



NEWTON PUBLIC  
**LIBRARY**

# **VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK**

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# WELCOME

The Newton Public Library staff and board members hope that you will enjoy your time as a volunteer and learn more about the library and its services. What we do together helps our families, friends, neighbors, and everyone else in our community.

At Newton Public Library, we aim to provide modern library resources and services for the educational, recreational, and informational needs of our community. These needs continue to evolve, and so the library continues to grow and change. If you like to learn new things, the library is the right place for you!

Thank you for volunteering your time and talents to the Newton Public Library – we are so glad you're here!

Cari Cusick  
Library Executive Director

# CONTACT INFORMATION

General Library Phone Number: 316-283-2890

Assistant Library Director/Volunteer Coordinator: \_\_\_\_\_, xxx-xxx-xxxx

Your Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_

Library Director: Cari Cusick, 316-333-8157, ccusick@newtonplks.org

Address: 223 E. 7<sup>th</sup>, Newton KS 67114

Hours: Monday-Thursday 9 a.m. - 8 p.m.; Friday-Saturday 9 a.m. – 6 p.m.

# WHO WE ARE

## Library Services

We aim to provide modern library resources and high-quality services for the educational, recreational, and informational needs of our community. We also partner with local organizations for outreach, providing meeting space, support, and opportunities for community connection.

Here are some of the resources and services we provide:

- **Physical collections:** The library houses books for all ages, as well as DVDs, audiobooks, board games, learning kits, microfilm and historical records, newspapers, and magazines. A growing Library of Things offers yard games, Experience passes, and other unique items. Circulation: about 13,000-14,000 items per month.
- **Digital collections:** Library cardholders have access to tens of thousands of e-books and e-audiobooks through Libby/Overdrive. Circulation: about 3500-3900 items per month.
- **Technology Access:** The library provides public computers and free Wi-Fi, with about 1,000 logins to public computers per month. We also provide mobile hotspots that patrons can take home and use for internet access. Our staff members assist patrons with tasks such as navigating job-search sites, uploading resumes, and accessing e-government resources.
- **Meeting/Study Rooms:** Our meeting room is used for library programs as well as by local non-profit and civic groups, free of charge. We have 6 study rooms that can be used by individuals or small groups for work, study, and collaboration.

The Newton Public Library serves:

- **Children:** We offer early-literacy programs at the library and in schools; these include weekly story times for children ages birth to 5, as well as other activities. We also provide the Summer Reading Program to encourage children and teens to keep reading during the summer. We have a play area for preschool age and below, plus four computers with educational games designed for toddlers through elementary-age children.
- **Tweens/Teens:** We host book discussions, the GameZone, summer STEAM workshops, and other activities. Our teen area has dedicated computers, a Switch game console, and space for collaboration and just hanging out.
- **Adults:** We host several monthly book discussions, as well as educational and cultural programs such as a photography club, programs on local history, and author talks. Through our ENLITE Outreach Service, we deliver materials to homebound older citizens and residents of local care facilities (about 75-100 individuals per month).

### How Did We Get Here?

Before the first Newton Public Library was created, only semi-private and membership libraries existed in Newton. People had to pay to belong to a library. In 1886, Newton residents approved a tax levy to support the operation of a free library for all Newtonians to use. The Newton Free Library had no special building; it was housed in various locations downtown.

In 1900, library board members wrote to Andrew Carnegie, asking for funds for a library building. The library received \$1,000 from Mr. Carnegie, on the condition that the city would provide at least \$1,000/year for maintenance. The city agreed, and a building was planned and built, to be known as the Carnegie Library. It opened in 1904. (Currently, the building houses the Harvey County Historical Museum.) Some Newton residents still remember going to this

library, which grew to include a piano, children's story times, and genealogy materials in addition to books.

In the 1950s and 1960s, lack of space in the Carnegie Library led the library board to begin considering options for better meeting the community's needs. Eventually, a plan to build a new library in Military Park was approved by the library board and the City Commission, but many residents protested the proposed site. A district court ruling said that citizens had to choose, by voting, whether or not to support the plan.

In 1971, voters approved the Military Park site by a vote of 1,932 to 1,781. A new building was erected and opened two years later, and the name was changed to the Newton Public Library. The library continued to expand resources and services to the community, including adding the ENLITE Outreach Service to take books and magazines to retirement homes and homebound citizens. In 1977, a TV studio was installed in the library, funded primarily by Cablevision, and at its peak provided 10 hrs/week of programming on local stations.

In 1981, Mrs. Florence Bessmer donated money for a Children's Wing, which greatly expanded services for children and youth. To this day, the Florence Bessmer Foundation continues to provide substantial financial support for children and youth programs at the Newton Public Library. Also in the 1980s, computers were introduced into the library. Library catalogs and patron accounts were stored on computer, and there were three computer terminals in the building. In 1984, the library offered four home computers for patrons to check out; it is believed that Newton was the first library in Kansas to enable patrons to check out computers for home use.

In the 1990s, the basement was renovated and children's library materials were moved from the Bessmer Children's Wing to the basement, which offered more space for the materials as well as a new play area. The Bessmer Room was turned into a public meeting space.

