

Bryan County Genealogy Library & Archives



Strategic Plan 2023-2028

Approved by the Board – April 2, 2024

The Bryan County Genealogy Library and Archives was originally founded in 1982 as the Bryan County Heritage Association. In 2004 the name changed to the Bryan County Genealogy Library and Archives, Inc.

We are a registered 501(c)3 dedicated to the preservation, publication, and acquisition of historical and genealogical materials. The Library sponsors free seminars/workshops on various topics throughout the year to educate the beginner and the seasoned researcher.

The membership consists of individuals, other genealogical societies, and libraries. The organization is supported through memberships, donations, and purchase of publications compiled by dedicated volunteers.

The Library's purpose and objectives are defined as:

- To actively promote an interest in genealogical research through the development and preservation of genealogical records and historical data.
- To interest people of all ages in the local heritage.
- Educate and assist interested parties and/or groups in genealogical and historical research.
- Publish writings, papers, books, pamphlets, periodicals, and other publications for historical education.
- To actively promote and support growth of a genealogical library for the purpose of genealogical research.

The library is supported by a dedicated group of core volunteers who keep the library open and assist patrons with research Monday – Friday.

The library has frequently held local classes and other programs over the years. Unfortunately, due to Covid restrictions, these programs were shut down for an extended period.

Recognizing the need to recruit additional volunteers, encourage more community participation in the library, resume and revitalize programs, and ensure succession planning, the Board held a strategic planning session in July 2023.

This strategic plan was approved by the Board on XXX.

Our strengths include:

- Successful publication of a quarterly newsletter.
- Improvements to the Library's website.
- Continued publication of books relating to local history and genealogy.

The library currently owns a historic building in downtown Calera which houses our operations and collections. The building has deferred maintenance needs which are beyond the scope of our current finances. Our collections need to be properly cataloged and digitized to improve accessibility. Our programs need to be revitalized ensuring our ability to resume outreach to the community, schools, online history sites, and potential new members and volunteers.

In this Strategic Plan we will:

- Outline our current status (Description and Strengths)
- Identify Challenges
- Set Goals
- Propose Action Plans to accomplish the Goals in the following areas:

1. Buildings
 - a. The library at 203 N. McKinley Street, Calera, OK
2. Collections
3. Community Outreach
4. Organizational Structure
5. Finances

1. Buildings

Description and Strengths

The library currently owns a building at 203 N. McKinley Street in Calera, Oklahoma. This building houses most of the library collection and serves as the base of operations for the library.

The building was built in the 1920's, and has served a variety of uses, mostly retail, over the years.

The building is paid for in full.

Challenges:

The building has a number of challenges due to its age and lack of library funding to address the concerns.

Maintenance Concerns:

1. The foundation and floor in the back half of the building is cracked and has a gap across the width of the kitchen space that gaps by over an inch in places. It may be cracking due to the weight of the collections.
2. The parking lot is concrete which is cracked and uneven creating a tripping hazard for visitors.
3. The lighting is fluorescent tubes which are no longer available.
4. The sewer lateral for the library is shared by adjoining property owners which has caused past sewer problems due to problems on an adjoining property.

Other Concerns:

1. The building is not ADA compliant making it difficult for volunteers and patrons who are mobility impaired to access the building. There is one door in the back which can be opened on request to allow wheelchair or walker access but once inside, there is inadequate space to move a walker or wheelchair.
2. The building lacks an electrical setup which would allow patrons to bring laptops or tablets and plug in to an outlet while conducting research.
3. The building is not large enough to house our entire collection and some items are stored offsite in a location we do not have full control over, placing those collection items at risk. We also lack the space to expand our collections.

Goals

During the July 2023 Planning Session all members present agreed that a new building was needed.

Action Items

1. Begin a search for a new building that will better serve the needs of the library.
2. Pursue various fundraising efforts to raise money to address the library's building concerns.

Point Person

To be determined by the Board.

2. Collections

Description and Strengths

The library has an extensive collection of over 10,000 volumes relating to history and genealogy. While the primary focus of the collection is the history and genealogy of Bryan County, Oklahoma, the collection also boasts pre-statehood historical and genealogical records of Choctaw & Chickasaw Nations, along with some records of the Muscogee (Creek) and Cherokee Nations. In addition, the library has made exchanges with other historical societies over the years and our collections also include historical and genealogical information from all 50 states.

