GLADYS E. KELLY PUBLIC LIBRARY
COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUPS
SUMMARY REPORT 2023

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS = 16

- **Focus Group #1** (3/7/23 9:30-11:00am) **=** 11
- **Focus Group #2** (3/9/23 6:30-8:00pm) **=** 5

1. **WHAT ARE THE FIRST TWO (2) THINGS THAT COME TO MIND WHEN YOU THINK OF THE LIBRARY?**

- Activities
- Audio Tapes
- Beautiful Building (3)
- Books (4)

- Community (3)
- Community Center (3)
- Education (2)
- Expand Mind
- Great Staff
- Huge Book Selection
- Kids
- Lifelong Love
- Programs
- Quiet (2)
- Resources (5)
- Information
- Safe (2)
- Solace
- Warmth/Welcoming
- Wonderfully Cozy

MISC. COMMENTS:
- A community center for community happenings.
- It's a beautiful facility, but it's underutilized.
- Place of many great resources (books, computers, special activities, resource center).
- Safe environment for youth to gather and utilize the resources.
- See a lot of different groups and ages and lots of activities for them.
- Warmth. It's welcoming. Patrons are talking to patrons.

2. **TELL US WHAT YOU THINK IS CURRENTLY <u>GREAT</u> ABOUT THE LIBRARY. FOR EXAMPLE, IF YOU WERE TELLING A FRIEND ABOUT THE LIBRARY, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY YOU LIKE THE MOST? WHAT MAKES IT SPECIAL OR UNIQUE?**

   PROGRAMS (12):
   - **Diversity of Programs (5):** Program diversity. The programs fit the community's needs. (3) || Diversity of programs offered (book group, cookbook group). (2)
   - **Relevant Programs (4):** They defy the old view of what a library offers.
   - **Incredible Quantity of Programs (2)**
   - **Misc. (1):** Book groups

   FACILITY (11):
   - **Meeting/Study Space (4):** Meeting space availability. (2) || The space itself. The small conference rooms can be used for tutoring and small group meetings. || Good for study sessions.
   - **Beautiful Building (2):** The building is a focal point. || Modern with beautiful architecture.
   - **Community Room Space Flexibility (2)**
   - **Misc. (3):** Central location || Cozy environment. Well kept. || Kids' space.

   MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS (8):
   - **Staff (7):** Great staff (4) || Like the staff. They're extremely helpful and friendly. (2) || Amazingly friendly staff
   - **Misc. (1):** Volunteers

   COLLECTIONS (1): Audiobooks are a resource. Participant gets them through Hoopla and Libby.

   MARKETING (1): Strong outreach

   SERVICES (1): Being a part of the interlibrary loan network. It's so valuable to be able to get a book even if our Library does not have it in its collection. You can always find a title in some library in the system. All 5 participants in Focus Group #2 have used the interlibrary loan program.

   MISC. COMMENT: A participant mentioned she is new to Webster.

3. **IF YOU WERE TELLING A FRIEND ABOUT WHAT THE LIBRARY NEEDS TO IMPROVE, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY NEEDS THE MOST ATTENTION? PLEASE BE AS SPECIFIC AS POSSIBLE.**

   MARKETING IDEAS (27):
   - **Improve and Expand Marketing (8):** Collaborate more with schools. Connect with the new superintendent. (3) || Create marketing materials and messages

that attract more people to the Library. || From her perspective as a teacher, she wants us to find a way to communicate better with students. Promote things in person—not just in print. Also, promote youth programs and services to parents so they know what is available. || He agrees that library offerings aren't marketed well. || Increase marketing || Library needs greater visibility.

