



Plan of Service 2026-2031 Needs Assessment Summary Results

Background

South Central Regional Library Council (SCRLC) is in the process of designing its 2026-2031 Plan of Service (PoS). In order to ensure that the Plan is relevant to the needs of the membership, SCRLC assessed needs in several ways, including field visits, a membership survey, and regional conversations that were held over Zoom.

A previous report, which is included in the Plan of Service documentation, had summarized the 2023-2024 field visits. These field visits offered an opportunity for SCRLC to learn directly about the issues affecting members, and to gather ideas on how SCRLC could better meet their needs.

The 2025 membership survey and regional conversations continued assessing member needs using updated questions. A copy of both instruments—the survey and regional conversations questions—is included in the Plan of Service documentation.

Survey Overview

SCRLC received responses from 79 direct member organizations plus public and school libraries who are members of the region's library systems. The majority of responses—34—came from academic libraries (43%); 10 (12.7%) from public libraries; 8 (10.1%) from public library systems; and 13 (16.4%) from SCHOAM (Special Collections, Historical Organizations, Archives, and Museums) members. Additionally, there were 4 school library (5.1%) responses, 5 (6.3%) from school library systems, and one (1.3%) from a hospital library. Four survey participants (5.1%) did not identify their library type.

Regional Conversations Overview

SCRLC hosted eight regional conversations altogether—one general session and the others tailored to specific types of members (academics, public, systems, SCHOAM). There were a total of 27 participants. Twelve (44.4%) participants were from academic

libraries; 4 (14.8%) from public libraries and 7 (26.0%) from public library systems, 3 (11.1%) from SCHOAM organizations, and one (3.7%) from a school library system.

Summary Findings

The following is a summary of the results from both 2025 membership need assessments to consider in designing the 2026-2031 Plan of Service. [Complete survey results are available here.](#) The anonymized regional conversations will be posted with the other Plan of Service documents.

Both the survey and the regional conversations suggest that SCRLC members of all types are navigating and struggling with significant changes and challenges to their service environments. The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 brought with it staffing shortages, new or revised procedures, shifting responsibilities, and changes in community needs and expectations that continue to affect operations. Public-facing libraries—academic, public, and school—discussed during regional conversations, feelings of being overwhelmed in their current roles.

Academic Libraries. Academic libraries were the largest contributors to both the survey and regional conversations. There were five key areas of need identified:

- **Accessibility.** Academic libraries expressed a desire to make their libraries more accessible, both in physical and virtual spaces. Needs include ADA Title II compliant websites, plus accessible study rooms and bathrooms. They want to improve assistive technology such as hearing, to be fully ADA compliant.
- **Professional Development.** They also presented needs for professional development in such areas as accessibility, emerging technologies, sustainability, and leadership/management.
- **Mentorship.** The librarians in academia also expressed interest in mentorship for early-career librarians.
- **Communications.** One frustration mentioned by academic librarians is a lack of communication from administration. Some participants said that those in charge are making decisions without speaking to staff, which has led to miscommunication, overwork, and missed opportunities.
- **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Justice & Accessibility (DEIJA) Concerns.** Another topic of note was a conversation about DEIJA. Many described their DEI policies as present but static, especially in the current political environment.

Public Libraries. Public library and library system staff were also major participants in the needs assessments, also identifying five areas of need:

- **Training and support for serving vulnerable populations.** Many participants working in public libraries have begun tackling social issues like homelessness, addiction and mental health in addition to their original library services. They expressed feeling alone and not knowing how to handle these things. Members have also struggled with caring for their communities while funding is being cut on a continual basis. They know their patrons have needs but how are they to meet them without money to do so? Addiction, mental illness, poverty and oppression are all systemic issues. However, libraries are some of the last free institutions and that is to where the people in need are flocking. Librarians may not be able to solve these issues, but they can learn to handle these situations in a way that helps both patrons and themselves.
- **Other Professional Development Needs** included advocacy, AI, and accessibility training.
- **Expanded Grants.** Many expressed in the inability to pursue initiatives due to lack of funding.
- **Sustainability.** Participants requested support for developing recycling programs and broader sustainability practices.
- **More Outreach to Public Libraries.** Several noted they were unaware of all that SCRLC offers and would like enhanced communication.

