

# Spartanburg County Public Libraries and Marketing Partner Neue South Receive National PR Award for Census Campaign and Proven Community Impact

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The Spartanburg County Public Libraries was one of eight recipients of the 2021 John Cotton Dana (JCD) Award, recognized for their strategic communications efforts with local marketing firm, Neue South, on the 2020 Census. The [John Cotton Dana Awards](#) provides up to eight grants for libraries that demonstrate outstanding library public relations. The award is managed by the American Library Association's Core Division and consists of \$10,000 grants from the H.W. Wilson Foundation. This grant will be added to the Friends of the Spartanburg County Public Libraries' fund, held at the Spartanburg County Foundation, to support outreach and civic engagement.



Pictured left to right: Todd Stephens, Brooke Robertson, Kathryn Harvey, Andy Flynt, Amanda Newman, John Cribb.

Spartanburg County Public Libraries led 2020 Census efforts in Spartanburg with over sixty community partners with the goal of getting everyone counted once and only once in the right place. With a county population of roughly 320,000 people, SCPL has over 1 million visits annually at all county-wide locations, reaching residents from all backgrounds. Since SCPL serves as the lead entity in the area of Civic Health for the Spartanburg Community Indicators Project, when the Census Bureau approached various Spartanburg County organizations to encourage Census participation, SCPL was positioned to take the lead role as a trusted community institution.

Working with community partners, hard to count communities throughout the county were identified using 2010 Census data, and a plan was put in place to encourage trusted messengers to deliver accurate information to residents through a wide range of communication and outreach opportunities that spanned the duration of the 2020 Census. The team, led by Andy Flynt, Director of Information Services at Spartanburg County Public Libraries, collaborated with local firm [Neue South](#), on a marketing, PR and outreach campaign that utilized social media and digital advertising with the Census form newly accessible online, grass-roots organizing and outreach, and other methods like digital geofencing and door knocking.

The campaign resulted in Spartanburg County being one of only five counties in South Carolina to exceed their 2010 Census self-response rate, which was the Census Bureau's measure of success for regional efforts given restrictions due to the pandemic. Spartanburg County's 2020 Census self-response rate was raised to 66.5% from our 2010 Census self-response rate of 66.1% in spite of the Census taking place in the midst of the pandemic that caused them to pivot, yet successfully complete, the campaign in eight months.

"The United States Census is the measurement used for allocating Federal funds to States and municipalities. I am certain that the collective efforts of SCPL and the outstanding advisory committee that assisted with this campaign will positively impact Federal funding in Spartanburg County," said Todd Stephens, County Librarian of the Spartanburg County Public Libraries. "Andy Flynt and Kathryn Harvey also received state-wide recognition for their efforts leading the Spartanburg Complete Count Committee by the Friends of South Carolina Libraries."

The library was asked to lead the local effort in the spring of 2019 and began reaching out to community leaders and non-profit agencies to encourage promotion of the benefits of Census participation to residents of Spartanburg County. Neue South joined the effort in the fall of 2019 while hosting a state-wide create-a-thon with the [US Census Bureau's Open Innovation Lab](#). The campaign directive to identify trusted messengers who could deliver accurate information around the Census locally, reinforced the work already done at the national level while bringing new strategies to the effort. As the pandemic took hold, local partners pivoted their efforts to reach the community by any means possible, and even experimented with new channels of outreach.

"Some of our best success stories early on were attributed to tried and true one-on-one outreach to residents in our community while maintaining social distancing," said Andy Flynt. "We hosted a Census drive-thru event with the City of Spartanburg that gave away gas station gift cards and library cards last summer and folks were able to fill out the Census on tablets from the comfort of their cars or safely at a walk-up station. We used a similar model closer to the start of the school year offering Census completion and voter registration opportunities during a drive-thru backpack pick up hosted by the library and a local mentoring non-profit."

[SC Counts](#), a statewide collaborative of grassroots leaders and organizations working to increase census completion, provided technical assistance, funding support, and enhanced connectivity critical to the success of this effort. Partnerships with local nonprofits and businesses came into play to help promote Census participation to their clients and communities while also aiding in disseminating information about the pandemic. Some of the best examples were events hosted by our local housing authority.

"While challenging, the extended timeframe for the Census allowed us to expand our strategy to more specifically engage hard to count communities with low response rates. The collective efforts of over sixty community partners truly made this campaign a success, and we're seeing the results play out in real time through Census data used in redistricting efforts and the allocation of American Rescue Plan funding on a statewide and local level," said Kathryn Harvey of Neue South. "Our team continues to support the community in both of these areas through our work with The Upstate Action Alliance and Together SC."

**About the Spartanburg County Public Libraries:** Spartanburg's first public library opened on October 17, 1885, thanks to a generous donation from Mrs. Helen Fayssoux Kennedy in honor of her husband, Dr. Lionel Chalmers Kennedy, a well known and respected physician who passed away five years earlier. Since that time, the library system has grown to include 10 full-service branch libraries and a Bookmobile. Now operating with a staff of roughly 200 employees, the

Libraries continue to strive towards their mission to inspire people to pursue lifelong learning for a thriving Spartanburg County. Each location provides a variety of programming for children, teens and adults and is equipped with meeting room facilities, free internet access, and shelves full of books, magazines, movies, music and more. For those who are not able to come into a library, Homebound services delivers books to shut-ins almost every day. Additionally, many downloadable resources are available on our website, [www.spartanburglibraries.org](http://www.spartanburglibraries.org).

**About Neue South:** Neue South is a creative marketing and communications agency based in Spartanburg, SC. [www.neuesouth.com](http://www.neuesouth.com)

**About the John Cotton Dana Award:** The award is named after John Cotton Dana (1859–1929), the father of the modern library, who is credited with helping transition libraries from reading rooms to community centers. JCD submissions include strategic library communications campaigns from libraries of all types and sizes. In recognition of the achievement, JCD award winners receive a cash development award from the H.W. Wilson Foundation. The John Cotton Dana Awards are typically presented during an awards ceremony hosted by EBSCO Information Services held during the American Library Association annual conference. The 2021 Winners will be honored at the next in-person ALA Conference, currently slated for June 2022. [www.ebsco.com](http://www.ebsco.com)