- **Increase Outreach (6):** Connect with the 8-18 age group || Determine how to connect and engage with the diverse community (e.g., targeted age groups) || Reach out to different, underserved populations || Reach out to lower socioeconomic and racially diverse groups. || Reach out to groups that serve local youths (e.g., Girl Scouts, Brownies, youth clubs, Boy Scouts). Youth clubs need meeting space. Promoting library meeting space could spark interest among kids who might visit the Library for other events. || He wants to see diverse groups of people in the Library. He usually sees white, middle-class, and middle-aged people like himself. Others would really benefit from the Library.
- **Misc. (9):** Use a message board with a static screen highlighting activities for the week (e.g., "This Week at the Library.") (9)
- **Website Feedback (4):**
  - 4 of the 5 Focus Group #2 participants have visited the website.
  - The calendar is good. It lets you know what is happening. The diversity of the books and populations addressed is incredible. For example, the Black History book display was great.
  - It's hard to say what to improve on the website. You would have to compare it with other libraries' websites. That's how to see what is missing. She assumes someone is already doing that.
  - The website is very well done. It's easy to navigate and user-friendly. Seems thorough.

MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS IDEAS (24):

- **Add Weekend Hours (11):** Add hours on Saturday and Sunday afternoons (8) || More time on Saturdays than Sundays. || Nice to have expanded weekend hours. || Saturdays to 5 pm.
- **Add Weekday Afternoon/Evening Hours (11):** Wednesday afternoon/evening (8) || Nice to have expanded evening hours. || Would like the Library to be open beyond 5 pm. Stay open until 7 or 9 pm. || Extend Wednesday hours to be the same as other days.
- **Add More Hours (2)**
- **Related Comment:** She realizes that it is a small library that doesn't have the resources. However, a different crowd would visit in the evenings and on weekends. It could appeal to a more diverse population.

PROGRAM IDEAS (9):

- **Bring People Together (5):** Encourage affinity groups (knitting group, walking group) to use the facility. After meeting at the Library about their favorite topic/interest, they can use the Library for other purposes while they're there (borrow books et al.). || Encourage more use of the Library by the town. || Foster inclusiveness and

community connections. || Get creative regarding how to draw in people. Do a book swap in which people bring books from home and get to select three new ones to take home while talking with other book lovers. || Have everyone in the community read the same book.

- **Increase Variety of Programs (2):** Offer new and different types of programs. Consider a pancake breakfast with books on the history of pancakes. Can tie the activity to literature. || Consider programs that might appeal to multicultural groups. Create different types of book groups that cater to different niches—don't just have everyone read the same book and talk about it.
- **Offer Conveniently Scheduled Children's Programs (2):** Offer more programs that accommodate working families' schedules (e.g., on weekends). For example, weekend puppet shows, art journaling for middle school kids on the weekends, etc.. || Offer a "vacation camp"—a place for kids to attend programs while school's out.

FACILITY IDEA (1): Add more storage space.

4. **WHAT CAN THE LIBRARY DO TO BETTER SERVE YOU AND YOUR FAMILY? CONSIDER ANY YOUNG CHILDREN, TWEENS, TEENS, AND ADULTS IN YOUR HOUSE. WHAT CAN WE DO TO ENCOURAGE YOU (AND THEM!) TO USE THE LIBRARY MORE?**

FACILITY IDEAS (6):

- **Clean Up and Organize the Space (3):** She has found loose toys (blocks!) everywhere in the children's area. She would like to see it organized. The Library needs to make it easy for the kids to pick up and put items in bins. Consider what makes kids want to take care of the materials. || It would be good to clean up the space and see it organized. || Space should be more organized.
- **Enhance the Children's Room (2):** It would be good to see more kids upstairs. Often, there aren't a lot of children there, but he finds the things there used by kids. || Would like to see children able to sit and play and engage at the Library. Different types of manipulatives are needed for kids. In another library she frequented, there were activity boards with pulleys and gears; need a variety of materials. And make it interesting for kids. Think like kids think.
- **Misc. (1):** Wants to see the community room full all the time. He sees it empty a lot.

MARKETING IDEAS (5):

- **Increase Community Outreach/Collaboration Activities (5):** Contact other local organizations (e.g., Boys/Girls Club, Chamber of Commerce, Historical Commission, Ski Club, and Lake Association). (3) || Cross-pollinate the Library's marketing tools/platforms with other community groups' marketing resources. Cultivate promotional partnerships (e.g., shared email lists). || Expand the Library's promotional outreach efforts.

