



## **Organization Strategic Plan**

*2024-2027*

*Approved by unanimous board vote on February 15, 2024*



## Table of Contents

2.....	Table of Contents
3.....	“Where We’re From”
4.....	Program Overview
6.....	Strategic Planning Process
7.....	Strategic Priority #1 - Enhance Operational Excellence
9.....	Strategic Priority #2 - Pursue Literacy for All
12.....	Strategic Priority #3 - Planning for Sustainability

## Where We're From

Books for Keeps exists to inspire joyful experiences around literacy that can forever be associated with learning. Founded by volunteers in Athens, GA in 2009, the organization has since distributed more than 1,302,000 books to children, teachers, fellow peer agencies, and other individuals in Georgia through its various book access programs. Alongside book distribution, the BFK team coordinates a local literacy mentoring program, community engagement opportunities around Georgia, and collaboration with literacy-focused agencies across the country.

In 2023, Books for Keeps experienced tremendous growth and change in order to fulfill the 2020-2023 Strategic Plan. The staff answered the challenge to “Go Deeper” and “Partner” by creating and executing the Storytellers Literacy Mentor Program with the help of Creature Comforts Brewing Company. This programming addition allowed the organization to leverage the book access they have sought so hard to create over the last decade. Further, the organization has worked to provide further opportunities to provide book access by way of the PreK Book Bundles program, the Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library and various community events through use of the bookmobile. These changes allowed the organization to adapt its mission, vision, and values in a way that better reflected the needs of its service communities.

## Our Mission

It is our mission to inspire joyful experiences around literacy that can forever be associated with learning.

## Our Vision

We believe in a world where it is accepted that literacy is a human right that belongs to all people and begins with a literacy rich childhood.

## Our Core Values

- **Integrity** - *Because it's the right thing to do.*
  - We seek to remain authentic and accountable to those that believe in our mission, no matter where we find ourselves in the community.
- **Belonging** - *There's always space at our table*
  - Everyone should be able to see themselves in the work we do and the resources we seek to provide. Providing representation at all levels is crucial to the work we do.
- **Connection** - *Vulnerability builds community.*
  - We're committed to taking the time to meet people where they are at, remain open-handed, and flexible
- **Enthusiasm** - *Time spent enjoyed is never time wasted.*
  - We express ourselves, and the things we enjoy, respectfully, intentionally, and often.

## Program Overview and Areas of Focus

### “Little Kids” - Ages Birth to Five

#### Pre-K Book Bundles

Every Pre-K student in the Clarke County School District receives 3 brand new, free books each month of the school year. This program’s goal is to help further develop positive associations with books and learning before finding themselves in Kindergarten. Books are always developmentally appropriate and typically slot into a few categories: social-emotional learning, letter and number foundations, bi-lingual, and seasonal celebrations. In addition to reading materials for children, caregivers will also receive resources in the form of thematic tips, ideas, and activities for supporting literacy growth outside of school for their young ones.

#### Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library in Clarke County

Each month, an age-appropriate book along with tools to grow literacy in the home and develop kindergarten readiness is mailed to the child's home. Focused on children ages 0-5, Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library (“DPIL”) has been alive in Athens Clarke County for nearly 10 years. BFK began overseeing the program in 2021, which includes coordinating child enrollment and funding all books and local operational costs.

### “Big Kids” - Ages 5 to 12

#### Spring Book Distributions

Our flagship program, dedicated to “Stopping Summer Slide,” the learning loss that children face due to limited access to learning materials and enrichment opportunities over the long summer months. With an emphasis on book choice and pride of ownership (getting to take home books “for keeps”), BFK’s Spring Book Distribution program provides children with opportunities to select high-interest, age-appropriate books at no cost to families.

#### Storytellers Literacy Mentor Program

Aims to 'move the needle' for 3rd-grade literacy rates through co-authored experiences with students by demonstrating engaging and exciting methods to interact with literature. Currently piloting at H.B. Stroud Elementary School mentors meet with 2nd and 3rd graders for 1 hour per week. During their visit, a mentor and their student will spend time engaging with books and corresponding reading activities.

#### BFK Bookmobile

The BFK Bookmobile is a rolling reminder of the importance of literacy in our community. The vehicle travels to schools, community events, and festivals throughout the year to offer book swaps, community resources, and other enrichment activities through collaboration with other organizations in our community. Rather than a standalone program, the bookmobile serves as an extension of program delivery for our book access programs.



