	JerseyCat
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research & engagement for 2025 renewal • Data sharing & local evaluation tools • User testing and customer experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usability testing when NLS moves to cloud • Outreach and expansion through key partners • Research and statewide staff engagement > offer new tools 	<p><i>JerseyCat will be supported with state funds. Options and funding models are being explored in Year 1.</i></p>
STAFF TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT			

Facilitate great end-to-end experiences with LSTA programs - Goal #1 emphasizes the importance of end-to-end experiences that center around the customer. At every point in the customer’s journey through a product or service, there is an opportunity to provide a consistently excellent experience. As a field, libraries are increasingly adopting the user experience (UX) techniques that began with product testing in IT. The discipline has expanded to include a full range of customer experiences (CX) methodologies. NJSL’s top two projects in terms of funding - Electronic Resources and TBBC

- both serve customers across a range of touch points and channels. Through the needs assessment, library staff affirmed the value and importance of both programs. At the same time, they surfaced a range of opportunities to enhance the overall service experience of each project. By making the customer's journey the overarching goal, NJSL will prioritize activities that lead to concerted improvements over time.

Activities and opportunities for electronic resources - Currently, the majority of electronic resources are on a three-year renewal cycle, which will come up for review again in 2025. For the most recent renewal, staff followed a working group approach to develop checklists for evaluation and review. With a three-year lead time until the next renewal, they will research new product approaches, and consider user experience across products, and marketing opportunities to bundle and promote products for different subsets of libraries.

Throughout the needs assessment, library staff consistently requested better feedback loops for data sharing about local use of electronic resources. As a companion tool, the state library would like to develop local assessment tools, which will assist libraries with parsing and making meaning of data sets. A range of evaluation tools are envisioned, which could include audience mapping for targeted promotion to key segments, staff assessments with a menu for training options, and a template for staff to conduct a hands-on user test with a customer on a specific product.

In addition to user testing templates at the local level, which could funnel up through a feedback mechanism, NJSL will invest in formal user testing and customer experience mapping for key products, apps, and interfaces. In the needs assessment, library staff emphasized that a multiplicity of apps and logons is challenging and simplification where possible is desirable. They shared that format for certain activities, such as reading a newspaper, is equally if not more important than access to content. For example, libraries might purchase a duplicate electronic copy of a popular item to obtain their customers preferred interface. As a result of user testing, NJSL will be positioned to prioritize products and packages that facilitate great experiences for the 2025 renewal and beyond.

Activities and opportunities for TBBC - The National Library Service (NLS) is in the process of moving to the cloud, which will enable a one-stop-shop for users to view their content across multiple devices (player, phone, iPad, etc.). TBBC will conduct user testing to better understand the customer journeys associated with this change and how to facilitate great end-to-end experiences. They will explore tactics to communicate the benefits of the NLS service enhancement to library staff and end users.

TBBC has a list of key partners who are ripe for partnership and expansion. As evidenced throughout the needs assessment, the TBBC user base encompasses a wide variety of personas and profiles, from young children and families who are navigating early literacy needs to newly blind seniors. TBBC will formalize key partner relationships and customize programmatic support for each audience. Spanish language outreach will be a designated area of focus.

Recent technological innovations are revolutionizing service options for TBBC customers. For example, TBBC participated in a recent electronic braille reader pilot, which put the equivalent of a van full of print braille volumes into a single handheld device. TBBC will design a staff-led research campaign to visit libraries and speak with librarians about their customer needs. TBBC staff have deep relationships with their current active yet limited set of end users. They will gather information to connect the dots about how to help frontline library staff market existing resources at their libraries. From there, TBBC is hopeful that pilots such as the electronic braille reader can be adopted at scale within the next five years, building on their strengthened network with local libraries.

Approach to the JerseyCat project - As a result of the needs assessment, NJSL is exploring whether the small amount of LSTA funding that supports the state interlibrary loan program (JerseyCat) could potentially be appropriated from a different source. JerseyCat is a standalone program with a large budget that requires its own strategic plan and initiatives.