PROGRAM IDEAS (12):

- **Preferred Program Formats/Venues (10):** Prefers in-person events. (4) || Balance virtual and in-person events. || Ensure virtual events are available, especially during winter and for the shut-in and senior populations. || If sponsored by the Library, a program can be held anywhere in town. || I love the in-person programs and gatherings. Some activities are easier to conduct virtually, but having discussions in the same room is great. || The type of program determines the best venue. For example, if it's a music program, it should be in person. A cemetery-related lecture could be presented virtually via Zoom. || Maybe you have an off-site event linked to a library program. For example, for a cemetery-related lecture, visit a cemetery. Emphasize in-person programs because we have great space. || Love activities at the Library or outdoors at the lake during the off-season.
- **Misc. (2):** Offer GED classes || Ensure that programs offered are useful.

SERVICES IDEAS (3):

- **Misc. (3):** Continue offering discounted museum passes. 3 participants in Focus Group #1 stated they use and value the passes. || Offer virtual office hours (e.g., "Ask the Librarian"). || The Orthodox church enables support groups to use their space. Maybe a library meeting room could be used by community support groups, too (e.g., coping with death and dying). By providing a public meeting space where groups can meet, attendees are introduced to the Library.

MISC. COMMENT: When the participant's four kids were young through middle school, they visited the Library to play with toys and get passes for the EcoTarium and the Science Museum. The use of those was very important. Then, they found things online. Now, her kids are older. Her daughter uses audiobooks, and the participant uses library space for tutoring.

5. **SEVERAL SURVEY RESPONDENTS INDICATED THAT THEY RARELY OR NEVER USE THE LIBRARY. WHAT CAN WE DO BETTER TO ATTRACT THEM?**

- Continue to work on relationships with parochial and public schools.
  - o Participate in events at the schools.
  - o Have booths at school events.
  - o Distribute an information package at the end of the school year to encourage children to use the Library in the summer.
- Target the summer lake population as potential patrons. Determine how best to reach them.
- It would be nice if the Library would distribute Welcome Packets when people first move to Webster. Several participants supported this idea. A new resident participant said she received a welcome packet when she moved to her previous town.
- Incentivize kids to get library cards. Gamify the process—sponsor drawings for things they want.
- Gamifying might work for adults, too.

- For people without children, partner with local businesses to pass out a pamphlet, magnets, or something else at the businesses to remind people of the Library. For example, local businesses have library scratch tickets available, but people must visit the Library to see what they won.

6. **THERE ARE A LOT OF EVENTS GOING ON IN OUR TOWN, INCLUDING WHAT THE LIBRARY OFFERS. IT CAN BE CHALLENGING FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO KNOW WHERE TO GO TO FIND OUT ABOUT THEM. HOW IMPORTANT IS IT FOR THE TOWN TO HAVE A CENTRALIZED COMMUNITY EVENTS CALENDAR?**

- A centralized, town-wide community events calendar would be valuable to all residents. It's very important. (16)
- Currently, residents must review multiple information sources to learn what's going on in town.
  - One participant follows several websites to learn what's going on locally. She constantly sees people confused about when fireworks, elections, etc., will be held. Providing a centralized means to disseminate all community activity information would be great.
  - Now, most of the information is on the town of Webster's website, but you must really dig to find it. People don't have the time or persistence to look for it. The board outside the town hall is okay for big events.
- **Calendar Ideas and Specifications:**
  - Organize the events by venue, date, and location.
  - Keep it simple. Present all the information in one place.
  - Loves the word "Hub" (e.g., community hub). It can disseminate Webster's information from an easily accessible central site. Show **all** local activities.
  - Utilize library resources to share the Town-wide calendar.
  - Utilize the Town website, cable channel, local newspapers, and social media to share the community calendar.
  - Examples of other communities' centralized information websites:
    - Discover Central Mass (tourism organization): Pulls in local events.
    - Social Web (Worcester-based site): An RSS feed, like a blog, that posts events.
    - A participant mentioned that Wayne, Maine maintains a single site to present all community events.

