

COVER TO COVER

COMMUNITY SURVEY 2025

The Westport Library



OVERVIEW

The Westport Library, open to all since 1908 and transformed in 2019, has prepared this report to share our findings from the 2025 Community Survey, conducted in service of developing a new five-year strategic plan.

The Library's cyclical planning processes are relentlessly aspirational, never in vain, and always in service of the Library's mission:

EMPOWERING INDIVIDUALS AND FOSTERING A CONNECTED, INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY.

The duality of the Library's mission – serving the individual and the community – creates complexity around its implementation. What one person needs may impede a group's needs being met; what the community wants overall may go against an individual's wish. Providing for both demands creativity, humility, open-mindedness and zeal for the democratic work of Libraries. It demands **inquiry, engagement and listening**: all of which are expressed through the consultative process of our community survey.

In addition to managing this duality is an even more formidable element of our mission: the work of recognizing the potential for divergent viewpoints and contrasting needs **to be the precise mechanisms by which communities become connected and inclusive**. To meet this potential is to celebrate contrary or even incompatible needs as opportunities for dialogue, the understanding, and exploration of the unknown. We invite this contrast, and we also cherish it as essential to our work of connection and inclusion.

We believe that this report showcases our commitment to this mission, in all of its complexity, and hope that it invites curiosity, reflection and openness in all who read it.

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INTRODUCTION

“IT IS THE PROVINCE OF KNOWLEDGE TO SPEAK AND IT IS THE PRIVILEGE OF WISDOM TO LISTEN.”

– Oliver Wendell Holmes

In 2025, The Westport Library carried forward the work it had begun the prior year to develop a multi-year strategic plan. In addition to forming a committee made up of members of the Board of Trustees and staff, the Library engaged a wide range of stakeholders to guide and influence the emergence of its strategic priorities.

As a publicly funded organization, strategic priorities will guide how our limited resources are deployed: in terms of our building space, our collection, our staff time, and our funding overall. We understand that we serve a diverse audience, and that some decisions on how to use our resources will limit other opportunities. The approach of engaging stakeholders is emblematic of the Library's commitment to prioritizing the diverse needs, wants and interests of the community, and reflecting these dimensions in its decision-making at all levels.

Receiving and using feedback and ideas from patrons is not a new concept for the Library. Post-event surveys, spontaneous input from visiting patrons, and even highly detailed written feedback are ongoing examples of how people share their opinions with staff, Board and leadership. However, this structured, formal and rigorous approach is a new initiative for the Library; it is based on our commitment to affirm and expand our impact to serve our best and highest purpose.

OPEN TO ALL

“IT IS A NARROW MIND WHICH CANNOT LOOK AT A SUBJECT FROM VARIOUS POINTS OF VIEW.”

– George Eliot

The Westport Library embraced its commitment to being “open to all” in its survey approach. The invitation to participate was universal, with the only barrier to participation being a minimum age of 14, which reflects Connecticut state law on data privacy.

The Library promoted the survey through on-site invitations to participate, including a kiosk in our Hub. Additionally, we included it in our mailed newsletter, our e-news and on our social media, as well as a special postcard mailer to every household in Westport.

The Library engaged its Board of Trustees, staff, donors and patrons in extending the invitation to participate in the survey. It took place from May 1 to May 31, 2025.

Importantly, the survey upheld The Westport Library’s commitment to creating space for diverse viewpoints to be heard. Most frequently, we do this work through our collection, our programs and our access points to resources that showcase a variety of perspectives and ideas, like databases and news sources.

Developing an open-to-all survey introduced a new way to create space for differing ideas and voices to be surfaced in Westport. The results speak to a range of viewpoints, opinions, and ideas that the Library appreciates and acknowledges with respect.

“I LOVE THE LIBRARY!”

- Respondent 114856536322

“HORRIBLE PLACE.”

- Respondent 114864319057

METHODOLOGY

“IT IS A CAPITAL MISTAKE TO THEORIZE BEFORE ONE HAS DATA.”

– Sherlock Holmes (Arthur Conan Doyle)

The Westport Library's 2025 community survey was designed to gain insight into key community needs, wants and interests. The survey was designed to answer a set of learning questions related to satisfaction, usage motivators, resource needs, awareness and beliefs.