SCHOAM and Special Library Members. Four areas were identified:

- SCHOAM organizations and our special libraries, including hospitals, generally have a small staff and need more consulting services than perhaps other types of members.
- **Processing.** Especially those who attended a regional conversation indicated a need for help with processing materials.
- **Digitization.** They also need continuing support for their digitization efforts.
- **Technology Assistance.** As a smaller library they also require some tech assistance which they may receive from “Tech-Talks” but perhaps a new topic may be added.

Commonalities Across Member Type

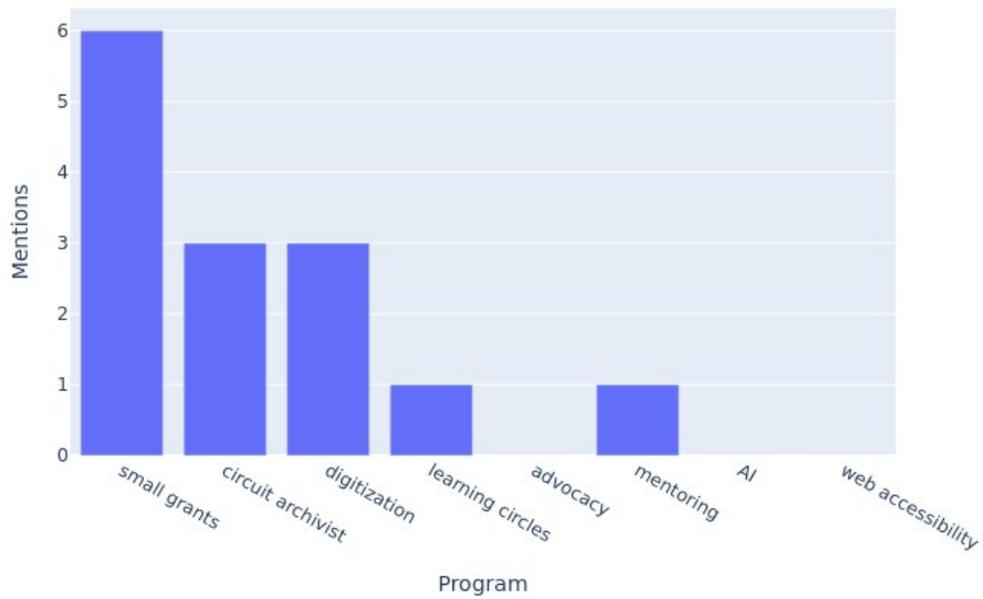
- **Learning Opportunity Format.** By analyzing the results of the survey especially, it appears that training and webinars have been effective for many SCRLC members. Several members, however, commented that lack of time keeps them

from taking advantage of these learning opportunities. Time and lack of funding prevent many from attending programs, conferences, etc. that cost money.