**“Bigger Kids” - Ages 12+**

**Annual Community Book Fair**

This event is a reflection of our mission to provide equitable book access for all and is made possible through partnerships with generous sponsors throughout the community. Guests from Athens and beyond are invited to visit our book warehouse and take home up to 100 gently-used, free books for their purposes. Books are acquired through book drives hosted by community members throughout the year leading up to the big event that takes place every October.

**Year-Round Volunteer Opportunities**

Books for Keeps' would not exist without the generosity of our dedicated community of volunteers. Annually, volunteers contribute more than 5000 hours toward providing literacy for all through Books for Keeps' mission. Community members can support the organization in a variety of ways as a volunteer:

- In the Book Warehouse helping to process new and used book inventory throughout the year.
- Helping to execute Spring Book Distributions in April and May at any number of partner elementary schools.
- Hosting a book drive to collect and donate books to the organization.
- As a Literacy Mentor by attending a one-time training that equips volunteers with the knowledge and skills to support a child's growth throughout the school year.

## Strategic Planning Process

### Fall 2022: First Meeting

- Initiated the strategic planning process with the Board Executive Committee.

### Internal Planning (Winter 2023):

- Held a board retreat with staff and board members for:
  - Reassessment and adaptation of mission, vision, and values.
  - Inclusion of findings from stakeholder engagement.
  - Identification of the mission based on the collective vision and community needs.
  - Review of the previous strategic plan and its status.
  - Prioritization of organizational focus areas.
- Conducted staff feedback and input sessions by:
  - Conducting a SWOT analysis.
  - Soliciting feedback on adapted mission, vision, values.
  - Solicited feedback for strategic plan objectives.

### Stakeholder Engagement (Spring 2023)

- Conducted stakeholder input session to:
  - Understand community perceptions of BFK.
  - Assess past interactions with the organization.
  - Identify community priorities for BFK.
  - Gather feedback on specific programs/initiatives.
  - Evaluate the effectiveness of current programs.
  - Determine ways BFK can better serve as a partner to community members/organizations.

### Analysis and Findings Presentation (Spring 2023):

- The Executive Director collected and presented all findings.
- Introduced the three focus areas: Distribute, Demonstrate, Leverage.

### Drafting Process (July 2023 - November 2023):

- First draft presented to board and staff in July 2023 for initial feedback.
- Second draft presented in October 2023 for additional feedback.
- Third draft presented in November 2023 for final feedback and review.

### Finalization (January 2024):

- The final draft was presented to the full board at the annual retreat.
- Put to a vote for approval.

## Strategic Priority #1 - Enhance Operational Excellence

The previous strategic plan, 2020-2023, observed several large changes for the organization:

- Books for Keeps' first employee and Executive Director left the organization which brought about major internal changes.
- The Stop Summer Slide Spring Book Distributions went through annual overhauls due to COVID and continuously evolving school partnerships.
- Book Access programs expanded to incorporate Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, Pre-K Book Bundles, and a Bookmobile for greater community engagement.
- The Storytellers Literacy Mentor Program was created as an answer to a goal set by the previous strategic plan to 'dig deeper' into our home community of Athens.
- The staff doubled in size over this time, going from three to six employees overall.

Considering the breadth of these changes, it is suggested that the staff focus on developing sound operational practices for both the Book Access and Literacy Mentor programs. These practices should focus on day-to-day operations and codifying practices with an emphasis on building for future succession of both volunteers and staff that are invested in the success of Books for Keeps.

**Objective #1** - Develop a formal key volunteer program to deepen the impact of those served by the organization.

- **Rationale:** A formal key volunteer program establishes a structured framework for engaging volunteers, fosters a sense of belonging and connection, while creating deeper opportunities for stakeholder investment. This type of support also provides program staff with the ability to forecast support in order to better schedule work around when they confidently can say volunteers with the time and skill sets necessary for completing the work will be present.
  - **Action Steps:**
    - Define what it *means* to be a key volunteer for Books for Keeps.
    - Develop a formalized recruitment strategy.
    - Establish a training program.
    - Identify ways to honor and recognize participants on a recurring and meaningful basis.