The methodology used was a mixed-methods research approach using a digital survey tool. A survey was the most appropriate tool for building a large, representative sample; maintaining anonymity; and obtaining both quantitative and qualitative data. The census-style survey was anonymous with voluntary self-selected participation (non-purposive sampling) open to anyone age 14 or over.

The survey instrument contained optional modules and logic pathways that provided 22 to 35 questions, based on preliminary responses. It was composed of multiple choice, multi-select, Likert scale and open-ended question types. Questions were developed based on desk research into existing library and public entity surveys catalogued publicly, as well as customized questions specific to Westport.

The quantitative analysis processed data for missing data and outliers, and used simple analysis to identify proportionality and relative responses when parsing by demographic groups. Additionally, linear regression analysis was used to identify the influence of independent variables.

The qualitative analysis used thematic analysis to identify and code broad themes. The cross-referencing of codes from multiple qualitative questions, as well as parsing by user type and other identifiers, allowed for additional understanding of clusters and types within the respondent group.

LIMITATIONS

“YOU CAN’T HAVE IT ALL, BUT THERE IS THIS.”

– Barbara Ras

The Westport Library’s first open-to-all community survey was successful in gathering sufficient responses to be statistically representative of the community, and in providing insights and data that responds to the original learning questions set forth by the Library.

However, there are important limitations in how the data can be understood and used that should be applied to any interpretation of the findings.

The first limitation is related to small sample sizes limiting the statistical significance of findings. Specifically, people who identify as men, people who do not use the library and people between 14 and 45 had sample sizes too small to be representative of their demographic group.

Additionally, the survey took place less than a month after some members of the community protested a speaker who came to the library to speak at an event. The survey was shared with the community on the heels of a period of time during which the Library was engaged by an unusually high number of patrons about its program choices.

Furthermore, there is a potential sampling bias (undercoverage or self-selection) based on the probability sampling inherent in census-style surveys. It is possible that individuals with specific characteristics (such as higher resource needs, greater time availability, a relationship with a library staff person or Trustee, physical proximity to the library, etc.) were more likely to answer the survey.

Finally, it is relevant to note that this was the first formal, scaled community engagement survey done by The Westport Library. The community and the Library are not in an ongoing periodic or structured feedback dialogue, and it is possible that uncertainty about privacy and data use may have an influence on responses.

PARTICIPATION

“THE MOST COMMON WAY PEOPLE GIVE UP THEIR POWER IS BY THINKING THEY DON’T HAVE ANY.”

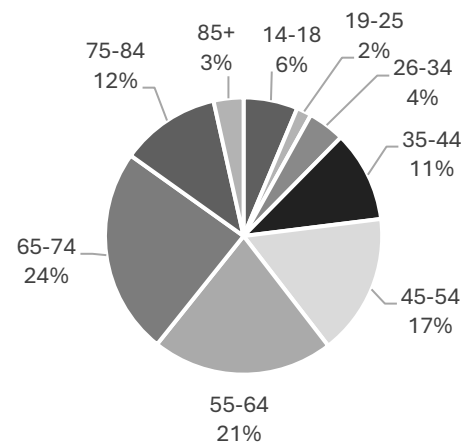
– Alice Walker

The Westport Library’s one-month community survey garnered 1399 responses. Based on Westport’s 2020 census data showing a population of 27,141, this is a statistically representative sample* with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%. As a result, we can interpret these results to be representative of Westport.

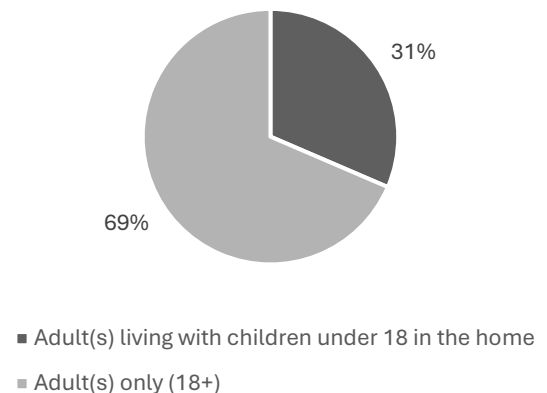
Respondents were largely women, largely Westport residents, and largely library users and cardholders. They are primarily from households of adults only, and over ¾ were age 45 or older.