As the library building aged, safety and accessibility issues grew. The building design did not accommodate growing needs for computer connectivity, and new library services did not fit well into the space. After comparing the costs of renovation versus new construction, the City of Newton recommended that a new building be built. With community input, Military Park was again the selected site, close to the old building.

In 2020, a project agreement was signed to commit the City of Newton to pay for part of the cost of the new building, with the Library board and private fundraising to cover the rest. Hundreds of individuals, foundations, businesses, and organizations gave to the new library project, totaling \$3.3 million in donations. The third generation of the Newton Public Library opened in 2024.

## VOLUNTEER EXPECTATIONS

We hire volunteers who can help us maintain a professional, customer-focused environment that is respectful of all persons. You are expected to:

- Be able to volunteer at least 4 hours per month.
- Complete all training and onboarding requirements.
- Keep your contact information up to date.
- Be prompt and present when scheduled, track your volunteer hours, and notify the Assistant Library Director if you are unable to work a scheduled shift.
- Abide by the policies and procedures established by the Board of Trustees, Library Executive Director, and the Assistant Library Director.
- Follow the direction of the Assistant Library Director and your supervisor, and accept coaching and correction with a positive attitude.
- Follow all safety rules. Tell the Assistant Library Director or Executive Director if you see any possible safety problems.
- Work well with other volunteers and with library staff members; demonstrate flexibility and a positive attitude; and contribute to the overall successful operation of the library.
- Learn what information is considered confidential in patron records and library usage, and maintain confidentiality of that information.
- Treat everyone with respect and fairness, and do not discriminate based on race, religion, color, sex, age, disability, national origin, or any other protected class.
- Avoid using drugs, tobacco, or alcohol on premises, with the exception of drugs legally prescribed by a physician.

## CONFIDENTIALITY & FREE ACCESS TO INFORMATION

**Confidentiality:** Protecting privacy is an important part of our library service. Volunteers may have access to confidential information, including:

- Whether a person has visited the library
- Whether a person has a library card
- What materials a person checks out or views
- What questions a person asks library staff

This information is confidential. Do not discuss this information with anyone other than library staff. Do not discuss it with other volunteers.

**Free Access to Information:** At the library, everyone has the right to access information freely. The library does not block or remove materials just because of their viewpoint. Parents and guardians are responsible for what children borrow from the library.

# ANTI-DISCRIMINATION & ANTI-HARASSMENT

Newton Public Library is committed to treating everyone with respect and fairness. We do not allow any kind of unfair treatment or harassment based on age, race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, or any other protected class.

We do not tolerate harassment; that is, any behavior that makes someone feel uncomfortable and affects their ability to work. Examples of sexual harassment include unwanted advances, requests for sexual favors, or other behaviors of a sexual nature that create a hostile or offensive environment.

If you feel you have been treated unfairly or if you have questions about what is allowed, please talk to the Library Executive Director or the President of the Library Board of Trustees.

If someone tells you about unfair treatment or harassment, or if you see it happening, please tell the Library Executive Director right away.

## GENERAL VOLUNTEER PROCEDURES

### Eligibility & Requirements

The Newton Public Library welcomes volunteers of all backgrounds, regardless of race, color, religion, gender, national origin, or disability. If you are aged 14 and above, you can volunteer. However, we may refuse entry into the volunteer program temporarily or permanently for various reasons, including providing false or incomplete information, exhibiting unprofessional behavior, being habitually late, or not showing up for scheduled shifts.

Some positions may require background checks, especially those working closely with young people or vulnerable individuals. If a background check is necessary, it will be clearly indicated in the volunteer position description and you will need to fill out a consent form. The library will pay for the background check.

### Scheduling & Attendance

You will work with your supervisor to set up a schedule (at least 4 hours per month) that is good for both you and the library. If you are not feeling well, please do not come to the library. Call the library at 316-283-2890 as soon as you can to let them know. If it is after-hours, you can leave a voicemail.

### Tracking of Hours

You are required to keep track of the number of hours you volunteer. This information is important for insurance, grants, and to give credit for your work. The Assistant Director will show you how to track your hours as part of your onboarding.

## Dress Code

Wear your name badge while on shift. Wear clothing that is in good condition, without visible holes, and that is suitable for the task at hand. Do not wear or display badges, buttons, clothing or signs while serving as a volunteer that support a particular candidate, political party, or political platform.

## Leave of Absence

If you decide to take a break from volunteering, tell the Assistant Library Director. For a break up to six months, you are still considered an “active” volunteer. After six months, your status is changed to “inactive.” To volunteer again after six months, contact the Assistant Library Director.

## Grievances

If you are concerned that rules are being broken, or something is not being done the right way, follow these steps:

1. Talk to your supervisor about any issues with your duties. Most problems can be sorted out at this level.
2. If you do not feel your problem has been addressed by your supervisor, put your concerns in writing and give them or email them to the Assistant Library Director. The Assistant Library Director will investigate and address the problem, with input from the Executive Library Director.

## Release from Volunteer Services

If you decide to permanently leave the volunteer program, notify the Assistant Library Director as soon as possible, either in person, by phone, email, or in writing. After you leave the program, you will be sent an exit interview form.

Volunteers who fail to meet expectations might be asked to leave the program.