**Objective #2** - Adapt roles and responsibilities for staff to be more specialized in their day-to-day operations.

- **Rationale:** As the Books for Keeps staff continues to grow, it should be a focus of the current and future team to codify all processes and procedures in order to plan for sustainable growth and future succession. Creating clear, written standard operating procedures allows staff to identify areas where work may be extraneous, overlapping, or missed entirely. Additionally, this specialization of work and roles will allow for further growth for staff to develop more robust mechanisms for measuring and reporting out success to key stakeholders.
- **Action Steps:**
  - Manage evaluation and data-collection processes internally as often as possible.
  - Identify processes that no longer serve the organization and either remove, refine, or adapt them to better meet BFK needs.
  - Automate and/or outsource time consuming processes when able.
  - Codify all recurring processes across the organization and reassess on a recurring basis.
  - Identify staff liaisons to serve on board committees.



## Strategic Priority #2 - Pursue Literacy for All

Research shows that book access is one of these most powerful tools in building literacy-rich communities. At Books for Keeps, we believe that book access for all is a right and are committed to providing high-interest, high-quality books across our community. The decision as to whether or not a person will read should not be made for them based on a simple lack of access to materials.

First and foremost, Books for Keeps will remain a partner to children through its various programs and services and will do so with their caregivers also in mind. Literacy for all means serving all people in our community.

**Objective #1** - Create space for staff, mentors, volunteers, and board members from more diverse backgrounds.

- **Rationale:** In order to best serve our community, we should be familiar with its needs as they stand but also as they evolve. Having regular touchpoints with members of different backgrounds and places in the community allows for a more complete understanding and perspective of our city as a whole.
- **Action Steps:**
  - Create a formal DEI policy.
  - Create and provide content that reflects back our target audiences through our communications channels.
  - Revise and adapt board and staff recruitment.
  - Establish benchmarks for providing more diverse representation in our book inventory that incorporate racial, linguistic, gender, and neurodivergent backgrounds.

**Objective #2** - Develop consistency for the bookmobile's services to provide clear expectations for our service communities.

- **Rationale:** The Bookmobile serves as a mobile reminder to the community of the importance of literacy and learning. Without clear consistent expectations, the Bookmobile's services will never reach their full potential of providing book access to the surrounding community. Clear consistent expectations and delivery of services provides an opportunity for data collection and program service evaluation to continuously improve future engagement. Additionally, solidifying the service model for the bookmobile will provide a clarity for future potential sponsors of its services.
- **Action Steps:**
  - Develop a clear execution strategy and annual calendar.
  - Developing criteria for answering requests as they are received.
  - Solidify inventory channels for supplying this initiative.

**Objective #3** - Grow the Storytellers Literacy Mentor Program to provide services to at least five schools by the end of 2027.

- **Rationale:** Alongside partners at Creature Comforts, BFK will work to “move the needle” on third grade literacy in Clarke County from 20% to 60%. This milestone was determined through a collaborative effort from literacy experts, Teachers, and leadership staff and faculty in the Clarke County School District. In order to reach this goal, BFK will need to continue scaling the program past these five schools but this goal matches the current pace in which the program is growing with deference to current forecasted funds and operational capacity for growth.
- **Action Steps:**
  - Diversify funding sources to reduce reliance on a single donor.
  - Further diversify volunteer recruitment to create greater community buy-in.
  - Explore grants, corporate sponsorships, individual donors, and philanthropic partnerships.

**Objective #4** - Prioritize community book drives as a key inventory stream and community engagement method.

- **Rationale:** Book drives for Books for Keeps started as a key component of providing books to children in addition to providing a revenue stream through the annual Community Book Sale. In recent years, the benefits to hosting book drives have changed due to the decreasing percentage of supplementary inventory they provide Spring Book Distributions along with the adapted model for the annual Community Book Fair. However, book drives remain a crucial component of providing inventory for community book requests and the BFK Bookmobile while also creating in-roads for businesses, organizations, and associations to engage with Books for Keeps in a meaningful way.
- **Action Steps:**
  - Use historical precedence to set reasonable goals to increase solicitation for book drives throughout the year.
  - Use the bookmobile as a collaborative mobile book drive opportunity for community partners.
  - Expand book drive solicitation to include more than just the Clarke County area. Identify outside of Athens partners to accomplish this task.
  - Explore the possibility of offering “virtual” book drives to accommodate all types of stakeholder engagement.