Outcomes and use of funds - At the end of the five-year plan, NJSL will have enhanced the end-to-end experience across its top two programs. Library staff and customers will benefit from a concerted approach over time to facilitate seamless customer journeys. Anticipated results include increased usage and adoption by new audiences including less well-resourced residents. Funds will be used for the operational costs of both projects and prioritized to support the improvement activities described above.



Goal #1 maps to the IMLS Information Access focal area.

GOAL #2 - PROVIDE KEY VALUE-ADD RESOURCES AND PROCESS SUPPORT

Projects	Statewide Marketing Strategies	JerseyConnect
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● KM (internal and external) ● Feedback loops & formal listening ● Onboarding tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● User research in the field ● Self-assessment tool + consulting ● Collaborative design / Data sharing & unified data sets
STAFF TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT		

Provide key value-add resources and process support - Throughout the needs assessment, library directors surfaced areas where statewide leadership, tools, and support would be most useful. Rather than reinvent the wheel for individual locations and consortiums, or disregard important topics due to insufficient local resources, they identified key places for a collective approach. The Goal #2 projects respond to two top needs in this regard: statewide marketing strategies specific to LSTA programs and technology support so all libraries can have their IT infrastructure needs met. Goal #2 is designed to create feedback loops between NJSL and New Jersey libraries for an iterative approach. The intent is to continually learn and affirm that NJSL is prioritizing the right resources and investing in the right supports, given the finite dollars available.

Activities and opportunities for statewide marketing strategies (specific to LSTA programs) - Through a collection of strategies, NJSL will help market the LSTA programs/projects described in the plan. In the area of knowledge management (KM), there are internal opportunities at NJSL to share data across LSTA programs more effectively. For example, programs can work from common distribution lists and shared notes based on field visits to libraries. Externally, libraries across the state would benefit from a unified KM portal and knowledge sharing tools. Feedback loops and feedback mechanisms can be studied and embedded in a variety of ways. Ideally, mechanisms will be interwoven into KM design as a whole and corresponding KM practices. Similarly, a standard toolkit to onboard new staff would inculcate key messages and resources from the first day on the job, a first step to creating a “New Jersey way.”

Activities and opportunities for JerseyConnect - JerseyConnect provides hands-on technology support and consultation to New Jersey libraries. The staff at JerseyConnect has eyes and ears at libraries throughout the state. With frequent site visits and regular consultations, they talk to directors and staff at a higher rate than any other program. In tandem with marketing strategies, they are an asset to capture feedback and bring back real-time observations. With collaboration and cross-pollination at NJSL, JerseyConnect staff can conduct ongoing user research that includes but is not limited to technology. JerseyConnect is also well positioned to create library self-assessment tools for their services, in a similar vein to local evaluation tools from JerseyClicks. These tools empower local libraries to do the work on their own behalf, with support and guidance from NJSL. Finally, as KM work moves forward, JerseyConnect staff will contribute to requirements gathering, collaborative design, and meeting technology needs associated with KM solutions.

At the end of the five-year plan, NJSL will have stronger feedback loops to provide key resources and support to 300+ New Jersey libraries. Through mutually reinforcing cycles, program awareness - for staff and customers alike - will improve. Similar to Goal #1, anticipated results include increased usage and adoption by new audiences including less well-resourced libraries and residents. Funds will be used for the operational costs of JerseyConnect and prioritized to support marketing, KM, and emerging needs over the lifecycle of the plan.



Goal #2 maps to the IMLS Build Institutional Capacity focal area.

GOAL #3 - CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO CUSTOMIZE & INNOVATE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Projects	Mini Grants	EDI Audit & Tools
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cohorts • Innovation challenge • Partner with statewide organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Menus • Spanish language focus
	STAFF TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT	

Provide opportunities to customize and innovate at the local level - Goal #3 responds to themes from the needs assessment that programs should evolve from a one-size-fits all structure to support tailored service and customization at the local level. Goals #1 and #2 incorporate more personalized support as well; however, Goal #3 is specifically focused on cultivating new opportunities.

