



Library Profile

BLUE RIDGE REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM

MARTINSVILLE CITY, VIRGINIA

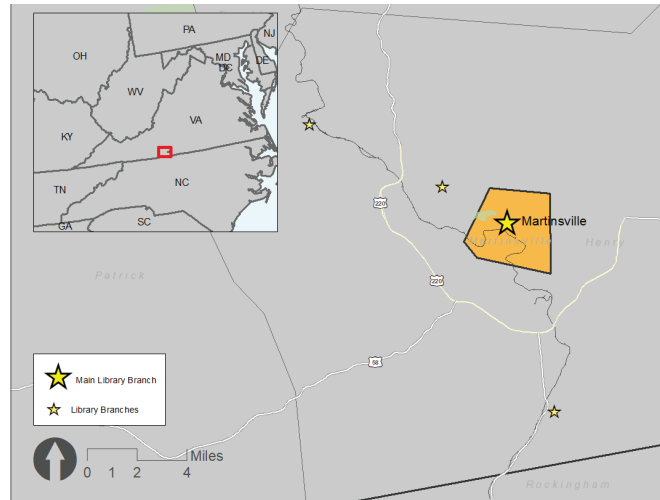
Library Profile: Blue Ridge Regional Library System



MARTINSVILLE CITY, VIRGINIA

Martinsville City is a rural city and county-equivalent located in southwestern Virginia. The Blue Ridge Regional Library System (BRRLS) serves the city of Martinsville as well as Henry and Patrick Counties from five physical locations. The main branch of the system is in Martinsville. In 2018–2019, BRRLS recorded 230,586 visits and offered 2,038 classes attended by 28,919 (nonunique) children, teens, young adults, and adults. The Martinsville branch employs a children’s librarian and is the home branch for BRRLS’s director and program coordinator.

BRRLS’s mission statement is to “provide free, friendly service and access to timely materials that educate, enrich, and entertain the entire community.” BRRLS promotes residents’ wellbeing by working to target and address many of the resource gaps in the area through partnerships and responsive programming. BRRLS provides marketing opportunities and community accessible space for its partners in safe, welcoming locations that promote social connections in a rural area.



MARTINSVILLE COUNTY

Martinsville is an independent city and county-equivalent near the southern border of Virginia with a population of 13,551. Martinsville is completely surrounded by Henry County, Virginia. This area was previously the seat of a thriving furniture and textile manufacturing industry that has undergone steady decline. This has resulted in a lack of economic opportunity;

poverty; and issues with substance use disorders, particularly opioid use disorder, in the area. The median household income in Martinsville is \$31,719, considerably less than the United States median of \$55,322. The city has a roughly equivalent share of Black and White residents and a poverty rate well above national levels.

	Population	% Change in Population (2000–2016)	% White	% Black	% Hispanic	% Asian	% Other	Median Household Income	% Families in Poverty
United States	318,558,162	13.2	62.0	12.3	17.3	5.2	3.3	\$55,322	11.0
Martinsville City	13,551	-12.2	46.6	45.5	6.7	0.3	2.0	\$31,719	18.4

Compared to other rural counties across the country, Martinsville residents experience relatively low levels of overall Community Health. Martinsville was in the bottom quartile of the Community Health Index.¹ The primary

industries in the city include Health Care & Social Assistance, Administrative Support & Waste Management Remediation Services, Retail Trade, and Manufacturing, which account for 58 percent of the adult employment in the city.

	Total Labor Force	% Health Care & Social Assistance	% Administrative Support & Waste Management Remediation Services	% Retail Trade	% Manufacturing
United States*	131,362,978	14.5	6.2	10.9	9.3
Martinsville City	8,246	27.0	12.0	10.0	9.0

Data Sources: 2012–16 American Community Survey five-year estimates; U.S. Census Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD), 2017.

*Continental figures for total labor force include the 48 lower states and Washington, DC.

