

Suffolk Public Library expands access and improves operations with Polaris

Suffolk Public Library (SPL) in Virginia is redefining how it delivers services across a geographically large and diverse community. With limited physical locations and staffing constraints, the library needed a way to extend services without adding unnecessary complexity for staff. With Polaris supporting its core library operations, Suffolk has modernized workflows, enabled new service models, and significantly increased community engagement.

“We use Polaris as our ILS. It integrates with our self-checkouts and supports authentication for PC reservations. Polaris has been very helpful in setting up configurations, especially as we prepare for a new library.”

Kyle Binaxas,
Tech and Content Strategy Manager at Suffolk Public Library.

Suffolk is the largest city in Virginia by land area but operates with just three branches and a bookmobile. This creates significant barriers to access - particularly in rural areas where residents may have limited ability to visit the library. For residents in Suffolk's rural communities, distance and transportation can create real barriers to library access. SPL needed technology that could support daily operations while also making new, more flexible service models possible.

At the same time, the library team needed to:

- Manage operations efficiently with a small staff
- Configure systems to support a new library opening
- Expand access without increasing staff work
- Adapt services to meet evolving community needs

With Polaris supporting its day-to-day operations, SPL has strengthened its operational foundation and extended access beyond traditionally staffed library hours. For Suffolk, that flexibility shows up in several practical ways:



Connected services

Polaris integrates with SPL's self-checkout systems and supports patron authentication for services such as PC reservations, creating a seamless experience for patrons.



Manage operations across locations

Staff use Polaris to manage permissions, configurations and workflows across library locations.



Flexible staff workflows

Polaris gives staff greater flexibility in how and where they work, supported by continued training, webinars, and tools such as SimplyReports.



Extend services through connected technology

Polaris integrates with Bibliotheca Open+, helping SPL offer Extended Access at Chuckatuck Library and make more services available beyond traditionally staffed hours.

“Our staff love working in Polaris and are eager to learn more through training, webinars, and tools like SimplyReports.”

Kyle Binaxas

Tech and Content Strategy Manager
at Suffolk Public Library.

Technology should make service feel easier, not more complicated.

Extended access at Chuckatuck Library

To expand service in rural Suffolk, SPL introduced Extended Access at Chuckatuck Library through the integration of Polaris and Bibliotheca Open+.

Registered users authenticate with their library cards and can independently access the library, reserve spaces, check out materials and use public computers, even when staff are not physically present. Remote support remains available, helping transform a minimally staffed location into a flexible, functional community resource.

Through integration with Polaris:

- Patrons authenticate using their library cards
- Users can reserve spaces, check out materials, and access computers
- Community groups can use the space independently
- Remote staff support is available in real time

This model transforms a minimally staffed branch into a fully functional, self-service library experience. The results demonstrate how technology can expand access without increasing physical infrastructure:

70–80%

increase in usage

and increased community engagement at this location

- Expanded access to library services in underserved rural area
- Greater flexibility for staff managing multiple responsibilities

Access is not only about keeping a door open. It is about making space for what a community needs next.

The library wasn't designed simply to be visited. It was designed to be experienced and made accessible to the community in more ways than ever before. Polaris supports a connected service model that gives staff more flexibility and gives the community more ways to use the library. SPL's work reflects a larger vision: technology should not replace the human experience of the library. It should remove barriers, support staff, and help more people find a place to learn, connect, and belong.

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