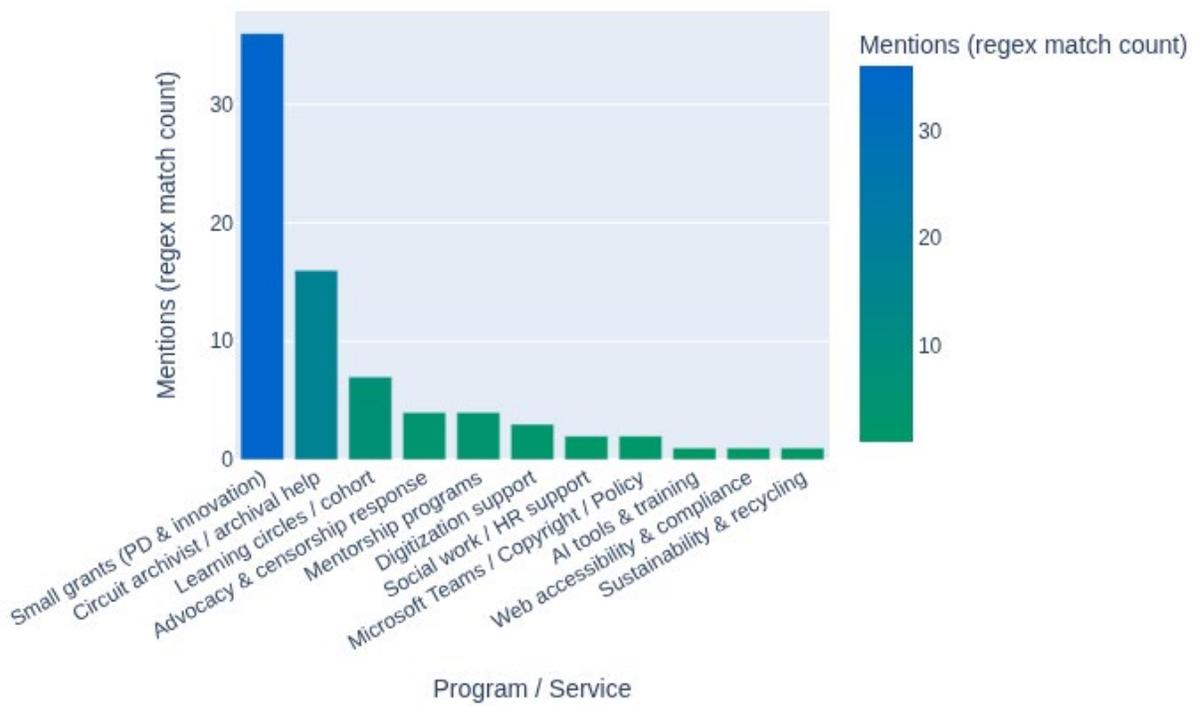
- **Communication and Access to Existing Services.** It appears as though the membership appreciates the work that SCRLC is doing but they need help accessing the information regarding those programs and services.
- **Accessibility and Sustainability** were priority areas for both academic and public libraries. They need help to accomplish this.
- **Grant Opportunities.** SCRLC members expressed a desire for more grant opportunities to get programs off the ground (see Survey Question 6).
- There were commonalities of priorities expressed in Survey Question 32, which asked participants to name their top 5 organizational priorities:
 - ❖ **Academic** – Access, intellectual freedom, education & lifelong learning.
 - ❖ **Public** – Access, Inclusion & sustainability.
 - ❖ **School** – Education & lifelong learning, digital equity & intellectual freedom.
 - ❖ **Historical/Museum** – Preservation, sustainability & access.



Requested New Programs (Overall)



Requested New Programs (Q6) – Overall (Updated from survey)



Recommendations

The results of the regional conversations and membership survey have shown that SCRLC is doing many things well. The membership is not asking the council to completely change--they just would like assistance taking advantage of what the Council already offers. Specific recommendations:

- Look for additional ways besides the email listserv and newsletter to reach members. Improve communication and outreach about existing services.
- In addition to digitization and HLSP grants, offer scholarships or grants for profession development, accessibility changes, and innovation.
- Consider developing a mentorship program for all types of libraries.
- Offer targeted training on advocacy, AI, and accessibility. Public libraries would also like assistance in developing sustainability initiatives and recycling programs.
- Host some workshops at individual member libraries similar to focus groups or travelling exhibits. If SCRLC is able to bring the information to the libraries, maybe more will benefit from the information offered.
- Offer workshops that pertain to working with vulnerable populations.

Conclusion

Results from the 2025 membership survey and regional conversations affirm that SCRLC's current direction is both strong and well regarded. Continued support is needed to help members address their priorities, and the recommendations outlined above will enhance SCRLC's capacity to meet member needs over the next five years.

As part of the planning process, SCRLC re-articulated its vision, mission, and values. An ongoing question is how SCRLC can help member libraries incorporate and reflect these values in their own organizations.

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