

**The Association for Rural & Small Librarians**



**ANNUAL  
REPORT**

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**2023**

# 2023 ANNUAL REPORT



## Our Mission

ARSL builds strong communities through advocacy, professional development, and elevating the impact of rural and small libraries.

## Our Vision

As the premier organization representing rural and small libraries, ARSL recognizes the uniqueness of small and rural libraries and is committed to providing an environment that encourages excellence within this community of practice, supporting their goals of service and speaking on behalf of this important constituency.

## Our Values

- Accessibility
- Responsive Service
- Intellectual Freedom
- Professionalism
- Collaboration
- Accountability

# ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH

ARSL has undergone a period of significant change and growth since 2020, and 2023 was no exception. The careful stewardship of our association during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic by our Board and staff has resulted in a healthy, thriving organization with plenty of room to grow!

# 130%

# 736%

## Membership Growth, 2020-2023

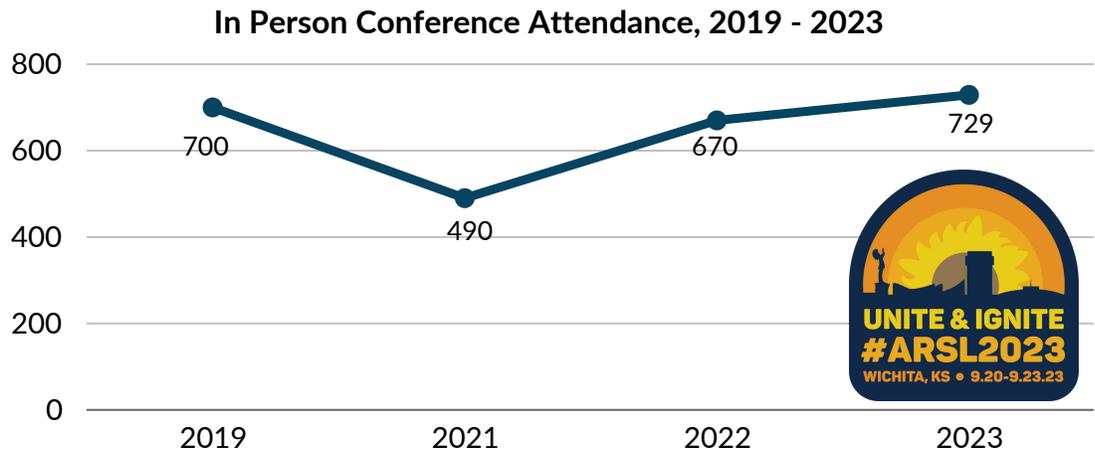
Dec 2020: 1211 members  
 Dec 2021: 1536 members  
 Dec 2022: 2546 members  
 Dec 2023: 2780 members

## Revenue Growth, 2020-2023

2020 Revenue: -\$7,241  
 2021 Revenue: -2,786  
 2022 Revenue: \$76,964  
 2023 YTD Revenue: \$53,334

# 2023 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

This year's annual conference represented a return to form in more ways than one. The location (Wichita, KS) was originally selected for our 2020 conference. We were finally able to *Unite & Ignite* in Wichita in 2023, and our in-person attendance surpassed pre-2020 levels to make it our largest in-person event ever!



Though they may be growing in size, we haven't forgotten what makes our conference the premiere professional development event for small and rural library workers. It's all about the content and quality of the programs. We will continue to have a conference planning process driven by a committee of folks working in our member libraries to ensure that our conference stays relevant, practical, and just the right fit for libraries like ours.

# ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS

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At their 2022 leadership retreat the Board of Directors identified four key organizational goals for ARSL. These goals were reaffirmed at their 2023 retreat, and are intended to foster sustainable growth for our association over the coming years. This will ensure that we are able to continue meeting the needs of our members and of the wider small and rural library community. Below are just a few of the ways that ARSL Committees, Board, and Staff worked to further those goals in 2023.

## Increase Operational Capacity

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- Since hiring our first Executive Director and staff in 2020 the ARSL Office has been able to be open and available to members for 50 hours per week (7 am - 5 pm PT, M-F).
- Established this year, the ARSL Supporters Alliance initiative allows businesses to sponsor our organization year-round.
- More than 250 volunteers gave over 1,000 hours of their time and talents across our Board, Regional Focus Groups, Major Committees, and in-person Conference Volunteers in 2023.
- Finance Committee recommended, and the Board of Directors approved, contracting with our first-ever investment advisor to help put ARSL's assets to work in support of our members.
- The Institute for Museum & Library Services (IMLS) awarded ARSL funding for a second pilot of the ARSL Leadership Institute. Applications for the 2024-25 cohort will open early next year.

## Expand Organizational Infrastructure

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- Membership Committee expanded our Professional Networking Groups. We now have nine groups, facilitated by ARSL members, that meet regularly to provide a space for the important connections and conversations that are the heart of ARSL.
- Our Regional Focus Groups have generated a number of actionable ideas for our committees, including the development of Benefit Guides to help members make the most of their memberships.
- Governance Committee has completed at least a first review of all existing policies that were adopted more than 5 years ago.
- Partnership Committee implemented a formal Partnership Request process to make establishing, tracking, and following through on our commitments to our partner organizations more efficient.

## Increase Member Support

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- The ARSL Advocacy Center steadily gained traction throughout 2023. Through this tool, library workers and trustees are able to connect directly with our Advocacy Committee to seek assistance or resources.
- Through our collaboration with generous funding private partners, ARSL has distributed more than \$1.4M in cash grants to small and rural libraries nationwide.
- Continuing Education Committee hosted 6 online professional development and networking events that had more than 300 cumulative registrants.

## Increase ARSL Visibility

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- ARSL collaborates directly with organizations like the Urban Libraries Council (ULC), Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA), and IMLS to ensure our community's needs and perspectives are well-represented in broader national conversations around library service.
- Grants, Awards & Scholarships Committee debuted the ARSL Annual Awards and presented them to the inaugural recipients at the First Annual ARSL Awards Luncheon at the 2023 Conference.