**Objective #5** - Provide Pre-K Book Bundles to children in Clarke County of Pre-K age but not attending Clarke County Schools.

- **Rationale:** The Clarke County School District currently has enough space to accommodate only 55% of eligible children in their Pre-K programs. The majority of alternative childcare for Pre-K eligible children in Clarke County is either too expensive for local families or is over utilized by children from neighboring areas due to a lack of opportunities for high-quality childcare in their home counties. That means that roughly half of our Kindergarten students in Clarke County are entering structured learning environments for the first time when enrolled. These children are also missing out on opportunities BFK provides to those children that are able to utilize Pre-K Book Bundles and other resources related to their enrollment in CCSD prior to Kindergarten.
  
- **Action Steps:**
  - Identify key partners in Athens-Clarke County to provide resources to Pre-K eligible children that aren't enrolled in CCSD.
  - Secure year-to-year funding for the program through service partners and foundations.
  - Secure relationships with relevant book vendors to elevate program execution.

## Strategic Priority #3 - Planning for Sustainability

Having grown programming opportunities based on community needs in the past three years, Books for Keeps is now in a position where it is necessary to not only plan for the current fiscal year's funding, but for the following years as well. Creating mechanisms and processes that allow for greater donor stewardship will allow the organization to deepen funder impact and attract new donors from new spaces.

**Objective #1** - Strengthen donor processes in an effort to increase year-over-year funding.

- **Rationale:** Books for Keeps has a strong, consistent, and loyal donor base that has supported the organization through the years. With the addition of a fundraising and donor development staff in 2023, the organization now has the capacity to look further into the future when considering funding opportunities and partnerships. By enhancing our donor processes, we aim to create a more robust and sustainable foundation for year-to-year funding. Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of our fundraising efforts will contribute to increased donor retention and engagement. Implementing streamlined communication, personalized engagement strategies, and efficient donation tracking systems will not only foster stronger relationships with existing donors but also attract new supporters. A focus on donor stewardship and appreciation activities will reinforce the sense of community and commitment to our mission. This objective is pivotal in ensuring that our organization not only meets its current funding needs but also strategically grows its support base over time. Strengthening donor processes aligns with our commitment to financial sustainability, allowing us to consistently fund and expand our programs for the benefit of the communities we serve.
  
- **Action Steps:**
  - Evaluate existing donor management software to ensure internal systems are equipped to manage organizational development goals.
  - Codify individual donor, sponsor, and grant acknowledgement processes to ensure groups are stewarded effectively.
  - Sustain communication and engagement throughout the year by adhering to an established donor strategy.

**Objective #2** - Diversify existing funding streams to include a major gift program, expanded corporate sponsorship program, and at least one annual fundraising event.

- **Rationale:** The objective to diversify existing funding streams aligns seamlessly with the overarching strategic priority of sustaining current programming to ensure the organization's long-term viability. By expanding beyond traditional revenue sources, such as grants and memberships, and incorporating a major gift program, an expanded corporate sponsorship initiative, and at least one annual fundraising event, we aim to create a more resilient financial foundation. Diversification not only guards against potential fluctuations in specific revenue streams but also fosters a more sustainable and adaptive financial model. A major gift program allows us to engage high-capacity donors, while an enhanced corporate sponsorship program leverages partnerships with businesses invested in our mission. The addition of an annual fundraising event not only generates immediate financial support but also provides an opportunity to engage the community and showcase the organization's impact, ultimately fostering a culture of sustained giving. This strategic approach will fortify our financial stability, ensuring that we can continue to deliver impactful programs and services for years to come.
  
- **Action Steps:**
  - Organize events that showcase the impact of book access opportunities and collaboration efforts either hosted by or in collaboration with potential and current corporate partners.
  - Increase solicitations for sponsors throughout the year. Seek corporate sponsorships for specific book access programs or events. Further develop sponsorship packages that provide recognition for participating corporations.
  - Implement methods to measure the economic impact of corporate partnerships to deepen communications and further bridge the sector gap.
  - Begin cultivating major gift donorship with the intent of one day deepening/creating endowment.