Half of all respondents are employed full-time or part-time, and 30% are retired. 87% identify as white, 5% as Asian, 3% as Hispanic and 2% as Black.

Age Groups



Household Makeup



*The formula used to calculate a representative sample size is $n = (Z^2 * p * (1-p)) / E^2$, where n =the sample size; Z = a Z-score of 95%; p =population proportion of 50%; and E =margin of error of +/- 5%.

FINDINGS

The Westport Library...

2025 Community Survey

Informed Consent

Welcome to The Westport Library's 2025 community survey. We hope you will help us improve our programs and services and ensure The Westport Library's mission of empowering individuals and fostering a community of learners.

Your responses are anonymous and only the collection of your responses will be used with respect to the Library's [Privacy Policy](#).

SATISFACTION

LEARNING QUESTION: “What is the level of satisfaction with the Library?”

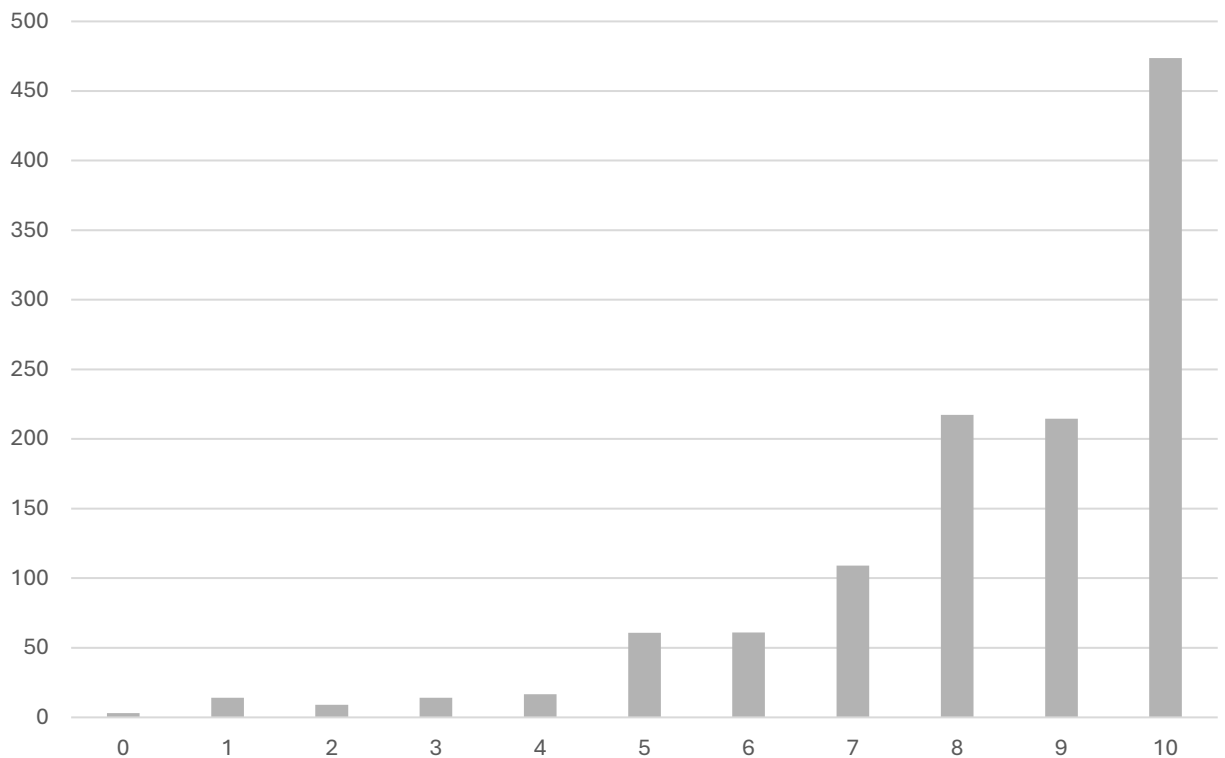
A key area of interest for the community survey was to understand respondents' satisfaction with the library generally, but also with specific attributes of our offerings and services.