Activities and opportunities for mini-grants - In the past few years, NJSL has offered small grant opportunities - largely with CARES and ARPA Act funds. They have piloted new services at select libraries, including: NJ Health @ Your

Library, a telemedicine program to address inequities exacerbated by Covid; NJSL + Partners Access Navigator program, which places a cohort of skilled trainers (navigators) in libraries to provide individualized assistance to persons seeking employment, job training, or digital competence; and NJSL + Partners Literacy Project to establish public libraries as local literacy hubs that support residents in achieving literacy – digital, financial, workforce, adult basic, English language – according to local needs. Based on feedback and learning, future mini-grants might create cohorts who embark on the process together, thus incorporating training, development, cross-pollination, and mentoring. The application process will be designed to reduce barriers to participation and make it approachable for less well-resourced libraries to take part. Similarly, NJSL would like to spur innovation in ways that are focused and cohesive. A statewide innovation challenge with seed funding is a potential option. The mini-grants and “small bets” funding models also lend themselves to partnership with other state agencies, such as the Office of Innovation, which amplifies reach, buy-in, and future scalability.

Activities and opportunities for EDI audits and tools - In the statewide survey, staff elevated EDI as the area where they aspire to be a leader and model for other states, with NJSL as their driver and champion. As a first step, NJSL would conduct an internal EDI audit to identify, implement, and model key actions and behaviors. From there, they would work collaboratively to provide auditing tools for local libraries, as well as training and support. NJSL may develop menus to help libraries market resources to specific audiences. Spanish-language resources and marketing are a potential area of focus. Over time, best practices and needs in this space will continue to emerge, such as a BIPOC emerging leaders cohort, to form the basis for future activities.

Outcomes and use of funds - At the end of the five-year plan, NJ libraries will have more tailored resources and support to meet individual needs and experiment at the local level. With knowledge sharing channels, successful experiments can adapt and scale to new locations. As a whole, New Jersey libraries will advance in their journey to be engines of equity and anti-racist role models. Funds will be used for mini-grants, seed funding, and EDI consultants and related support. In year one, these will be relatively small amounts given the magnitude of other programs. Over time, funds can be judiciously identified for emerging priorities and needs.



Goal #3 maps to the IMLS Lifelong Learning focal area.

TIMELINE

The timeline below charts project activities across the five-year strategic plan timeline.

Goal	Project	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Facilitate great end-to-end experiences with LSTA Programs	TBBC	Site visits and user research	NLS usability testing	New models for outreach	New models continued	New models evaluated
	Electronic Resources	Scope and plan for UX review	UX review	Assemble options for new RFP	Communication and iterative feedback	Evaluate usage in new model
	JerseyCat	Explore alternate funding	← TBD →			
Provide key value-add resources & process support	Statewide LSTA Marketing Strategies	Onboard new NJSL marketing position	Listening sessions and key graphics	Internal KM	External KM pilot	Evaluate pilot
	JerseyConnect	Cross-program design sessions	Library self-assessment tools	Support internal KM	Support external KM	Evaluation
Create opportunities to customize & innovate at the local level	Mini Grants	Iterate ideas w/ current grants	Launch new cohort	← Innovation challenge/cohort →		
	EDI Audit & Tools	Develop scope and requirements for internal NJSL audit	NJSL audit	Develop state tools	← Implement and iterate →	

Coordination Efforts

The following table contains a crosswalk mapping NJSL LSTA goals to IMLS Measuring Success focal areas, and maps LSTA project activities to corresponding LSTA intents.