WHAT ORGANIZATION SHOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR CREATING AND MANAGING A CENTRALIZED COMMUNITY CALENDAR?

- While all participants agreed that a centralized community calendar would be very valuable, a majority don't think the Library should be responsible for creating and maintaining it.
- **Library to Coordinate—No (11):**

- The Library should be the conduit for promoting and contributing to the centralized community event calendar, but NOT the calendar developer. That is the town's responsibility. (10)
- The Library is the place to get information, but it should not originate the information.

- **Library to Coordinate—Yes (3):**
  - The Library is the perfect venue to bring all the threads together. It would be a win-win. When this participant was new to Webster, she did not know where things were. In another town where she lived, there was a recreation department website with everything pertaining to town events, and all knew where to go. She called our town and was told we don't have a recreation department. She thinks the Library could do it because it's a community hub. The Library would have to reach out to other local organizations so that they would know what to add to the centralized calendar.
  - The Library is in a good position to facilitate the gathering of information. The Library could drive the conversation and help promote the online hub, but other organizations could post their own events. Recreation department events don't have to be on the library calendar, but the recreation department can drive the conversation to create the hub.
  - The Library would have to both receive and solicit data.

- **MISC. UNRELATED IDEAS (2):** A welcome package from the town with library information in it would introduce the Library to new residents. || It would be great to have a summer or fall fair with organizations bringing their info to the Library to share their services with the community.

7. **HOW CAN THE LIBRARY BECOME A COMMUNITY HUB FOR WEBSTER? WHAT IDEAS DO YOU HAVE FOR HOW THE LIBRARY CAN BETTER CONNECT PEOPLE TO INFORMATION <u>AND</u> TO OTHER PEOPLE?**

MARKETING IDEAS (4): Strengthen the relationship with schools. Liaise with schools more frequently. (3) || Use a screen projector to promote programs/events on the rear exterior of the building.

FACILITY IDEAS (2): || Create a storyboard. Post it outside on the Library's exterior wall. || Find space for outdoor events (outdoor pavilion?). It's good to have outdoor activities.

MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS IDEAS (2): Challenge: Kids come in late at the end of the school year to fulfill their community service requirements. The Library needs more structured programs for them. Any age could teach something (cooking, et al.). Think of interesting, creative ways for them to meet their service requirements AND add value to the Library. || Increase funding for library programs.

PROGRAM IDEAS (9):

- **Conduct Town Information Sessions (3):** Have a coffee hour, "Get to Know Your Town," with Q and A sessions. || Host a library Open House with refreshments. Conduct tours and educate community members about library offerings (who we are, here's what we offer, etc.). || Town department information sessions. Department representatives can provide an overview of what they do and the department's current projects.

- **Intergenerational Activities (2):** Intergenerational activity is important. The participant said another town offers a senior citizen and elementary school writing group. The Library could sponsor a one-day class led by kids (community service) presented to seniors (e.g., technology topic). || Schedule a Grandparents' Sunday or Grandparents' Day. It would bring people to the Library. Sometimes, parents are busy, but grandparents could bring children.

- **Multicultural Programs (2):** Ask people from diverse cultures to share their backgrounds and cultural information, especially with kids. For example, reach out to the Spanish community, which is very diverse—from all over the world. A Colombian priest at a local church may be able to help reach members of the Spanish community. || A participant said she loves the idea of people sharing what they know with others. For example, information about a hobby. For people sharing, "it just fills their bucket." It makes them feel confident. People who receive the information learn. Perhaps enable people to reserve time with someone who has a specific skill and is willing to share it. Or once a week, come learn about XX or YY if you are interested. It could have a multicultural component.

- **Misc. Ideas (2):** Offering outdoor activities is a good idea. It may attract people who are hesitant to enter the Library (e.g., shy, introverted, or unaware of library offerings). || Conduct a series of relevant resource information sessions (health, financial aid, housing).

