

# Executive Summary of Berkeley Public Library's 2019 Community Survey

Elliot Warren, Acting Director of Library Services, May 6, 2019

In spring of 2019, the Library surveyed the community to help identify how the organization could better serve community members. More than 4,000 people responded to the survey. The following executive summary is intended to help the Library use information from the survey to effectively shape its future budget, develop service priorities, and design operational practices and policies.

Themes that arose include the following:

## **How People Use the Library:**

Most patrons use more than one of the branches. The neighborhood branches, all recently renovated or rebuilt, are considered attractive and accessible. A majority of patrons indicated that their primary access points to Library services, including access to materials and programming, is via a neighborhood branch.

People are very happy with self-service options such as self-checkout and using the catalog independently to find material. However, a significant number indicated an interest in catalog improvements based upon their experience with some difficult elements of the Library's cataloging and catalog maintenance practices.

## **Sunday Hours**

Survey results show a significant interest in expanding hours and opportunities to attend public programs on Sundays. Currently only the Central Library is open for four hours on Sunday afternoons and is staffed relatively lightly; holding programming on Sundays is rare. Yet Sunday, as indicated in the survey, is a preferred time for programming. Many people also indicated an interest in the branches being open on Sundays.

## **Extended Service Hours**

The community is invested in the Library and, beyond an interest in Sunday hours at the branches, would like to see the Central Library open additional evening hours. Currently, Central is open after 6 PM on Mondays and Tuesdays.

## **Tool Lending Library**

The Tool lending Library is seen as a community treasure and is a secondary branch for a very large percentage of Library patrons. There is an interest in both expanded hours and expanded collections that include such things as culinary and other household tools.

## **Collections**

Obtaining access to reading materials is the primary interest of Library patrons, far above an interest in having a place to study or to attend programs. BPL patrons love the Library's new books, Lucky Day collection, eBooks and streaming media collections, access to Link+, and the ability to place online holds. Patrons would like the Library to have both deeper and broader collections. A primary patron interest is having greater access to more copies of newly published books, eBooks and electronic audiobooks to reduce wait times for popular materials. Patrons recognize that the Library cannot own all titles and that Link+ provides a very important service by allowing patrons to check out materials from libraries all across California and Nevada. Some patrons indicated an interest in ensuring that materials they suggest for purchase are ordered and that they can get access to those materials automatically.

### **Public Programming**

Programming was not indicated as a major interest of the majority of community members who answered the survey. A minority of respondents indicated that they attend public programs. Although important to some patrons, the Library is not currently widely perceived as a primary provider of cultural or educational opportunities for the community.

### **Publicity**

Patrons indicated an interest in hearing about Library happenings via email and on the Library's website. Few people learn about programs and services through traditional paper flyers and posters or via social media.

### **Customer Service**

Patrons indicated, generally, a high degree of satisfaction with customer services, although there were some indications of a need for more consistency and introducing more welcoming practices. Some patrons showed some discomfort with the number of seemingly unhoused community members who use the Library. Many patrons praised the Library for changes to the fines structure, initiation of automatic renewals, creation of new seating areas at Central, and the overall demeanor of the majority of staff.

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The survey provides an opportunity for the Library to shape future budgetary priorities and operational practices. These include the following:

- The Library should consider how to **expand hours** in as revenue-neutral a manner as possible
- Expansion of **tool lending services** (hours, programs, collections) should be prioritized
- The **collection budget** should continue to be increased for both physical and electronic materials, and staff should be engaged in the collection management process through data analysis and local refreshment of collections to ensure that money invested is used effectively.
- Public programming should be optimized by developing a Library-wide **programming plan** that more equitably incorporates a community input process and outcome measurement and evaluation practices. There is currently no way for patrons to consistently and effectively indicate their interests in or response to programs. This has translated into some unsatisfied patrons, inconsistent programming levels across the branches, and a practice of maintaining

legacy programs that serve a small number of patrons while others express feeling underserved. There is a clear need to develop and communicate programming priorities and to enable supervisors to develop programming assignments to better serve the community and help the Library play a more central role in the dissemination of cultural and educational information.

- The Library should consider how to develop a larger amount of **weekend programming**, given patrons' stated availability at those times, and the fact that some current programming attendance is relatively low.
- The Library should leverage its coming new **Integrated Library System** to provide access to an improved suggestion for purchase process, and to facilitate ease of use of the catalog. The online catalog, rather than physical browsing or mediated help from staff, is the primary means that patrons use to discover materials. The Library should continue to identify ways to improve call number and other cataloging practices so that people are better able to find materials independently.
- Publicity practices should focus upon refinement of the Library's **e-newsletter** and improvement of the Library's **online event calendar**. The Library should reduce the amount of time, material resources, and effort that goes into creation of printed publicity for programs.
- The Library should continue to develop practices and policies that make the Library **welcoming for all**. Continued staff trainings related to working with populations that are experiencing homelessness or mental health crises should be planned. Customer service trainings on such things as gender sensitivity, open listening, and improving the reference transaction should be initiated or continued.