Some records are unique to the library. These include:

- Bryan County Probate Records from statehood to 1928.
- Bryan County Tax Records from 1908-1990.
- Original Logs of Dr. Wells, physician in Calera, OK from 1924-1942.
- Original marriage licenses from Bryan County from pre-statehood to early 1930's.
- Holmes Funeral Home Records from 1916-1993.
- Bryan County School Records from 1918-1967.
- An extensive collection of family histories donated by members.
- Over 100 books that our volunteers have compiled and published.
- Bryan County Land Survey Records 1912-1926

Challenges

Many of these records have not been imaged or digitized. As such, the records are vulnerable and could be permanently lost if a disaster occurred. Also, some of the records are housed off-site at City Hall and may already have been lost since the library does not have sole access to those records.

Goals

The current goal is to begin the process of imaging the records in our collection.

Action Items

1. Begin scanning some of our records in-house as TIFF images and establish a partnership with the Oklahoma Historical Society to get these items online.
2. Pursue grants and other funding resources to have some items professionally scanned for archiving and online posting.
3. Scan copies of all books published by our volunteers to store in the library's Sharepoint site.

Point Person

Kris Harapan

3. Community Outreach

1. Programming

Description and Strengths

The library has historically held classes and other community programming. Unfortunately, these efforts were halted due to Covid restrictions beginning in 2020. Two classes were held in September and October 2023 for the members of the Choctaw Nation Senior Center in Durant.

Challenges

It has been difficult to get the momentum going again. With a decrease in community outreach programs, there has also been a decrease in community visits to the library. This also has a negative impact on our ability to recruit new members and volunteers.

Classes have historically been held onsite at the library. While this is good for getting visitors to the library, and engaging local community members, many of our members are out of state and unable to participate.

Goals

It is possible to hold classes in the library for local attendees while also streaming via Zoom or Facebook Live platforms for members who are out of the immediate area. This would allow the library to reach a wider audience.

Action Items

1. Develop community genealogy classes.
 - a. Hold a class series on getting started on your family tree. (Jan Wallbaum)
 - b. Hold a class series hosted in the library and streamed online simultaneously on getting the most out of your DNA results. (Kris Harapan)
2. Develop a speaker series to educate current and prospective members on various historical topics. (Kris Harapan)
 - a. Develop a series that invites local authors and historical researchers to speak at the library.
 - b. Stream the speakers on Zoom or other video software so that members from outside the area can participate.
 - c. Record the presentations to be placed on YouTube.
3. Develop an education program about the library resources.
 - a. The library has a vast number of resources that most people are unaware of. Educating the public on our resources would extend our outreach efforts. This item is still under development.
 - b. Develop field trips and tours in Bryan County. Field trips and local history tours would extend our outreach efforts. This item is still under development.

Point Person

Various including Jan Wallbaum and Kris Harapan.

2. Communication

Description and Strengths

The library currently produces a 31-page quarterly newsletter.

Challenges

During Covid, reduced outreach efforts resulted in reduced submission of articles to the newsletter. The same small group of volunteers has been writing and assembling the newsletter for the last few years. It is also a paper document that has to be copied, stapled, addressed, and mailed.

Goals

While we still have some members who prefer to receive a paper copy of the newsletter, an electronic format is the preferred medium of many prospective new members. Limiting ourselves to a paper format limits our outreach abilities.

In addition, we are receiving notice from other historical/genealogical societies that we exchange newsletters with, that they are switching to an electronic format exclusively.

Also, as postage, paper, and toner costs increase, the cost of producing the newsletter increases.

Action Items

1. Develop a system to convert the newsletter to an electronic format. (Kris Harapan)
 - a. This format needs to be low-cost solution.
 - b. Needs to be easy to use solution that volunteers can be easily trained on.
 - c. Needs to support sending of bulk emails in accordance with federal regulations.
 - d. Needs to also generate the newsletter as a .pdf that can be printed for those members who still prefer a paper copy.
2. Encourage members to submit original items for the newsletter. (Marion Traer-Downs)
 - a. As the library moves forward with the Strategic Plan, encourage members and new participants to submit articles for the newsletter.

Point Person

Various, including Marion Traer-Downs and Kris Harapan.

3. Educational Outreach

Description and Strengths

There has been some interest expressed in running educational programs. Developing educational programs would allow the library to expand the demographics of outreach efforts. This would also expand the demographics of potential members and volunteers.

Challenges

While various ideas have been proposed, one of the current challenges is a lack of connections with the local school districts. Current volunteers are also struggling to keep up with current offerings.

Goals

To begin offering educational programs to local elementary, junior high, and high school students such as local history field trips, a summer history program, and other projects to engage local students of all ages with library and the regional history of Bryan County, Oklahoma.

