REPORT

Title: COMMUNITY PARTNER QUESTIONNAIRE REPORT

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Introduction

The community partner questionnaire was designed to ask EPL's community partners about their experiences with library spaces. In consultation with EPL's community librarians about how best to gain feedback from their communities it was decided that the 21st Century Library Spaces Interns would design a questionnaire that would then be distributed by the community librarians however they saw best (e.g. in person, via email). The questionnaire was distributed from November 2011 through the end of January 2012.

The questions included in the questionnaire were based on those used during staff meetings for the site inventory report. The questions were:
1. What about library spaces is working well for your community group? How does the space support those activities that your community group want to be doing?
2. What about library spaces is not working for your community group? How could the space be changed to improve it?
3. Is there anything your community group would like to be doing in the library space that they can't do now? How could the space be changed to allow for it?

In order to explore how customers currently use and how they might like to use EPL's spaces in the future the 21st Century Library Spaces internship is guided by four questions:
1. What are customers doing in EPL's spaces?
2. How would customers like to be using EPL's spaces?
3. What are current and future trends in library spaces and customer activities?
4. How could EPL's spaces best meet the needs of EPL's customers?

The questionnaire was chosen to address questions one and two by asking for feedback from community partners as to what is and is not working well for them about EPL's spaces and if there are any activities they would like to engage in but are limited by the spaces. This method was also chosen as it addresses EPL's strategic goal to "strengthen neighbourhoods and communities by creating connections and understanding needs... fostering collaborative relationships to build relevant and responsive library services" by gaining feedback about what community partners would like to see to make EPL's spaces more relevant and responsive to their needs.

Overall, the most common theme to appear in community partner responses to this questionnaire was that they like the use of the program and meeting rooms at EPL branches and would like to use the spaces more often.

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Questionnaire Response Analysis

The analysis for this report is organized by question and includes overarching themes that were found in the responses collected.[1] 16 questionnaires were received. Responses were coded for 9 different themes and each theme has the number of responses that were coded for it (n=##).

Question 1

What about library spaces is working well for your community group? How does the space support those activities that your community group want to be doing?

This question received 14 responses from community partners, and was coded for 9 different themes.

Top themes of items that community partners said worked well for them:
1. The library as a gathering space (12 of 14 responses)
2. Accessibility of the library and the program room (6 of 14 responses)
3. Collections/and resources the library provides (3 of 14 responses)
4. Staff helpfulness and friendliness (3 of 14 responses)
5. Aesthetics (3 of 14 responses)
6. Technology provided in program rooms or in the library (3 of 14 responses)

Gathering Space (n=12)

Responses were coded as gathering space if they were about spaces for groups of people to meet and/or hold programs or talked about the library as a community gathering space. 85.7% (12/14) of responses were coded for this theme, which was by far the most commonly found for the first question.

Many of the responses coded for gathering space referred to the program room or meeting rooms as something that was working well for them.

"I think the activity room is a good place for some of our meetings... The space supports the community by enabling us to hold meetings and discuss important matters that positively affect the community."

Other responses mentioned library gathering spaces as working well for their groups but did not identify the program or meeting rooms.

"Space for gathering spot where everybody can meet and talk is very helpful."

Two of the comments about gathering space focused on the importance of the privacy and the quiet of a space.

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[1] Many responses contained more than one theme, resulting in total percentages higher than %100.

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"A quiet room separated from the rest of the library so we are able to function more as a group without disruption."

Accessibility (n=6)

Responses were coded for accessibility if they discussed the accessibility of the library in terms of physical accessibility for people with disabilities, location, and hours. 42.9% (6/14) of responses were coded for the theme of accessibility.

Responses in this category referred to the accessibility of the library as something that works well for them. They discussed either the accessibility of the program room or the accessibility of the library as a whole (location, transportation to, parking).

"Libraries also decrease many of the barriers that may inhibit someone with arthritis from otherwise being able to take our programs. Participants in our classes are able to take part in our programs in their own neighbourhoods, limited need for extensive travel to and from the program. The libraries are accessible by public transit, offer ample parking, extended hours, and are welcoming community hubs of activity."

"We have visited the library a couple of times and the tenants seem to be able to navigate easily through the space."

Two responses stated that the location of the program room made it accessible in terms of findability.

"This space [Milner AV room] is near the main entrance of the library, making it easy for members of the public to find this event."