¹ Data elements included in the Community Health Index, along with measures for Martinsville, can be found in the Technical Appendix.

SITE VISIT PARTICIPANTS AND DATA COLLECTION

In fall 2019, the study team conducted interviews with four current library staff and representatives from 11 different partner organizations. Site visit interviews conducted with BRRLS staff and partners focused on understanding the library programming and partnerships that support community health in Martinsville and the library's institutional approaches to sustainability.

In addition, the following data were used to create the network map included in this profile:

- 2016 Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) Public Libraries Survey
- Program reviews for several BRRLS programs
- Interview notes and related materials collected by the case study team

This site profile includes the following:

- A summary of select library programming and partnerships that support library customers' community health and the overall public health of the Martinsville community
- A descriptive network map that illustrates the scope and variety of connections the library maintains with local partners throughout the county and beyond.

BRRLS WORKS WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS TO OFFER A RANGE OF PROGRAMMING THAT PROMOTES PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Community partnerships play an important role in BRRLS's programming to support health and wellbeing in Martinsville. Community partners broadly fit into two categories: ongoing relationships with large institutions where the library most often played a host role and one-time events with smaller community-based institutions where the library was either a convener or participant. Generally, the library is a strong partner for public institutions with a mandate to connect with the public. Public institutions like the Department of Health or the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) have sophisticated programming and a mandate to serve the community but can lack grassroots connections. BRRLS's strong connections with its patrons support its partners' public serving mandate while providing relevant, well-developed programming.

Through a partnership with Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital, BRRLS offered Heart Smart classes, six-week programs that centered around preventative nutrition, and diabetes management classes. The library also played host to a five-week wellness program organized by Martinsville-Henry Healthy Coalition, where registered nurses taught about alternatives to managing pain and opioid addiction (e.g., cannabidiol [CBD], biofeedback, meditation, and yoga). The library also hosts free flu shot clinics for the area.

The Go Healthy West Piedmont program is run by the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and was designed to prevent obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and strokes by encouraging residents to consume more fresh foods and increase physical activity. Go Healthy West Piedmont programming at the library has consisted of

education on how to grocery shop on a budget, select healthy food options at limited-supply markets like Dollar Stores, and prepare healthier versions of traditional meals. The program also offered blood pressure screenings at the library, with referrals to a doctor if necessary. All of these programs have provided opportunities for community members to learn about healthy living, contributing to broader social wellbeing.

Nutrition and food insecurity are two of the most pressing public health needs in the area. The library has participated as a USDA summer feeding site, where young people and adults with disabilities are encouraged to come for books and activities and stay for USDA-provided hot meals that are prepared by another community partner. The library has also served as a distribution site for an organization that provides backpacks full of food for food-insecure children.

BRRLS CREATES OPPORTUNITIES FOR HEALTHY SOCIAL INTERACTION AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

The library offers a variety of its own health-based programming on-site in response to patron feedback, including a chair exercise program for seniors and those with physical or developmental disabilities. The library also hosts a variety of activities that promote social wellbeing simply by getting people in the doors. For instance, the library hosts bingo and adult coloring programs for local assisted living centers and nursing homes as well as workshops for an organization that works with developmentally disabled adults. BRRLS also hosts coffee and conversation programs that foster social connection, line dancing workshops, and story time and play activities for children and their parents. For those unable to access the library, there is a bookmobile, described as a “moving community center” that allows people who would not otherwise see each other to catch up and connect. These are all

important ways that the library supports not only the physical health of area residents, but mental health and social wellbeing. As one staff member said:

“When I think of health, I think of diet and exercise, but social wellbeing and mental health is such a large part of it. All [the branches] have special needs groups come by for whatever reason for interaction on a social level . . . it’s nothing elaborate but we are providing a welcoming space. We also perform that function for regular residents who sometimes just need someone to talk to.”