The survey asked about three features:

- 1) Availability of what you're looking for
- 2) Welcome you receive
- 3) Library staff

Each feature had **an average rating of 8.4**, with the most frequent rating being a 10 across the board.

Satisfaction With Library Features



SATISFACTION

LEARNING QUESTION: “What is the level of satisfaction with the library?”

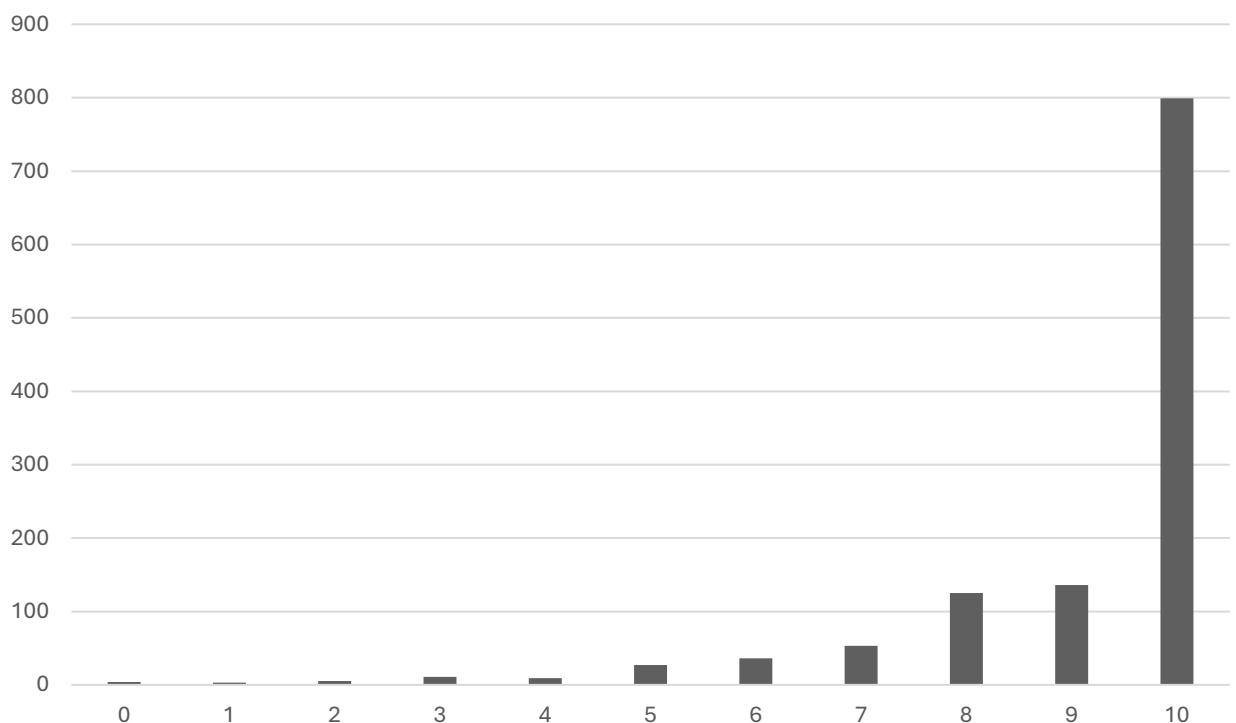
The survey also asked a standardized survey question that assesses the level of support – or promotion – for the Library by inquiring about a respondent’s likelihood to recommend it.

Survey respondents stated that they are very likely to recommend The Westport Library to someone. **2/3 of respondents rated their likelihood to recommend the Library as a 10 out of 10.** Just 5% of respondents rated their likelihood as 0 to 5 (59 people out of 1208 who answered this question).

This distribution of responses places the library in a range of excellence. Using a scoring matrix designed for this question, a score of over 30 is considered good and over 50 is considered excellent.

The Library’s score is 70.

Likely to Recommend



ACCESS & USE

LEARNING QUESTION: “How do people access and use the Library? Why?”

The survey explored access and use questions designed to build upon the Library’s existing empirical data (from building occupancy software and program check-ins) as well as observational data from staff. The findings affirmed the existing data and understanding:

Many patrons use the Library in-person (46%), and an equal amount (44%) blend in-person and virtual access points.