New Jersey State Library LSTA Crosswalk

	GOAL 1: FACILITATE GREAT END-TO-END EXPERIENCES WITH LSTA PROGRAMS			GOAL 2: PROVIDE KEY VALUE-ADD RESOURCES AND PROCESS SUPPORT		GOAL 3: CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO CUSTOMIZE & INNOVATE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL	
Measuring Success Focal Area	INFORMATION ACCESS			BUILD INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY		LIFELONG LEARNING	
Objectives	To improve users' ability to obtain and/or use information resources			Improve library operations		Improve users' formal education	
	Improve users' ability to obtain and/or use information resources			Improve library's physical and technology infrastructure		Improve users' general knowledge and skills	
				Improve libraries workforce			
Projects	ELECTRONIC RESOURCES	TALKING BOOK AND BRAILLE CENTER	JERSEYCAT	STATEWIDE MARKETING STRATEGIES	JERSEYCONNECT	MINI GRANTS	EDI AUDIT & TOOLS
	Research & engagement for 2023 renewal	Usability testing when NLS moves to cloud	<i>JerseyCat will be phased out of LSTA funding starting in 2024</i>	KM (internal & external)	User research in the field	Cohorts	Menus
	Data sharing & local evaluation tools	Outreach & expansion through key partners		Feedback loops & formal listening	Self-assessment tool + consulting	Innovation Challenge	Second Language Focus
	User testing & customer experience	Research and statewide staff engagement > offer new tools		Onboarding tools	Collaborative design/Data sharing & unified data sets	Partner with Statewide Organizations	
Staff Training & Development				Staff Training & Development		Staff Training & Development	
LSTA Purposes met (summarized)							
1. Fed program coordination							
2. Continuous improvement	x	x		x	x	x	x
3. Access to resources	x	x		x	x	x	x
4. Resource sharing	x	x		x	x	x	x
5. Promote literacy	x	x					x
6. Meet community needs	x	x		x	x	x	x
7. Support community revitalization	x	x				x	x
8. Enhance library employee skills	x	x		x	x	x	x
9. Preserve knowledge	x	x		x			
10. US information infrastructure	x	x		x	x		
11. Collaboration at all levels	x	x		x	x	x	x
12. Model programs	x	x				x	x
Grants to States objectives (summarized)							
1. Expand Services	x	x		x	x	x	x
2. Improve coordination	x	x		x	x	x	x
3. Library professional development	x	x		x	x	x	x
4. Develop partnerships		x		x	x	x	x
5. Target diversity	x	x		x	x	x	x
6. Target underserved	x	x		x	x	x	x
7. Provide information access through collaboration at all levels	x	x		x	x	x	x

Evaluation Plan

The primary methodology for planning and evaluation will be tied to the annual reporting cycle. In Q4 each fiscal year, NJSL will initiate evaluation activities in preparation for the State Program Report and craft the implementation strategy for the year ahead. Summary reports from outcomes-based assessment questions will be factors into review, as well as indicators by goal. With feedback from the LSTA Advisory Council, the LSTA Coordinator will convene cross-program evaluation and design sessions, and present findings and recommendations to the state librarian. The objectives by goal are summarized in the crosswalk on page 21.

Stakeholder Involvement

The LSTA Advisory Council was established to ensure broad, representative stakeholder involvement and stewardship of the Plan. NJSL specifically designated a project in the 2023-2027 plan for statewide marketing strategies, to include feedback loops and formal listening opportunities from channels across New Jersey.

Communication and Public Availability

The NJSL 2023 – 2027 LSTA Plan will be shared with NJSL staff and specific portions of the Plan will be reviewed in detail with individuals whose responsibilities relate to carrying out the projects and activities described in the document.

The Plan will also be presented to NJSL’s formal affiliate, Thomas Edison State University, the LSTA Advisory Council, and other appropriate agencies within state government. NJSL will alert New Jersey public libraries of the plan’s availability and the Plan will be publicly available on the agency website as well as on the IMLS website.

LSTA Advisory Council members will receive periodic updates on LSTA-funded activities at their regularly scheduled meetings and advise on communication strategies relative to the plan.

Monitoring

NJSL will monitor the implementation of its Library Services and Technology Act Five-Year LSTA Plan for 2023-2027 using procedures outlined in 2 CFR 200.328-332.

Assurances

Required certifications and assurances listed below are included as a separate attachment in the email submission of this plan

- Program Assurances for 2023 Grant Award (includes compliance with Internet Safety; Trafficking in Persons; Nondiscrimination; Debarment and Suspension; Drug-Free Workplace; Federal Debt Status; and Lobbying requirements)
- Assurances of Non-Construction Programs
- State Legal Officer's Certification of Authorized Certifying Official
- Internet Safety Certification for Applicant Public Libraries, Public Elementary and Secondary School Libraries, and Consortia with Public and/or Public School Libraries