DC Public Library Strategic Plan Community Meetings Report

In October 2015, as part of the strategic planning process, the DC Public Library held a series of public meetings for the community to share input on the library's programs and services. There were three meetings with more than 40 participants in total: The first was at Tenley-Friendship Library, the second at Shaw (Watha T. Daniel) Library and the third at Anacostia Library. These three locations were strategically chosen to ensure that input was gathered from a wide cross-section of the community, ensuring that residents from all racial/ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, ages, genders, education levels and neighborhoods were reached. These meetings were widely promoted on the library's website and social media, on promotional flyers and bookmarks throughout the branches, and in local media outlets, and they represented one of several methods used to gather input from the community to inform the library's strategic plan. Community members, partners and library staff were also asked to participate in a phone survey, focus groups and an online survey.

Library staff facilitated small group discussions at all community meetings. Facilitators invited attendees to comment on how they currently use the library and how the library currently serves their community. The facilitators also asked attendees to share their vision for the library in the next five years and to rate eight guiding principles on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the most important and 1 being the least important. (See appendix.) Support staff provided participants with data reports and poster boards that gave more context on library utilization data and D.C. community demographics.

This report is a summary of the results of the community meetings, based on a combination of notes taken at the meetings by designated note-takers and the information that attendees provided on the distributed worksheets. All quotes and feedback in this report are anonymous.

Summary of Participants

The summary below is based on the responses of participants who returned their worksheets at the conclusion of the meeting. Not all participants are represented.

Tenley-Friendship Community Meeting

Participant	Ward/Neighborhood	Main Library	Secondary Libraries
#1	Ward 1	Mt. Pleasant	MLK
#2	Ward 3/American University Park	Tenley-Friendship	MLK
#3	Ward 2/West End	MLK	Tenley-Friendship, West End
#4	Ward 3/Tenleytown	Tenley-Friendship	MLK, Cleveland Park
#5	Ward 3/Tenleytown	Tenley-Friendship	Cleveland Park, MLK
#6	Ward 2/Dupont Circle	MLK	Mt. Pleasant, Shaw, Georgetown
#7	Ward 3	Tenley-Friendship	Chevy Chase, Georgetown
#8	Ward 3	Chevy Chase	Tenley-Friendship, Palisades
#9	Ward 3	Info not provided	Info not provided
#10	Ward 3	Info not provided	Info not provided

Shaw Community Meeting

Participant	Ward/Neighborhood	Main Library	Secondary Libraries
#1	Ward 6/Shaw	Shaw	MLK
#2	Ward 6/Shaw	Shaw	MLK
#3	Ward 1/Columbia Heights	MLK	Petworth, Shaw
#4	Ward 2/West End	West End	MLK, Cleveland Park
#5	Shaw	Shaw	N/A
#6	Ward 3/Cleveland Park	MLK	Petworth, MLK, Cleveland Park
#7	Pleasant Plains	Shaw	Petworth
#8	Ward 5/Woodbridge	Lamond-Riggs	MLK, Woodbridge, Northeast

Anacostia Community Meeting

Participant	Ward/Neighborhood	Main Library	Secondary Libraries
#1	Ward 8	Anacostia	MLK
#2	Ward 8	Anacostia	MLK
#3	Ward 8/Congress Heights	Bellevue	MLK
#4	Ward 8	Anacostia	MLK
#5	Ward 7	Anacostia	Southeast
#6	Ward 8	Anacostia	MLK
#7	Ward 6/Navy Yard	Southeast	Anacostia
#8	Ward 8	Bellevue	MLK, Anacostia
#9	Ward 8	Bellevue	Parklands-Turner, Anacostia
#10	Ward 7/Hillcrest	Anacostia	Most other libraries
#11	Ward 8	Anacostia	Bellevue

Key Findings

- Almost everyone stated that they primarily use their library branch to check out books and access space for meetings and study. Only a few participants said they use more innovative services, such as Digital Commons and labs, programs for Makers, and 3-D printing.
- Participants at all meetings agreed that the library should serve as a community gathering place where people of all backgrounds can gather and learn together, although everyone had a different. It is important to note that the "Community Gathering Place" guiding principle was not ranked the highest or second highest at any of the meetings.
- The widest range of opinions was in the idea of equal access. It is important to note that there were differing opinions in all meetings about the definition of equal access. While some thought it referred to equality in programming and services, others thought it was a reference to accessibility for people with disabilities. Many believed that all branches should offer the same exact services and programs, making it easier for those who live far away from the main branch to still participate. Other participants felt that the library's investments would go further if each branch tailored its offerings to the needs of the immediate community. For example, more GED preparation programs in Anacostia may be needed, but the college-aged demographic in Shaw may prefer more software programs like Adobe Photoshop and Dreamweaver.