"It works that it [LHL Program Room] is at the front of the library and that there is even a separate entrance."

Collections/Resources (n=3)

Responses that dealt with library collections or resources were coded for this category. The three responses for this theme included that library resources are something that is working well for them currently.

"We also love the variation in books which interest learners of all ages."

"They are able to find the resources they want."

Staff (n=3)

Responses that included mention of library staff were coded for this category. Three responses included library staff as something that was working well for their community group. These responses expressed satisfaction with the knowledge, helpfulness, and friendliness of staff.

"We have had several workshops at the library and we find the staff to be open and willing to go beyond and above to make sure we get what we need."

"The staff are friendly and informative as well as flexible."

Facilities (n=3)

Responses were coded for facilities if they included mention of library facilities such as washrooms, or commented on the aesthetics of library spaces. All three responses coded for this theme focus on the aesthetics of the facilities that are working well for them.

"I think that open space is also really working for us."

"It's a clean tidy environment which is safe."

"Washrooms available close by – good light – welcoming space."

Technology (n=3)

Responses coded for technology included technology found in the library, as well as in the program/training rooms. Two responses commented that the equipment found in the program rooms worked well for them, and one commented that their community group members are always able to find a computer.

"As well, the room contains all of the technology we need to run this tutorial."

"They [...] are always able to get a computer which is important to them."

Exposure (n=2)

Responses coded for exposure were about the exposure that the community group gained from using the library space to hold their programs. One comment also specifically mentioned the importance of space for them to display community posters as it was something that worked well for them.

"Having library space available means increased exposure... We have been able to utilize the library program guide (online and in print), in-branch promotion, and system-wide poster distribution to

help advertise our programs and build awareness for our organization in general.”

Children's (n=2)

Items coded as Children's included mention of space or services directed towards kids. One response commented that the separate children's space works well for them, while the other mentioned the space works well for both children and parents.

"The space in the Children library for storytelling. Parents and Children can sit and listen to stories."

Programs (n=1)

Responses coded for programs included comments about programs offered by EPL or its community partners. There was only one response coded for this category for question one and it suggested that the respondent would like "different activities."

Question 2

What about library spaces is not working for your community group? How could the space be changed to improve it?

13 responses were received for this question and were recorded for four main themes: Gathering space, Programs, Accessibility, and Facilities.

Gathering Space (n=9)

69.2% (9/13) of the responses for the question as to what was not working well for their community group fell under the theme of gathering space.

38.5% (5/13) of responses raised the issue of not being able to book the program room due to high use, or not being able to find the space/furniture in the library that they require.

"Always booked program room."

"Since our reading program is getting slightly larger each year, we are running into some difficulty with finding a spot for each pair of volunteer and learner... Other reading spaces (ie chairs or benches with or without tables) would be very convenient!"

One respondent raised the difficulty they have with the booking process and suggested it be simplified.

"Individual staff at each branch to books space. Often what availability is listed on the website is not current and, many, times strings of emails and voicemails are needed to secure a booking.

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Each branch seems to also have their own process for approving bookings from outside organizations. For some branches, the booking approval process is quick: one call to the community librarian and it is done, while others require branch manager approval. One, clear process across the system would make it less challenging for outside programs to be able to book the space."

One response raised the issue of noise on the library floor.

"Though the benches at WMC are quite large, the proximity of groups results in our being quite noisy."

Another respondent found the fee to book the program room to be a problem for their community group.

"Whenever I have inquired about using the space, I have been told there is a fee."

Three responses discussed their satisfaction with the library spaces their community groups are using.

"The meeting area serves us well. We can accommodate our continuing varying size of attendance."

Programs (n=2)
Two responses included suggestions for programming:

"On a personal note the children programs could be scheduled for the working parents. I enjoyed mommy and me sessions at the Whitemud library while I was on maternity leave I find that the sessions are not available for me now that I am working."

"More activities such as crafts, puppets, dancing, singing."

Accessibility (n=1)
One respondent found that the library was not accessible to their group in terms of the hours.

"The time that the libraries open – our meetings usually need to set up at 8:30 and meeting starts at 9:00."

Facilities (n=1)
One response requested specific facilities for their community group.

"It would be nice to have access to facilities where we could warm up items for potluck lunches. It would be nice to have a small locked space to store small items/materials that need to dry/cure."

Question 3

Is there anything your community group would like to be doing in the library space that they can't do now? How could the space be changed to allow for it?