When asked why they use the Library, **nearly as many patrons said to access materials (65%) as said to attend programs (60%)**. Fewer than 1 in 3 come to work or study. Again, this is consistent with an existing understanding of the core community usages of the Library. Additionally, 80% of respondents said they have attended a program in the past 12 months.

A minority of Library users (under 30%) come to work or study.

However, when broken out by age group, we see that **¾ of users under 35 years old use the Library to work or study**. This finding reveals one of the divergent stakeholder needs that distinguish user groups. Whereas the average user is coming for materials or programs, the under 35 user is coming to work or study.

Finally, survey respondents who selected “Other” shared that they most often come for (1) Books, (2) Café and Store, (3) Using Meeting Rooms.

“THE ONLY THING YOU HAVE TO KNOW, IS THE LOCATION OF THE LIBRARY.”

- Albert Einstein

PROGRAMS

LEARNING QUESTION: “Are people attending programs? What are their interests?”

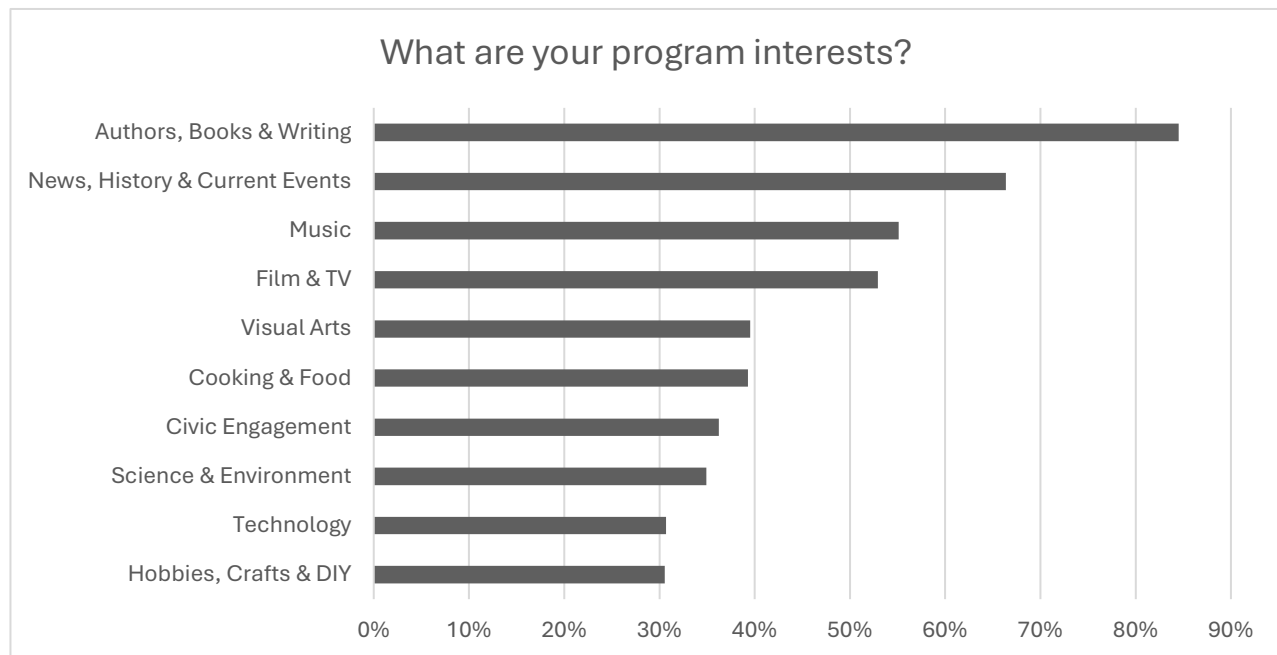
Public programs are a meaning way that The Westport Library creates and offers resources to its community and patrons. As noted, **4/5 of respondents have attended a program in the past year**, affirming this is a top access point.

When asked what the Library could do increase people’s use of the Library, **over 60% of respondents cited “Programs or events tailored to my interest” as the most likely factor to change their usage**. These results indicate an opportunity to adjust programs for increased alignment with community interests.