- Participants at all meetings also extensively commented on the community-driven aspect of the library. Many liked the idea of the library tailoring its services to meet the unique needs of the city; however, few favored the idea of the library changing at the whim of the community's "new or different interests."
- While the general consensus at the Tenley community meeting was that there was too much technology in libraries, participants at the Anacostia and Shaw meetings disagreed and believed that technology is the selling point that will initially draw users in to the variety of other programs and services offered.
- In all meetings, at least one person expressed interest in the library offering services outside of the physical branches. Many mentioned stronger partnerships with DCPS, local universities and nonprofit organizations.
- Participants at all meetings mentioned increasing marketing and communication to reach a wider audience. Many stated that they were unaware of the library's offerings and believed that their communities would be more motivated to use the library's programs and services if they were better informed.

Key Quotes

"The library is a vehicle to have a conversation and meet like-minded people." – Tenley participant

"I like the computers, but I think the libraries should be so much more, including where children come and enjoy the atmosphere with parents and caregivers, where adults and teens can share books and have conversations, and where authors and readers can share and learn." – Tenley participant

"The library should do more or as much as possible to do well, with the freedom to pilot new programs and phase out others." – Tenley participant

"I'd like to see DCPL continue to be a leader in the city, having their talented staff continue to innovate and show the citizens the way forward." – Shaw participant

"Makerspace is a broadly appealing, "future-proof" program that benefits users well into the future. The desire to make is strong in many people, and the skills gained in a maker environment (crafts, music, modeling) can be applied across disciplines throughout life." – Shaw participant

"DCPL should be the keeper of community opportunities." – Shaw participant

"The library is a place to bring the immediate community together to discuss issues important to them." – Shaw participant

"The library needs to find a way to get parents into the library so the kids will want to follow." – Anacostia participant

"I'd like my library to connect me with community-based nonprofits and services for families." – Anacostia participant

"What if kids that are acting up in school knew that they could make websites? That's what the library is for." – Anacostia participant

"It's not so much technology vs. books. My vision of an ideal library is that it's a central resource location and something that can provide all these resources and programs." – Anacostia participant

Tenley Community Meeting
Oct. 1, 2015

Overview

- About 15 participants; 10 handed in worksheets. Most participants were from Wards 1, 2 and 3.
- Six participants stated that they use the Tenley-Friendship library, though a few suggested that they use MLK just as often.
- Other home branches include Mt. Pleasant and Chevy Chase.
- Participants stated that they currently use the library most often to check out new books, borrow online materials and resources, use meeting spaces, and participate in book clubs and discussion groups.
- Participants rated the "Equal access" guiding principle the highest (5/5) and the "Community gathering place" and "Conveners" guiding principles the lowest (4.3/5 and 4.4/5). On average, no guiding principle was rated below a 4.

Highlights

- Participants at the Tenley community meeting stated that they would like the library to focus on physical space in the future. This ranged from the warmth and surroundings inside to more openness that may encourage greater collaboration, communication and social interaction. In addition, some users felt that librarians themselves should encourage this.
- Participants at the Tenley community meeting felt the library should offer and do more. Specifically, participants mentioned more computer classes, more art shows and concerts, special programming for children and seniors, and resources in languages other than Spanish and English.
- Participants at Tenley placed less emphasis on computers and technology than participants at other meetings. They were more interested in events and services that could bring the community together, more welcoming spaces for conversations and interaction, and greater physical space for books and resources.
- Participants highlighted communication as a key barrier to sharing information. They suggested that the library could communicate more often via its e-newsletter (some did not know the library has an e-newsletter), better advertise events and services on TV screens and flyers, and use social media to bring in non-users. Participants also expressed frustration about navigating the website.
- Tenley participants identified increased communication and promotion, more tailored programming, and greater interaction with non-users as key opportunities for the future.

Shaw Community Meeting
Oct. 5, 2015

Overview

- About 12 participants; 8 handed in worksheets. This group was the most diverse, with participants representing Wards 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6.
- Most participants use the Shaw library as their main branch. Secondary branches mentioned included MLK, Petworth and Cleveland Park.
- Participants stated that they currently use the library to reserve meeting space, reserve and check out books, access the internet and computes, and use study rooms.
- Participants rated the "Equal access" guiding principle the highest (4.6/5) and the "Filling needs" guiding principle the lowest (3.9/5).