This question received 13 responses that were coded for the six different themes: Gathering Space, Programs, Children's, Accessibility, Technology, and Facilities.

Gathering Space (n=8)

8 responses included the theme of gathering spaces. One stated they would like to use the program room more often.

"I would love to make use of the Program Room, but understand that the library has other functions scheduled for the same time. This would help us with our difficulty of finding reading space for some of our groupings."

Other comments included a suggestion for a different kind of space for activities.

"A playroom for young children to play or listen to stories and parents can do their own reading."

"Need program room in a portable… - temporary walls for meeting spaces… - would like to watch movies library."

Four comments stated that the library space is currently working well for them or that there are no other activities they would like to be doing that the space does not currently support.

"At this point the library space is working very well for our group and we are able to do the things we want. We are still very new to the library and are enjoying learning new things every time we come."

"No and it is perfectly suited to our activities."

Programs (n=3)

Three responses included suggestions or issues they had with current programs.

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"Yes, more youth program. We would like to bring youth once in a while for a program. There was a Wii competition at one of the library and we were planning to organize a visit but something changed and the visit never happened. We would like to plan something fun; our youth are used to using the library now and would like to get them in more often."

"Can library handle greater need evidenced by early years continuum."

"Child care issue – children can't be left unsupervised in the library while parents taking class."

Children's (n=2)

Two comments made suggestions for things they would like to see for children.

"A playroom for young children to play or listen to stories."

Accessibility (n=1)

One respondent had issues with accessibility in terms of cost and hours of the library.

"Longer hours for program room - … Program room should always be free of charge - … Should be no charge for anyone using program room except private business."

Technology (n=1)

The respondent above who suggested more computers for children also fell into the technology category.

"More computers for kids to use."

Facilities (n=1)

One response included a suggestion for the inclusion of shelf space for their group as a facility they would like to see.

Additional Comments

The questionnaire included a line that encouraged any "further comments, thoughts, or ideas." Four questionnaires were returned with comments in this area. Three comments included praise for the work EPL and its staff is currently doing.

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"The library has done a great job of making newcomers feel welcomed, thank you for being open and welcoming and for your support of our community programs."

"I appreciate the changes in philosophy that EPL has undergone in the past while to become more community focused and more of a community hub."

"Thank you for all your hard work. We sincerely appreciate all we do have as well as your staff who care."

One of the four further comments also made the following suggestions:
- Opening library space to pre-school and early literacy programs
- ESL classes easily accessible to neighborhood residents
- Drop-in programs for pre-teens from various ethnic minorities (e.g. book club)
- The need for libraries to offer "free meeting space for community, citizen and volunteer groups through having a community room"

This comment did however indicate a note saying "I realize that some of the above may be already offered at certain branches."

Another of the responses in this section indicated that they appreciated being put on the programs calendar as this helped to build their attendance.

Limitations

At the time of this questionnaire more than two community librarian positions were vacant, reducing the number of community partners the questionnaire would have been distributed to. The sample of answered questionnaires received does not cover all branches. Most were from Lois Hole, Stanley A. Milner, Calder, Sprucewood, and Whitemud Crossing. In some cases it was also difficult to figure out which branch a respondent was referring to as they use more than one branch. The small data sample collected also limits the ability to draw conclusions and make generalizations to EPL as a whole.

Next Steps

The feedback gained from this questionnaire will be used to help inform recommendations made for the final report.

Acknowledgements

I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the community partners, who took the time to fill out this questionnaire, as well as the community librarians of EPL who were very helpful in giving us feedback about their community groups and for distributing this questionnaire. This report would not have been possible without them.

Appendices

Appendix A: Questionnaire

21st Century Library Spaces Questions for Community Partners

In May 2011 the Edmonton Public Library hired two interns to explore and analyze how customers use EPL's physical library spaces in order to make recommendations for library spaces that will best serve EPL customers. As part of this exploration, we have created this questionnaire to ask our community partners about how EPL's spaces are currently serving community members and what could be changed to improve this service.

We greatly appreciate your participation in this questionnaire!

1   What about library spaces is working well for your community group? How does the space support those activities that your community group want to be doing?

2   What about library spaces is not working for your community group? How could the space be changed to improve it?

3   Is there anything your community group would like to be doing in the library space that they can't do now? How could the space be changed to allow for it?

Any further comments, thoughts, or ideas are welcome. I would love to hear from you!

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