Action Items

1. Network with teachers and administration in the local Calera and Durant school districts to facilitate partnering with local schools on various history presentations and programs.
2. Network with professors and administration at Southeastern Oklahoma State University to develop various educational programs and other volunteer projects.
3. Recruit volunteers to develop and facilitate a summer history program (similar format to a summer reading program). This program would help engage families with the library and provide a fun summer activity in between school years.

Point Person

To be determined by the Board.

4. Organizational Structure

Description and Strengths

The organization is run by a dedicated group of volunteers. There are no paid staff members.

Challenges

A broader base of members, volunteers, and leadership is crucial to maintain current initiatives, handle collections projects, and expand our vision and scope for the future. Training and succession planning for leadership on the Board, and ongoing strategy for the recruitment of new members and volunteers, are necessary to maximize satisfaction, clarity, and effectiveness of volunteers/leaders, and avoid confusion, wasted effort, and burnout.

A. Memberships

Goals

Memberships are one of the key financial sources of income for the library. Our membership has declined over the years and the demographic diversity of those members has narrowed. As part of our succession planning efforts, the library would like to increase the number and diversity of its members.

Action Items

Action items for this goal are still being developed. It is hoped that accomplishing the educational and communication outreach goals of this Strategic Plan will help provide momentum to memberships recruitment and retention efforts.

1. The Board will continue to monitor this matter and work to develop a member recruitment strategy.

Point Person

The Board.

B. Board and Volunteers

Goals

Assure continuity of the organization by developing volunteers to support and run the organization.

Action Items

Designate a Volunteer Coordinator to encourage members and local students to volunteer for projects and events. Align volunteer participation with individual strengths, skills, and interests. The Volunteer Coordinator will:

1. Work with assigned point persons on various projects to determine volunteer needs and develop job descriptions appropriate to the project needs.

2. Develop a database to track the skills and special interests of volunteers and potential volunteers.
3. Ensure volunteers are adequately trained and aligned with appropriate projects.
 - a. Ensure project is properly structured to work with volunteer's access, strengths, and interests.
 - b. Develop training for volunteers and persons supervising volunteers.
4. Develop an internship program with local colleges and universities.
 - a. Ensure internship program is properly structured.
 - b. Develop training for interns and persons supervising interns.
5. Track the work progress of volunteers.
6. Acknowledge the work and achievements of volunteers.
 - a. Develop written acknowledgement of contributions.
 - i. Certificates.
 - ii. Recommendation letters for interns.
7. Hold periodic meetings for volunteers.
8. Make use of school and other organizational (DAR/SAR, Girls/Boy Scouts, etc.) community service requirements to recruit volunteers.
9. Develop a succession plan to develop members for Board positions such as President, Vice-President, Treasurer, and other key organizational positions.

Point Person

Kris Harapan

C. Administration and Staffing

Goals

Utilize volunteers effectively and appropriately to further the work of the BCGLA.

1. Create job descriptions of all key volunteer positions.
2. Develop policies and procedures for Board approval for identified administration functions.
These include but are not limited to:
 - a. Volunteer Agreement
 - b. Internship Agreement
 - c. Speaker Agreement
 - d. Collections Donation Agreement
3. Recruit interns from local educational institutions to work on targeted projects.
4. Maintain a prioritized list of projects that are doable by volunteers.

5. Finances

Description and Strengths

The financial operation of the BCGLA consists of financial management and fundraising. Fundraising efforts include paid memberships, book sales, and donations.

The BCGLA is debt-free and is currently meeting most basic financial obligations for utilities, insurance, website, mailing, and some building maintenance.

Challenges

1. We have one volunteer that serves as both Treasurer and Membership Coordinator.
2. Our current budget does not allow for proper building and collections maintenance.
3. We are also a fully volunteer run organization with no paid staff.

Goals

1. Ensure the continuation of the BCGLA.
2. Recruit additional volunteers to support expanding fundraising efforts.

Action Items

To be determined by the Board.

Point Person

To be determined by the Board.

Conclusion:

This plan was initially developed as a five-year plan. In developing goals and objectives, it was most effective to start with developing the action plans for year one objectives. Subsequent year action plans will be developed over the coming year.

The Board will review progress on this plan at our regular monthly Board meetings. The overall plan will be reviewed and assessed in July every year to evaluate progress and adjust as needed for current conditions.

This Strategic Plan is a starting point and guiding document that will be refined and expanded as BCGLA moves forward.