Top program interests varied by age group, by household type (households with or without children at home), and by Library use type.

Overall, the survey showed a top interest in **Authors, Books and Writing; News, History & Current Events; Music; Film & TV; and Visual Arts**.

To address the question of what’s missing, the Library evaluated its current programmatic distribution. While the **first four topics are matched by the Library’s most recent program focus areas**, a closer exploration of opportunities related to cooking & food, civic engagement and science & environment is needed.



PROGRAMS

LEARNING QUESTION: “Why are people attending programs? What needs are being met?”

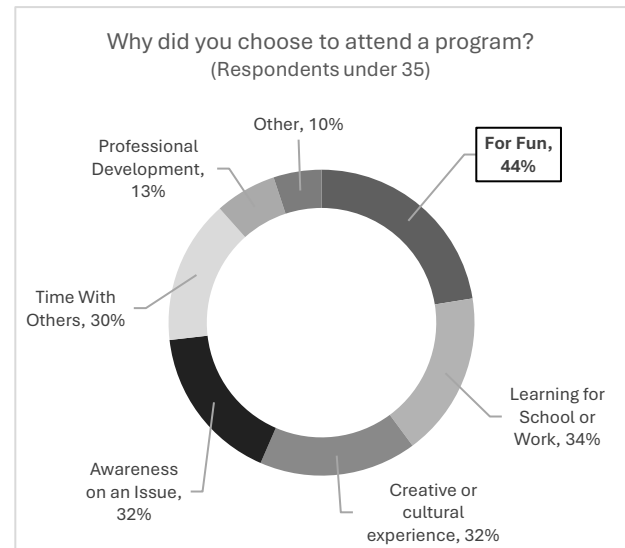
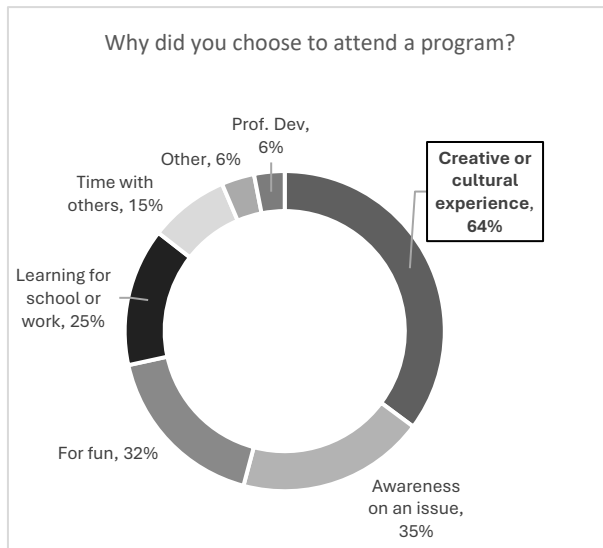
In addition, the survey explored what motivates program attendance and participation. While respondents reflected a range of reasons to join a public program, there is a clear driver of most program attendance:

A creative encounter or cultural experience (64%).

Based on respondents who provided voluntary demographic information, the survey also explored variability across groups.

While men and women do not diverge, respondents under age 35 reflect a different primary driver:

For fun (44%).



WHAT'S MISSING

LEARNING QUESTION: "What service gaps exist in the community?"

The Library understands itself to be one component in the broader fabric of the community and town's services and institutional supports. One key area of inquiry is how to complement other organizations by identifying service gaps.

Participants responded to this question with input specific to the Library, which remains meaningful for interpretation albeit in an unexpected way. The learning question evolves into "**What is missing from the Library?**" More than any other write-in option, this question received enormous participation from survey respondents: 346 individual responses were submitted.

Above all else, the top response (23 respondents) was "Nothing," with answers expressing **satisfaction with the Library's current resources and services.**

The second most frequent response (20 respondents) was a reference to books, including both an emphasis on books as well as physical access to books. This group **expressed a desire for more books, and book-centric offerings, in the Library.** The third largest cluster (13 respondents) noted that **more space and time dedicated to quiet areas was missing.**

Of note, 20 respondents also wrote in with individual program ideas, but almost none were repeated, making these ideas difficult to cluster.

**"NOTHING, THIS IS A
PHENOMENAL LIBRARY."**

-Respondent 114869639423

**"MORE HARD
COPIES OF
BOOKS."**

-Respondent 114859761611

**"QUIET TIME
AT THE
LIBRARY."**

-Respondent 114862157689

VISION & MISSION

LEARNING QUESTION: “What role are we perceived to play in the community?”

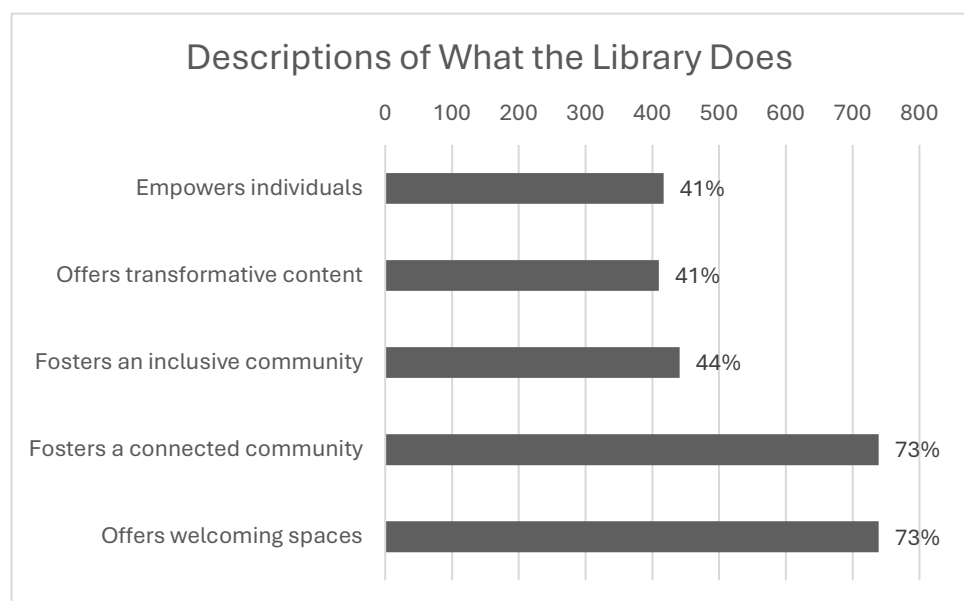
The Library’s multi-year strategic planning process included a committee-led review of its vision and mission statements, as well as its core values. The process engaged trustees and staff in refining its guiding organizational commitments and direction.

The survey focused on understanding how the community perceives the Library, as well as beliefs around the role the Library plays in the community.

73% of respondents agree that the Library “fosters a connected community” and “offers welcoming spaces.”

Additionally, **87% of respondents agreed that “Lifelong Learning” best describes the Library**, whereas fewer agreed with “Meaningful Connections” (34%) or “Bold Thinking” (31%).

Respondents were most likely to state that **the Library “reflects community interests” (73% or 845 people)**. 48% stated that the Library “adapts to changing needs” and just 20% stated that the Library “addresses unmet needs.”