SERVICES IDEAS (2): Offer support services for families. || Rent out the Library for birthday or other gatherings.

8. HOW DO YOU ENVISION THE LIBRARY IN THE FUTURE? WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE? WHAT SHOULD IT DO? OR OFFER?

TECHNOLOGY IDEAS (10):

- **Offer and Utilize Current Technology (9):** Have technology experts available who can help the public with technology (3) || Stay on top of technology (3) || Be on the cutting edge with technology. Invite people to "come to see the latest game" and have someone available to teach them. Then, recommend a book that complements the specific technical knowledge area. The staff is good at doing that. || Library must keep technology in mind. Always think ahead. How will we meet the technological needs of young and old even three and four years from now? || Schools teach about technology a lot. It's part of their mission statement. Computer literacy is also important for those out of school (post-high school).

- **Misc. (1):** Offering gaming devices and information is important, too. Not all kids have access to gaming at home.

MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS IDEAS (8):

- **Mission/Purpose/Focus (6):** Ensure the Library makes choices that support the mission and community. || Focus on fellowship, community, education, outreach, service, and informational resources. || Focus on bringing people together and building a sense of "community." || For all ages, ensure the Library's a great place to be. Offer something for everyone. || Generally, increase knowledge and learning of the town's population. The Library should be (and is) doing that. || Support lifelong learning, not just for K-12. Be a source of information and community resources (books, programs).
- **Equitable Access to Relevant Information (2):** Make information equitably available to diverse demographic groups. || Provide relevant information, like financial literacy. Stay on top of what is relevant to make it available.

PROGRAM IDEAS (6):

- **Enhance Financial Literacy (2):** Offer financial literacy programs for all ages. || A participant wants to see the Library work more on strengthening financial literacy. Many people don't have a basic understanding of finance, especially children. Offer information and resources to them while they're young—still in school.
- **Misc**. **(4):** Conduct field trips to the Library. Bring students there to the Library. || Offer self-directed activities for children. || Develop traveling exhibits. Bring the Library out into the community, where the people are. || Have patrons draft website articles/oral history (e.g., what the Library means to me) that present personal stories about the impact libraries have had on common citizens. It will help demonstrate why libraries are important to the community and to the human experience.

MARKETING IDEAS (5):

- **Understand What Diverse Demographic Groups Want/Need (4):** Find out what appeals to tweens/teens || Increase outreach to the entire community || Look at how major retailers (e.g., Amazon) want to profile you, so they can recommend what you would like. The Library must better understand the community and its patrons (e.g., by age group). It must make recommendations for books and programs that suit each population group. || A participant said they love the idea of really knowing the patrons and community. Need algorithms or data collection. Conducting an annual survey would be good. Collecting the data identifies what they what and helps drive what is provided. Attract more responses by incentivizing it (e.g., get a tote bag if you complete the survey).
- **Misc. (1):** Collaborate with the school. Coordinate library resources with the schools to avoid duplication and enhance cross-promotion.

COLLECTIONS IDEA (1): Offer educational resources that improve people's lives.

FACILITY IDEA (1): Conduct ongoing maintenance and repairs to preserve the library building.

SERVICE IDEA (1): Offer home delivery of materials.

FINAL THOUGHTS

- **Feedback about the Library (3):** Because of time constraints, one focus group attendee can't participate much in the library activities right now. However, she recommends library offerings to parents and students. It's a great resource, and she encourages people to use it. || The Library does a great job of making programs and resources available. They are offering a lot. Great job, but there's always room for improvement. || The staff is so talented, caring, and energetic. They do great things.

- **Focus Group Feedback (3):** The Library's preaching to the choir in this group. She hopes the strategic plan engages more people, especially young people. That way, using the Library will become a lifelong habit. || We covered a lot today. People shared many great ideas. She's excited and feels the momentum. She can't wait to see what comes of it and knows the Library will put effort into addressing the topics discussed. || Tonight's conversation was inspiring. She wants to see where it goes.

- **Strategic Advice (2):** Don't forget books! || Don't be afraid to take risks.