Another staff member observed that, “There’s so much in our world that encourages us to stay alone, and there are human faces here which provide interaction, and that part of our life can’t be undervalued.”

THE MARTINSVILLE COMMUNITY IS STRENGTHENED BY INFORMAL NETWORKS

BRRLS operates in a web of organizations dedicated to serving the community. The United Way of Henry County and Martinsville is the primary formal coordinator among organizations working to improve health outcomes. The United Way convenes a professional development leadership association and coordinates a group of health and human services providers working to create a centralized case management database. Participant organizations use the database to coordinate and streamline case management for individuals across multiple social service providers. The library is a member of a nonprofit professional development group, and while not the centralized case management network, BRRLS is able to coordinate its work within the community.

While acknowledging the importance of the formal networks operated by the United Way, partners and library staff highlighted the key role of informal and ad hoc networks in engaging their community. The library played a leadership role in creating ad hoc networks of community resources for its patrons. One partner noted that, "The county is so small that everyone pulls from the [same] resources. We have to come together." The library provides a platform to share resources that support social wellbeing and quality of life. For example, the Health and Hope initiative is a two-night resource fair designed to bring an array of community resources to the library at the same time so patrons can "one-stop shop" for all their needs—transportation, clothing, food pantries, other nonprofits in the area. Overlapping participation in organizations and personal connections creates informal community networks; for instance, one interviewee mentioned that serving on multiple boards allowed her to direct many organizations to participate in Health and Hope at the library.

For smaller, community-based organizations, the library is a vital conduit for connecting with their community. The library provides space for smaller organizations to set up a table and do outreach for an afternoon on their own or participate in larger resource fairs that the library organizes. Smaller organizations also benefit from the publicity the library can provide via its large marquee at the main branch. For example, Autism Awareness with Love is a small, community-based autism awareness and support organization serving Martinsville, Henry, and Franklin Counties. BRRLS invited Autism Awareness with Love to set up a one-day program at the library. The program consisted of sensory activities geared toward autistic children and sensory experiences for adults to better understand how autistic children encounter their surroundings. The event both spread awareness and provided information on additional resources, including next steps after an autism diagnosis, how to secure an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for school-age autistic children, and referral services. Like other organizations interviewed, Autism Awareness with Love was new to partnering with the library and hoped to continue and deepen the relationship.

INVESTING IN STAFF HELPS BUILD CONNECTIONS TO THE COMMUNITY

BRRLS attributes its success to its staff engagement with the community. As in other libraries, there has been a shift in skills and hiring practices toward “meeting the community where they are at” and moving outside the library walls to a more outward-facing approach. The library’s increasingly flexible, outward-facing role—as a community connector and a nexus for health and education services and outreach—demands an adapted set of skills for librarians. Library-led programming is informed by library staff’s perception of community needs, like pain management/opioid awareness, autism awareness, nutrition, diabetes care and prevention, hunger and food insecurity, and senior health.

Librarians suggested that, in this regard, experience in social work, early childhood, or further education, for instance, can prove just as valuable as a library degree. During his tenure, the library director changed the branch manager job position requirements to prioritize knowledge of the community over traditional credentials for librarians—a switch BRRLS believes to be one of the best decisions the library leadership has made. Another staffing change came when the library created a program coordinator position. Community partners reported the program coordinator’s work was instrumental in increasing the amount and quality of programming in general, and health programming specifically, available in the area. As previously observed, this health-related programming has covered a wide range of topics from hunger and nutrition to physical exercise, senior health, and substance use disorders.

The BRRLS staff’s attempts to understand how their programming impacts their patrons and local residents were largely informal and guided by personal connection. The library conducted satisfaction surveys after each program and generally used the feedback received to inform planning for future programming, rather than

measuring the program impacts. Library staff and several partners indicated their ongoing relationships within the community gave them adequate feedback about the importance of their work. Informal feedback and assessments also informed adaptations to programming conducted by smaller organizations while also continuing to build connections between individuals, organizations, and the library system.

Library staff and community partners working with BRRLS saw community connection and attentiveness to patron needs as key to their success. Staff and partners cited the importance of personal relationships in making connections between people, organizations, and other institutions to meet the needs of local residents and their families. Library staff were well positioned to identify, understand, and respond to the needs of their community and to experiment with new programming to address those needs. As one staff member noted, “We try to know the community and introduce new things in a way that lessens intimidation, and people embrace it.”

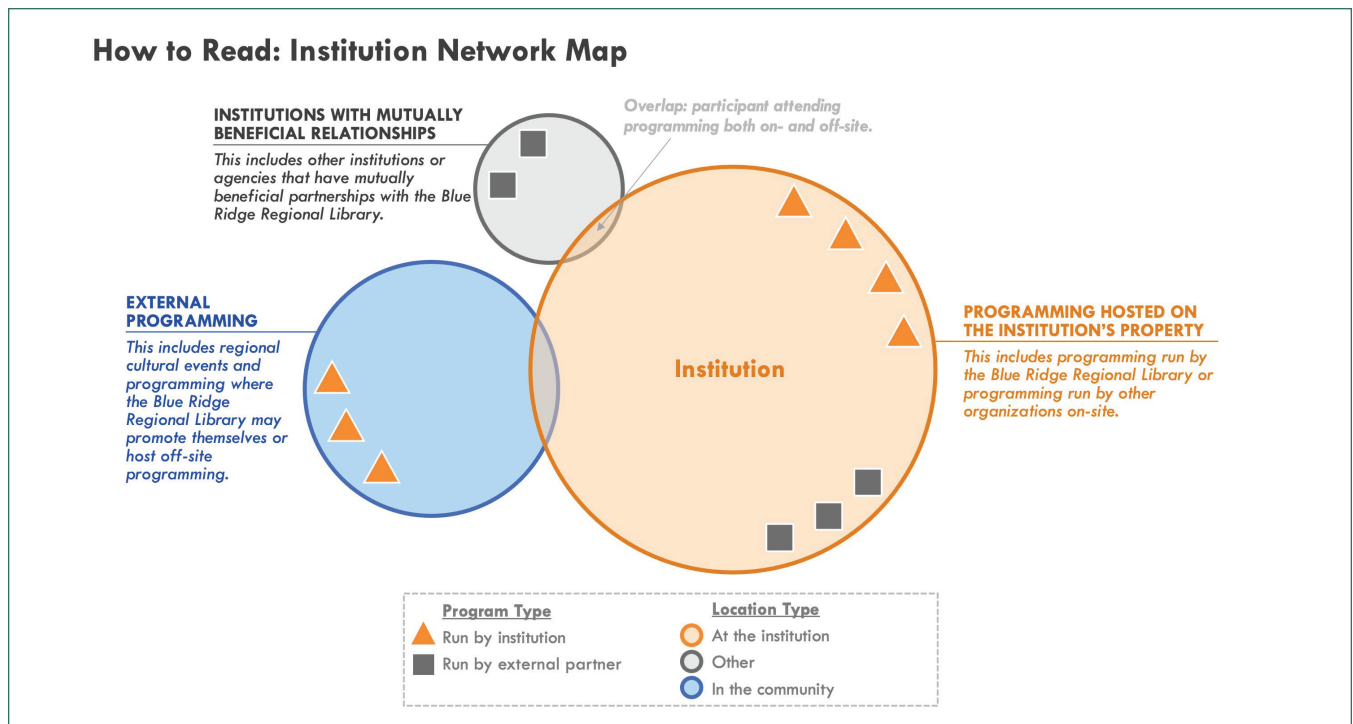
In rural areas, the libraries are often critical meeting places that facilitate a series of personal and organizational connections, making it possible for so many residents to access programs and activities that promote their physical health and social wellbeing. “It’s becoming more of a community center . . . programming has picked up and allows more people to be involved. Now, we’re a part of the community, rather than just a brick-and-mortar home for books,” one staff member noted. People go to the library simply to talk and connect with others, which is important in rural areas where there is little social infrastructure, a lack of public transit, and limited opportunities for making connections.

BLUE RIDGE REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEM NETWORK MAP

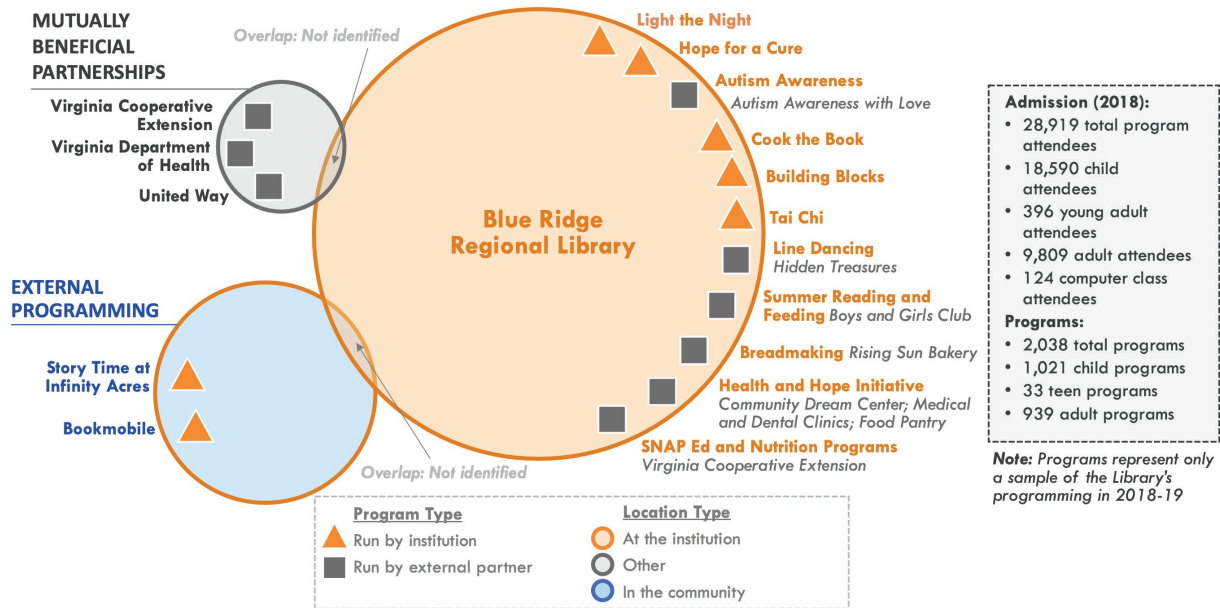
Using data provided by BRRLS, the study team developed a descriptive network map to highlight the different types of connections the system maintains with other institutions in the local community. The map illustrates the relationships between BRRLS and those entities that offer programming at the library itself and those

that support cross-marketing efforts or have reciprocal relationships with the library system, and it includes examples of off-site, library-led programming. The map does not provide an exhaustive list of BRRLS’s programs but attempts to illustrate a subset of the relationships that the system maintains.

NOTE: The network map is purely descriptive. The connections represented on the map do not necessarily, and are not intended to, provide estimates of the duration, durability, intensity, or broader impact of the relationships between BRRLS and any single entity, or the broader network itself. The goal of the network map is to represent the range and diversity of different types of institutions that connect to library in different ways.



Blue Ridge Regional Library Network Map



The figure above illustrates a *sample* of the connections across the programs offered by the BRRLS. Within the orange circle are a small sample of programs conducted on the physical property of the institution, both programs produced by the institution, and those produced by others. Within the blue circle is a sample of programs produced by the library and offered off-site in the community. The gray circle represents a sample of connections with other organizations that have reciprocal relationships with the library system.