SCHOOLS

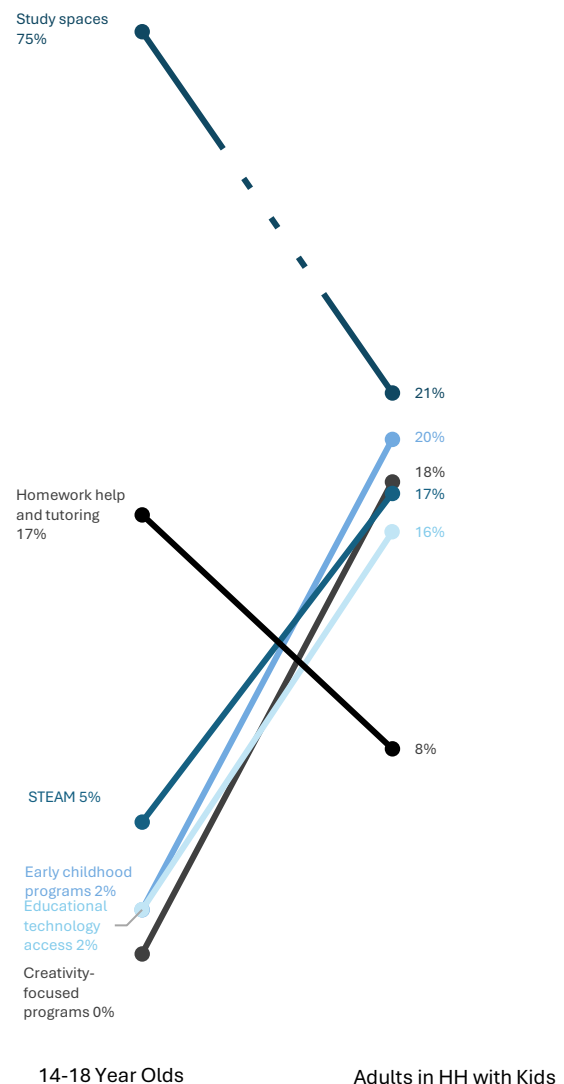
LEARNING QUESTIONS: “How well does the Library support schools and students? Where could we do more?”

The Library understands its services as being a key contribution to students' educational and academic journeys. The survey asked about satisfaction in various areas, as well as the importance of specific offerings. Finally, it asked for input on where it could do more.

Respondents showed **high satisfaction across all dimensions** (supporting the curriculum, contributing to social-emotional wellbeing, contributing to academic success), with **4 out of 5 stating the Library does this “well” or “very well.”**

For the importance of specific offerings, it depends who you ask. **75% of 14-18 year olds noted that study spaces were the most important feature**, whereas just 21% of adults from households with children agreed. Whereas not a single teen rated creativity-focused programs as the most important feature, 20% of adults from households with children said it was, making it their 2nd highest-rated feature.

Most Important Features by Age



Whereas teens rated homework help as most important after study spaces, this was least likely to be seen as the most important feature by adults with children under 18.

MAKING MEANING

“THE KEY TO GOOD DECISION-MAKING IS NOT KNOWLEDGE. IT IS UNDERSTANDING.”

- Malcolm Gladwell

The Library's stakeholder engagement was completed in a **rich environment of observational, quantitative and anecdotal data** that is collected continuously. The many systems used to monitor usage, access and satisfaction at the Library provide an array of complementary resources for understanding community needs and interests, as well as areas of growth.

The Library's leadership team and committee of Trustees applied this context to make meaning of the survey findings and transition them into strategic goals. The key understandings that emerged from this reflection are shared here, and are at the core of our emerging five-year strategic plan.

1. The Library is an epicenter for lifelong learning.

We understand that our community relates to us as a supporter, provider and driver of lifelong learning for all ages.

2. We must continue to reflect our community and evolve with it.

We understand that our community feels reflected by the Library, and we can work further to be adaptive.

3. Creativity is elemental to our offerings.

Our community comes for creative encounters, and are motivated to engage in creative programs.

4. The Library drives community connection.

As an institution open to all, the community understands that the Library fosters connection.

Finally, a key conclusion drawn from the survey is **the willingness, openness and commitment of the broader community to provide insights**, feedback and ideas to the Library. The rates of participation, the time spent and the depth of thought shared is a clear testament to the community's support for the Library's work of engaging its stakeholders in an open dialogue around needs, wants and interests.

THANK YOU

“RESEARCH IS FORMALIZED CURIOSITY.”

- Zora Neale Hurston

First and foremost, the Library thanks the nearly 1400 respondents who participated in this survey. We thank those who forwarded it to friends, passed it on to a neighbor or encouraged a family member to participate.

We also thank our staff, who were relentlessly curious, unreservedly supportive of this new outreach tool, and avowedly open to the feedback and ideas contained in these results. Their ability to reflect our community in programs and services is not only documented in these findings, but now in our emerging five-year strategy.

Thank you to the Board of Trustees, who created a committee dedicated to engaging stakeholders and supporting new ways of discovering and documenting feedback. The guidance and expertise they afforded to this project was invaluable.

The Library remains curious and open, and looks forward to future opportunities to share new findings and insights on how we can increasingly meet our mission of empowering individuals and fostering a connected, inclusive community.

September 2025