Methodology & Key Findings

Methodology

From the launch of the Library’s strategic planning process more than a year ago, it was understood that input from as many D.C. residents and stakeholders as possible would be needed to help the Library map out a compelling vision and direction for the Library over the next five years.

To this end, over a six-month period, DCPL staff reached out to residents, library users and partners, service providers and other stakeholders through a variety of channels to gather insights and perspectives on how they have used the library to date and what their priorities are for the future. The outreach effort included:

- A statistically valid phone survey of residents from every ward in the District, half of whom use the library with some frequency and the other half who use the library rarely or not at all;
- A shorter survey open to anyone available on the Library’s website or in paper form at library branches, community events and other locations;
- Three community meetings held at library branches in different regions of the District;
- A series of focus groups with diverse constituencies, community partners and service providers representing a wide range of users of library programs and services; and
- A system-wide survey and series of focus groups with library staff.

For more detail, see Appendix.
All in all, the Library engaged nearly 2,500 individuals across D.C., asking them challenging questions such as:

- What are the most important programs and services the library currently provides?
- What should the Library’s priorities be for the future?
- If you use the library rarely or not at all, why?
- Should the library continue to be all things to all people, or should it direct more resources to address the needs of specific communities?
- How can the Library improve operations so that residents’ needs are met by their local branch while making sure that they can access other quality services at branches in other communities, online or at other places outside the library walls in their own community?

Through this process, a variety of valuable and thought-provoking insights, ideas, perspectives and questions emerged. Beyond offering many excellent ideas and suggestions for how the Library can enhance and improve its programs and services moving forward, a handful of key themes emerged.

**Key Findings**

**Quality books and other traditional library offerings continue to rank the highest in terms of programs and services residents use or desire.**

Books and digital resources such as e-books and DVDs remain the most popular of the services offered by the library. Last year, residents borrowed more than three million books and other physical materials from the library while accessing more than one million e-books and other digital downloads. Access to more of these quality resources is at the top of residents’ list of priorities.

**Residents envision the library of the future as a community education hub.**

Residents across D.C. see convenient access to a branch location closest to their home as most critical. They want to see a library that offers not only books and other quality resources but also access to technology, more classes and cultural events for all ages; houses multilingual resources; and provides access to activities that offer learning and growth opportunities to build stronger local communities.

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1 All survey citations are from the statistically valid phone survey of D.C. residents conducted in 2015, unless otherwise indicated.
Community meeting participants were responsive to the idea of the Library tailoring its services to the needs of the community and forming strong partnerships with local school, universities and nonprofits.

Source: DC Public Library community meetings, 2015.

In addition, a significant number of residents—particularly residents from underserved groups and communities—say they would be more likely to use the library than they currently do if it were to expand its practice of offering services in other community locations outside the four walls of library branches. Staff and community service providers agree that the library should be an extension of the community. They see an opportunity to build stronger partnerships with local organizations and envision the library as a community connector that directs people to the information and resources these organizations provide.

Residents see the library serving their diverse communities in different ways.

Despite the importance they place on convenience and accessibility, most residents appear to recognize that all library branches cannot offer the exact same programs and services to residents of each community. They say they are willing to travel to other branches beyond their local community for cultural programs, literary events and certain other programs and services. And, the fact that residents’ expressed priorities vary significantly depending on where they live and other factors suggests they would value the Library being more thoughtful and targeted in what it offers and where.

The Library needs to do more to promote existing programs and services.

In the surveys and during all community meetings, a significant number of participants expressed their desire for the Library to do more to build awareness about existing programs, services and resources. Lack of awareness was an especially important issue for non-users and newer residents, and even frequent users stated they were not very familiar with the complete range of current offerings. They believed that their communities would be more inclined to use the Library’s programs and services if they were promoted more widely and effectively and there was increased community engagement.

These key findings, which emerged from the Library’s conversations with D.C. residents and library staff and partners ultimately helped guide the development of four major priority areas for the Library over the next five years. Along with the essential programs and services residents have come to count on and new initiatives already in the planning stages, the Library’s hope is that the priorities and initiatives outlined in this plan will ensure that all residents find something valuable in their library.