Highlights

- Participants emphasized that DCPL become community responsive rather than community driven. Participants felt that, as a trusted resource, DCPL should take the interests of the community into account, but they also felt that the library should be empowered to lead the way and expose the community to programs and services that residents may not be aware they need. Many urged DCPL not to forget the "voiceless," or those who have lived in the city for many years and may not have their interests considered due to demographic changes in the city.
- The idea of the library as a place that could potentially "open doors" for the community and individuals who live there, such as by reducing illiteracy rates and being a thought leader in reading, was particularly salient.
- Some participants felt the library should be a neutral and safe convening space for groups in the community, whether religious, political or cultural.
- Participants said they would like the library to consider programming outside of the physical branches in an effort to draw people to the services inside. Specifically, participants mentioned the lack of coordination between DCPL and D.C. schools and the unequal access to programming in Wards 7 and 8.
- Many felt that the library could improve its messaging and branding to market the library as "the first place to go," consistent with the perception that people do not know what the library has to offer.
- As key opportunities for the future, Shaw participants identified innovation and high standards in offerings and atmosphere. Many challenged DCPL to think beyond the physical space of the branches.

Anacostia Community Meeting
Oct. 8, 2015

Overview

- About 15 participants; 11 handed in worksheets. Most attendees were from Wards 6, 7 and 8.
- Most participants use the Anacostia branch and at least half mentioned MLK as their secondary branch.
- Other home branches included Bellevue, Parklands-Turner and Southeast.
- Participants currently use the library to access computers and technology, check out books and DVDs, reserve meeting and study space and attend children's story time.
- Participants rated the "Filling needs" guiding principle the highest (4.6/5) and the "Conveners" guiding principle the lowest (3.7/5).

Highlights

- More so than at other community meetings, Anacostia participants emphasized that there needs to be greater availability of literacy-based programming for both children and adults. In addition, while it is understood that books are important, some explained they believe that the library should take it one step further to improve information literacy, not just access.
- Some participants felt that in order for DCPL's services and programs to be available to everyone, all library branches should have the same offerings. Even more, participants felt that the library should serve as a place where the community comes together. Attendees emphasized the need for more cultural programming, more services for children and teens, and increased programming for seniors and other underrepresented populations. Some participants even suggested that the physical space of the library should remain flexible, not just for storing books, but also as a space for cultural programming, events and adult classes.
- Participants urged DCPL to provide increased guidance to users on resources for life skills, jobs and education so that the library remains a vital resource for all communities. For example, one person stated that their branch currently does not offer much help with certification programs.
- Many participants said that the library must increase outreach to youth (ages 10-16) with a leadership program, more tutoring, and programs that prepare students for future job and college opportunities.
- More so than at other community meetings, there was an emphasis on health and wellness programs, like yoga, for all branches, not just MLK and other branches downtown.
- Participants felt that the library should coordinate with local organizations already familiar to community members in order to reach non-users. For example, DCPL could work with local nonprofits to provide free seminars and research tools for job-seekers and help job-seekers learn about growing job sectors.
- Participants emphasized that there should be increased investment in toddler and pre-K literacy programs and that events should include parents in addition to children.

APPENDIX

DC Public Library Strategic Plan Community Meeting Discussion Guide and Worksheet

Step 1:

Your Neighborhood/Ward:_____

Library location you visit/use the most: _____

Other libraries locations you visit/use:_____

Step 2:

How do you use the library now? What services do you find helpful/not helpful? Why?

Notes:

_____

Step 3:

Guiding Principles: Rate the importance of each principle on a scale of 1-5 with 5 representing "MOST important" and 1 representing "LEAST important" - then discuss.

Principle		Rating
EQUAL ACCESS	Libraries should provide equal access to library services and programs to everyone in the community, across library branches.	
COMMUNITY DRIVEN	The services the library offers should be customized based on what the community wants, and should change if the community has new or different interests.	

FILLING NEEDS	The library's offerings should be based on improving the community and meeting its needs.	
LITERACY AND LOVE OF READING	The library should focus on services that promote reading as well as literacy services for those in the community who cannot read well or at all.	
LIFELONG LEARNING	The library should be a place where people of all ages come to learn and be enriched.	
TRUSTED RESOURCE	The library should be a resource community members can trust to provide a rich array of materials -- from books to electronic media to digital information -- and librarian advice and expertise.	
COMMUNITY GATHERING PLACE	The library should be a place where people can come to spend time, see their neighbors, and have a sense of community.	
CONVENERS	The library should work to bring people and organizations together and to get people involved in the community.	

Notes:

_____

Step 3:

Looking toward the future, how can the library best serve the community's needs? What is your vision for the Library?

Notes: