# REPORT

**Title:** THE TOP FIVE BARRIERS TO LIBRARY ACCESS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ELIMINATING THOSE BARRIERS

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2012/2013, EPL connected with underserved communities to identify the Top Five Barriers to accessing library services. The EPL Barriers Study identified 11 underserved communities, spoke with 174 representatives of those communities and identified the five barriers that had the greatest impact on their ability to access our services.

**The top five barriers were:**

- **Library Policies:** People have trouble understanding and navigating our policies
- **Fees:** People are afraid of, cannot always afford, and do not feel like they have options for paying fees.
- **Transportation:** People have difficulty getting to the library.
- **Service Awareness:** People do not understand what they can use the library for.
- **Literacies:** People lack literacy and digital literacy skills

**Primary Recommendations:**

Library Policies
1) Design and implement staff training and orientation programs to ensure all front-line staff know and understand EPL membership, customer conduct, borrowing, fee policies, and that all staff enforce these policies consistently. (COMPLETE)
2) Simplify EPL's borrowing policies. (COMPLETE)
3) Simplify EPL's membership policies. (COMPLETE)

Fees
1) Institute a yearly system clean-up that would eliminate/forgive outdated late fees. (COMPLETE)
2) Explore simplification of late fees (included in 2014-2016 Business Plan).

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3) Explore the creation of additional events like Food4Fines that provide alternative ways of paying late fees  (Fine-Free Day planned for October 2014)

Transportation
1) Increase access points for materials and services
2) Increase promotion of off-site services, programs, and visits by Community Librarians and other staff

Service Awareness
1) Categorize library services from a customer-centered perspective (in terms of how customers use the service) and list them on the website

Literacies
1) Encourage literacy instruction programs from partner organizations
2) Encourage and increase the provision of flexible digital literacy instruction

# Contents

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## INTRODUCTION

"Our Community" Objective 1 of the 2011-2013 Business Plan states that EPL will "understand and eliminate the top 5 barriers to underserved communities." In 2012, the Community Led Intern Librarian tackled this objective by connecting with underserved populations to determine the top five barriers preventing them from using library services. The year-long project drew on resources and relationships developed through our Community-Led approach to service and involved extensive interviewing and focus grouping with underserved communities.

## DEFINITIONS

The approach to and execution of the project was framed by the operational definitions or "EPL services" and "underserved communities."

<u>Underserved Communities</u>
There is no universally accepted definition for "underserved". The Working Together Project (WTP) used social marginalization as an indicator of limitations to access, building on work in British libraries (WTP, 2008; Pateman and Vincent, 2010; Wilson and Birdi, 2008; Muddiman et. al., 2000). The American Library Association's Office for Literacy and Outreach Service (ALA OLOS) identifies nine groups traditionally underserved by library services, but does not identify what separates adequately and underserved communities. EPL's Community Led Service Philosophy (CLSP) recognizes that barriers can exist for all community members and social marginalization should not be the only factor defining underserved (EPL, 2013).

For the EPL Barriers Study, underserved customers are defined as:

- Customers, non-users or lapsed users prevented from accessing library services or who have their access to library services limited by barriers.

<u>Library Services</u>
In order to identify which customers have reduced access to library services, it is necessary to define the services EPL currently offers. Although no document outlines EPL's core services, EPL annual reports and planning documents provide a picture of EPL's service goals.

- **Annual Reports, 2011 and 2012:** highlight material circulation, reference transactions, library visits, technology access, program delivery, and attendance as measureable accomplishments (EPL, 2012b; 2013b).
- **EPL's 2011-2013 Business Plan**: describes digital literacy as an emerging core service and EPL's commitment to early literacy services (EPL, 2011).

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- **Mission Statement**: "We Share", highlights material and information distribution emphasizing reference and materials (EPL, 2012a).
- **Shared Values Wheel**: focuses primarily on the way EPL services are provided, but emphasizes delivering content to customers in terms of collections, spaces and reference services (EPL, 2010).
- **Community Led Service Philosophy** Toolkit:  emphasizes EPL's role in engaging with community members to develop relevant services (EPL, 2013a).

Based on policy information summarized above and descriptions of barriers faced by local communities provided by Community Librarians, five services were identified:

- Materials
- Customer Service
- Space
- Digital access
- Programming

Fully evaluating customer service expectations and experiences was deemed too complex to fit within the scope of the EPL Barriers Study but comments were noted. This left four services that were used to identify underserved communities.

## METHODS

### IDENTIFYING UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS FOR STUDY

Before recruitment could begin, the population of study needed to be identified. This was accomplished via consultation with library literature and email consultation with Community Librarians.

An email was sent to all Community librarians asking them to identify groups in their catchments experiencing barriers to library access (Appendix A). Follow up emails were sent asking for elaboration on specific descriptions of barriers. Respondents were given the option of a one on one interview and had their responses documented. From those contacted, 108 groups were identified. Most Community Librarians identified populations specific to their catchment areas.

Eleven populations were selected based on the issues identified by Community Librarians, the number of staff reporting the issue, vulnerable populations identified during the literature review, issues identified in EPL's organizational reviews, and

the accessibility of participants from those populations. Populations identified in multiple catchments were given priority.

The eleven identified populations were:

- Aboriginal People
- At Risk Teens
- Homeless People
- Low Income Adults
- Low Income Families
- Adults with Low Literacy Skills
- Geographically Isolated Communities
- Newcomers
- Seniors
- Teen Parents
- University of Alberta Students

A description of each community, a brief summary of barriers identified by staff, and the rationale for the inclusion of each group can be found in Appendix F.

Cautions and Limitations
When identifying communities, it is important to keep the following things in mind:

- The elements binding communities together vary greatly and may come from location, shared interests, or attachment-based cultural ties. (Wilmott, 1987).
- Community membership is not exclusive: individuals who are members of one identified community may be a member of multiple other communities. (Wilmott, 1987).
- Each member of an identified community will share features, but not be interchangeable with other community members. (Barbour, 2007).

Because of this:

- Patterns in responses based on other criteria (such as geographic patterns resulting from recruitment sites) must be noted.
- Participants in the EPL Barriers Study were noted as belonging to all communities they self-identify as belonging to.
- The results of the study acknowledge the individuality of every participant. Their responses indicate the range of experiences community members can have when accessing library services.

**IDENTIFYING THE TOP FIVE BARRIERS**

A qualitative, mixed-methods approach using interviews and focus groups was selected for the EPL Barriers study. Because connecting with people who feel they have little or no stake in library services can be difficult, flexibility was essential to recruitment. While the initial plan conceived of focus groups exclusively, interviews were added as it became apparent that organizing focus groups for some populations would not be feasible.

An advertisement describing the study was posted at organizations serving clients from the targeted groups, and sent to interested participants (Appendix B). Participants were recruited through:

- Direct recruitment from drop-in programs (e.g. Boyle Street Community Co-Op, Health for Two)
  - Focus Groups: 11, Interviews: 19
- Direct referrals (e.g. from Community Librarians, Settlement Workers).
  - Focus Groups: 4, Interviews: 8
- On the spot recruitment at Community events: (e.g. Homeless Connect, Pow Wow Nights)
  - Interviews: 25
- On the spot recruitment at locations frequented by targeted groups (e.g. University of Alberta, Education North)
  - Interviews: 9
- Snowball sampling (e.g. word of mouth, community newsletters)
  - Interviews: 3

Interview locations and structure varied greatly depending on participant comfort level. Interview locations included:

- Public events and festivals
- Library branch meeting and program rooms
- Library programs and events
- Off-site drop in programs
- Coffee shops and cafeterias

When possible, signed consent forms were obtained from participants (Appendix C). Because many participants did not feel comfortable signing a form, consent was obtained orally and included on the recordings. Participants were assigned a pseudonym during transcription and explicitly given the option of not using their real name. During initial interviews and focus groups, demographic information was collected from participants, but due to low response rates the questions were discarded and library use data was obtained during the interviews (demographic data collection form can be found in Appendix D).

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Five questions were used to structure the interviews, but participants were encouraged to take the interview in the direction they felt best described the barriers they experienced (see Appendix E for interview guide). A total of 186 participants were recruited and participated through 15 focus groups and 64 semi-structured qualitative interviews.

9 interviews representing twelve participants from four communities were not transcribed because they represented groups that had already reached data saturation in existing transcripts. Verbatim transcripts were prepared for select interviews (9) and focus groups (3). Summary transcripts were made from the remaining interviews (46) and focus groups (12). The decision to revert to summary transcription rather than verbatim transcription was largely the product of time constraints. However, the researcher consulted methods literature, which suggests that summary transcription does not compromise the credibility of data (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006).

Information from interviews and focus groups was coded by theme. While a detailed discussion of qualitative data analysis is outside the scope of this report, it is important to note that what we can get from this kind of study is a description of the range of barriers customers face, and the details surrounding the specific experience of those barriers, including customers who do not use our services. This is beyond what a more comprehensive quantitative study could provide (Barbour, 2007). Data collected can also inform future quantitative studies looking to assess how many customers are affected by the identified barriers.

Guest, Bunce, & Johnson (2006) argue that when coding qualitative interviews, most themes appear within six interviews, and almost all themes appear within twelve. There is no consensus about the number of focus groups necessary to exhaust the useful information you can collect from an identified community (Barbour, 2007). Because this study aimed to identify broad trends in attitudes and experiences, nine interviews were selected as the ideal recruitment target for each identified group, so that almost all of the common themes experienced by participants could be identified. Three focus groups were selected as the equivalent of nine interviews.

**EXAMINING EPL POLICY**

In order to better understand the context informing participants' reported experience of barriers, a review of EPL policies was conducted. This included examination of all policy documents related to:

- Membership (card eligibility, how to obtain a library card, who can obtain a library card)
- Fees (fee schedules, guidelines for forgiving charges, guidelines for waiving membership fee, user statuses, UMS)

- Spaces (Customer Conduct, Use of Public Spaces)

This allowed the researcher to clarify whether reported barriers were the result of official EPL policy, inconsistently applied or incorrectly interpreted policies, or issues beyond EPL's control.

# RESULTS

## SAMPLE

A total of 174 participants provided interview and focus group data. A breakdown of participants by primary community membership is found below[1].

**Participant Community Membership**



- Aboriginal
- At-Risk Teens
- Isolated
- Homeless
- Low Income Adults
- Low Income Families
- Low Literacy Adults
- Newcomers
- Seniors
- University of Alberta Students
- Teen Parents
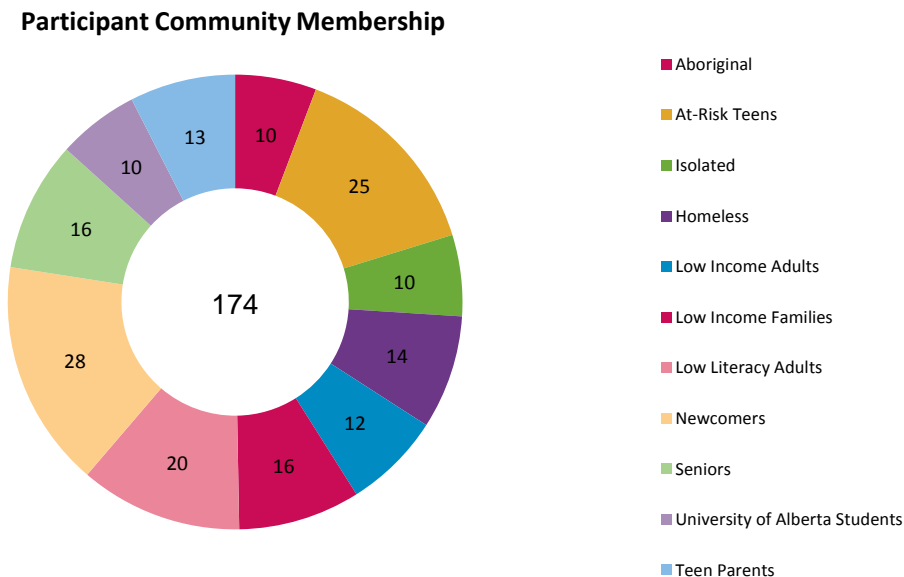
Participants came from all catchment areas except CAL, HIG, and RIV. The largest number of participants came from the MNA (49), MLW (30), STR (22), WOO (15), ABB (15), and JPL (10) catchments. Participants did not necessarily use the library closest to them, and many participants used multiple branches.

## REPORTED USE
### Overall Use
Participants were asked what library services they currently use. 74% used at least one service and 26% reported not using any EPL services.[2]

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[1] Community members were asked to self-identify as members of any groups to which they felt they belonged. The community memberships used to develop the following chart were their "primary" community membership as identified by them, or as determined by how they were recruited (e.g., if they were recruited as homeless, but also self-identified as a low-literacy adult, homeless was the community membership used to develop the following chart.

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Service use was defined broadly, including any mention of recent use. Some participants stated they did not use the library, but then remarked on how they use specific EPL services, usually computers or on-site materials, suggesting that their perception of use was framed around borrowing material. In these cases, participants were coded as using all the services they mention using, even if their explicit answer re library use was negative.

**Participants using library services**

26%
n=48

74%
n=138

Does not use services
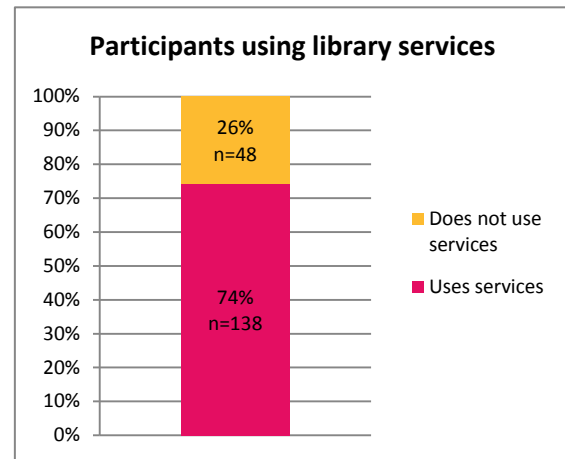
Uses services

## Use by Service Type

Of participants who used library services, the majority used three services (spaces, digital services and materials). Programs were mostly attended by customers who accessed all other services. Customers who used only one service either borrowed materials or used library spaces. Customers who used two services tended to access materials and digital services.

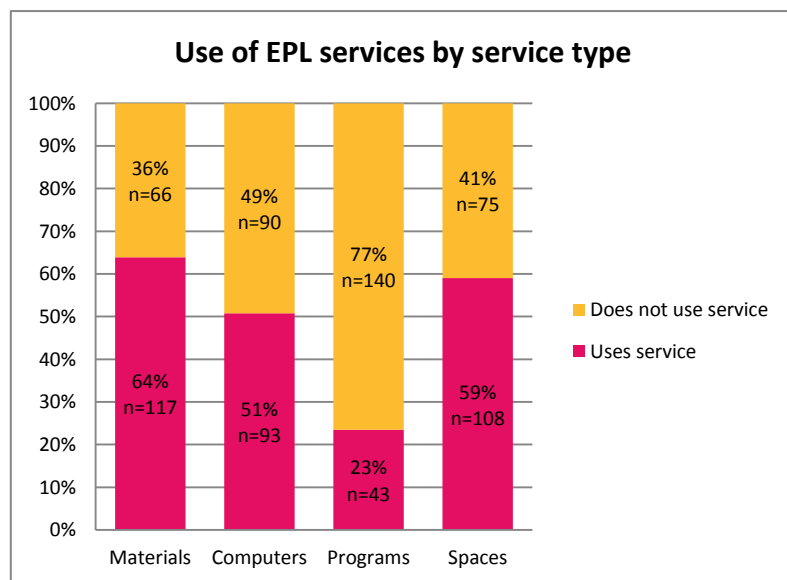Participants that reported using few library services used those services less frequently, while those that reported using multiple services used them more frequently. This fits with descriptions of typical library use patterns, which describe heavy users making greater use of more varied services (Parsons & Paxhia, 2011). Two exceptions to this were a subset of inner city residents near MNA (interviewed as adults who struggled with low income, homelessness, and literacy) and At-Risk Teens near STR, who reported using library spaces frequently, but no other services.

**Use of EPL services by service type**

Materials: 36% n=66 / 64% n=117
Computers: 49% n=90 / 51% n=93
Programs: 77% n=140 / 23% n=43
Spaces: 41% n=75 / 59% n=108

Does not use service

Uses service

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[2] Customers who did not use library services were assigned home branches based on the catchment wherein the agency from which they were recruited was located.

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Use by Community Membership

Use of services varied greatly by group, but few communities showed consistent patterns to make supportable statements about their use patterns. With that in mind, participants from senior and student communities reported remarkably low use of library computers. Seniors reported a notably low use of library spaces (5/22), especially considering that focus groups occurred in malls directly beside library branches (IDY and CPL). Participants who used the library primarily for computer use reported having library cards, but not using their cards for materials.

Homeless participants reported heavy use of library spaces (16/17). University of Alberta students reported a remarkably low use of all library services. This could stem from the small sample, but fits with the picture painted by the limited adoption of L-Passes and EPLGo circulation statistics. (7% of potential students checked out more than 10 items in 2012) and declining usage of EPLGo (10% reduction in circulation and 12% fewer visits between 2011 and 2012.)

Even with the small sample size, the number of people who reported not attending library programs was significant. Often, participants did not know what kind of programming the library offered beyond children's programming. Use was very low among teen parents (1/13).

**REPORTED BARRIERS**

While participants identified many barriers and concerns during the study, the five most significant barriers identified across communities were:

- Policies
- Fees
- Transportation
- Service Awareness
- Literacies

**% of participants who reported facing the top five barriers (n=174)**

| Barrier | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Policies | 67% n=116 |
| Transportation | 61% n=107 |
| Literacies | 57% n=100 |
| Awareness | 54% n=94 |
| Fees | 49% n=85 |
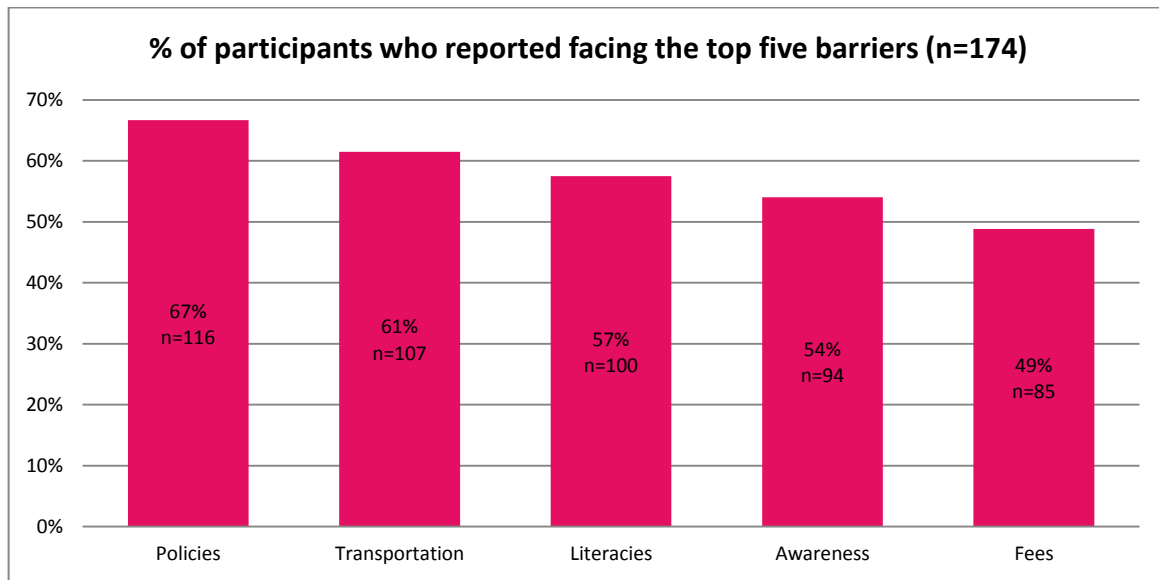
It is not possible to meaningfully rank the impacts of these barriers as they often overlap and reinforce each other. For example, people with limited transportation options are more likely to generate larger late fees because they have limited options for returning materials and have a lack of awareness of their options for renewing materials. If people lack digital or print literacy skills they are likely to have difficulty navigating library policies or using library systems, which can be worsened by inconsistent or inflexible policy enforcement. All participants faced at least one barrier to access, and non-users tended to face multiple.

Barriers affected communities differently, but members of all communities were impacted by all five barriers.

**LIBRARY POLICIES**
**(67% of participants; n=116)**

Library policies were the most cited barrier to accessing EPL services (67% of participants, n=116). The actual content of EPL's policies were one aspect of these reported barriers, but issues of enforcement, communication, and understanding were often the cause of policy-related barriers.

Cross-referencing responses with EPL policy documentation revealed that our policies themselves were barriers in the following instances:

**Borrowing:** Customers who used our services regularly found the renewal ceiling frustrating. It led to the accrual of late fees when other barriers such as transportation issues prevented the timely return of materials. It is important to note that the issues they described did not relate to the length of time they needed materials, but to factors including: distance from the library, limited transportation options, weather, mobility issues, health issues with children, insecure living

conditions which intervened when trying to return materials. Customers were not aware of available policies designed to provide flexibility, such the option of phoning to ask for short renewal windows when circumstances prevent the timely return of material that is over the customer renewal limit.

**Membership:** Participants without appropriate ID or addresses were unable to obtain library cards.

While policy content that presents a barrier to customer use is problematic, what became clear through coding was that the bulk of policy issues were related to enforcement, communication and understanding rather than actual policies. Customers did not under understand why things were happening to them (late fees, account issues), and the explanations they received were both confusing and inconsistent.

106 participants reported facing barriers due to policy enforcement, 35 due to how policies were communicated, and 25 due to a lack of understanding of confusing policies.

**% of participants for whom policy enforcement, policy communication, and policy understanding created a barrier to service**

| Category | as a % of participants who experience policy barriers | as a % of total participants |
|---|---|---|
| Enforcement | 91% n=106 | 61% n=106 |
| Communication | 30% n=35 | 20% n=35 |
| Understanding | 22% n=25 | 14% n=25 |

Legend:
- as a % of participants who experience policy barriers
- as a % of total participants

Enforcement

**Primary Issues:**
- Lack of options presented by staff
- Inconsistent enforcement of policies
- Perception of customer profiling, leading to harsher enforcement or targeted enforcement for some populations

*People who steal people's cards, they don't really pay attention to that, do they? […] I did report it stolen, and they're like, "there is nothing we can do about it, sorry". So I hung up on them and was like, "'F' you."*

*Savannah, Teen Parent, MNA*

Enforcement is about how library policies are applied to customers by individual staff, and how customers are treated when those policies are being enforced. Participants reported a range of enforcement issues, including not being provided with useful options for resolving policy issues, encountering different standards and options for resolving policy issues depending on the staff member or branch they visited, and the perception that policies were being applied differentially to different groups of people.

Participants described being told they had no options available to them when they experienced problems trying to access services. While this included issues surrounding lost materials and late fees, it also included participants booking public space for community groups, students looking for help with school assignments and customers asking other questions. Quotes from Savannah and Larissa illustrate the participant perception that no options were provided when policy barriers were encountered.

The perception of differential and inconsistent enforcement of policies was another key issue. In particular, in-branch behavioral policies were felt to be enforced differently by different staff members, and participants did not perceive or know of any consistent guidelines regarding in-branch behaviour around computer use, time extensions, and noise. Some customers, particularly at-risk youth, felt security or library staff was targeting them unfairly, while home-less adults often reported a sense that teen customers were being allowed to break behavioural policies without consequence.

Communication

**Primary Issues:**
- Participants received incomplete or inadequate information
- Participants were unable to identify the appropriate person or people to assist them
- Participants were directed to incorrect people or departments to deal with their issues (sometimes bounced around repeatedly)

Communication of policies is defined by what information customers are given when trying to access library services.

Participants often described being given inadequate information to make meaningful choices about their library use. In addition, they did not know who to contact when they had problems, or where to begin looking for information. They were unable to identify who in the library was responsible for which tasks and frequently described

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feeling like they had been talking to the wrong person, or talking to a chain of people who did not understand their situation. In some cases participants described having account problems resolved, but having the solutions communicated to them in a way that made them feel like they were being punished.

Participants were sometimes reluctant to speak with staff members to ask them questions, which led to them missing information. Participants walked away from their initial questions and searches without a complete idea of what their options were, or what the appropriate process was for finding the service they were asking for. Participants described situations where they were not aware of what all of their options were, even after talking to staff. This came up especially often with newcomers who expressed confusion regarding the ways they could use library resources.

<u>Understanding</u>

**Primary Issues**
- Lack of written policy for participants to consult
- Borrowing policies are confusing and complicated
- Differential enforcement creates further confusion regarding actual policies

The theme of understanding is, in part, the end result of the previously described issues with enforcement and communication. Because participants did not receive and could not find clearly communicated information about EPL policies, and because enforcement of policies was inconsistent, most participants reported difficulty understanding some aspect of library policies or services. Borrowing policies, card eligibility policies, and behavioral policies were mentioned most frequently. At-risk teens were particularly confused about their options for getting a library card. Indeed, the diagram below illustrates the convoluted card options available to at-risk teens.

**EPL Library Card Options**

Flowchart elements:

Age? — Over 18 / Under 18

**Over 18 branch:**
- Do you have ID? — Yes → Do you have a home? / No → Contact Community Librarian to help you get ID.
- Do you have a home? — Yes / No → Do you have ID?
- Do you have ID? — Yes → Do you have a home? / No → No Address Card
- Do you have a home? — Yes → Do you have proof of address? / No → Give address to Community Librarian – they will send mail that can be used as proof of address.
- Do you have proof of address? — Yes → Independent Juvenile or Adult Card

**Under 18 branch:**
- Do you have a guardian? — No / Yes → Are they here right now?
- Are they here right now? — Yes → Do they have ID? / No → Give address to Community Librarian – they will mail you a form for your guardian to sign.
- Do they have ID? — Yes → Do they have proof of address? / No → Give address to Community Librarian – they will mail you a form for your guardian to sign.
- Do they have proof of address? — Yes → Juvenile Card / No → Give address to Community Librarian – they will send mail that can be used as proof of address.

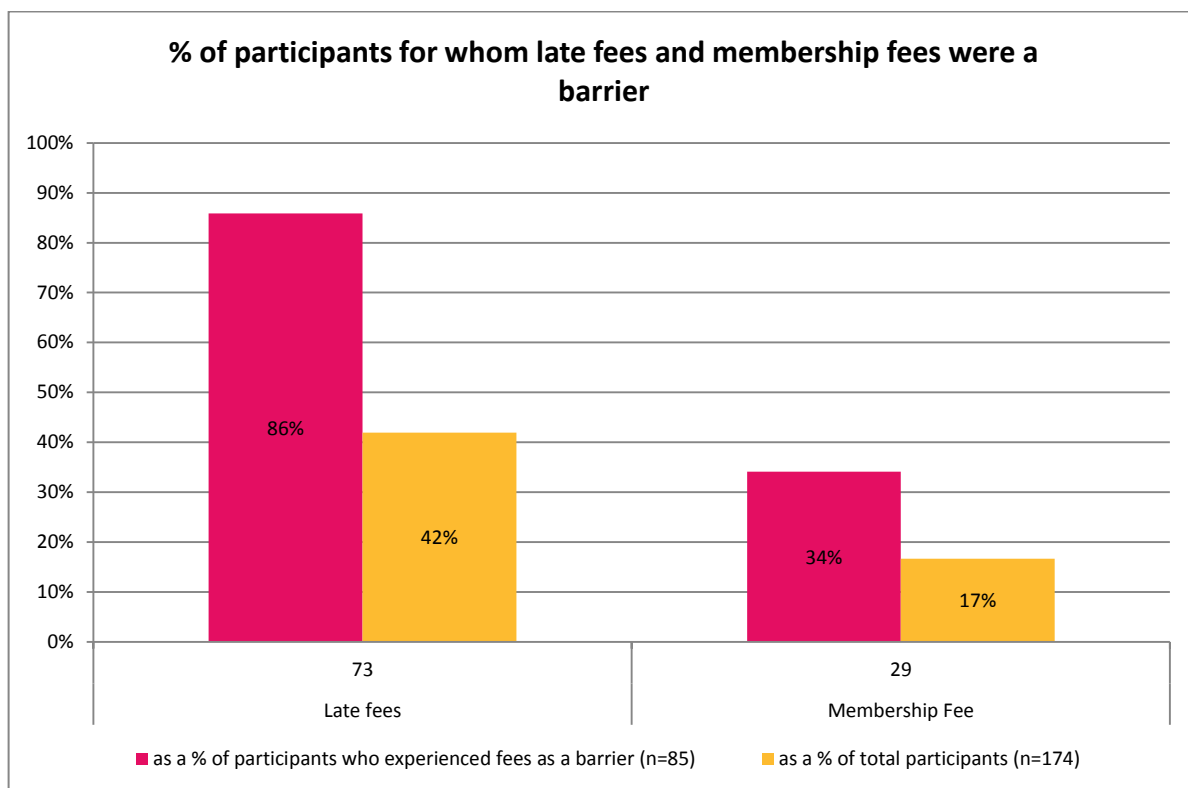| People who cannot get cards: | Terms: | Acceptable ID: | Proof of address: |
|---|---|---|---|
| Group home residents without guarantors | Adult Card | Alberta ID | Alberta ID |
| | Community Librarian | Drivers License | Drivers License |
| | Guarantor | Credit card with name | Vehicle registration |
| People without ID | Guardian | Bank Card with name | Rental agreement |
| | Home | Health Care card | Bank statement |
| Children of above | ID | Birth certificate | Personalized cheque |
| | Independent Juvenile Card | Passport | Utility bill |
| | Juvenile Card | Social Insurance Number card | Personal mail with current address |
| | No Address Card | Student ID | |
| | Proof of Address | Indian Status card | |

Flowchart showing Library card options

Participants had difficulty understanding our policies and loan periods for different item types and reported difficulty verifying when items were due. This often led to further barriers as a result of accruing late fees.

During interviews and focus groups, participants often reported incorrect information about library policies when asked. Participants who used multiple branches found that the process for gaining temporary access to computers varied branch by branch.

## FEES
**(49% of participants, n=85)**

Most participants in the EPL Barriers study faced some degree of social marginalization and had low household incomes. It is, therefore, not surprising that nearly half of all participants cited fees as a reason for not using library services. EPL has two fee categories: the **membership fee** and **late fees**, and each will be discussed separately.

**% of participants for whom late fees and membership fees were a barrier**

[Bar chart showing percentages. Late fees: 86% (pink), 42% (orange), n=73. Membership Fee: 34% (pink), 17% (orange), n=29.]

Legend:
- ■ as a % of participants who experienced fees as a barrier (n=85)
- ■ as a % of total participants (n=174)

## Late fees

> *I lent a so-called friend, my library card and $400 later I can't even get a card. This has been three or four years. I was hoping the library would forgive this debt after four years. After four years I've been punished enough.*

While late fees were noted as a barrier for nearly half of participants, many participants supported late fees, viewing them as an effective and necessary tool for policing other customer's behavior. The basic script was, "fines are good and necessary… but I don't use the library because of them." In some cases, customers with large late fees or collection accounts still supported late fees, although they viewed what had happened to them as excessive. Of the participants who opposed library late fees, most were passionately opposed to them. They viewed late fees as predatory, limiting access to library resources, especially for children.

In many cases participants described specific account problems that were preventing them from using library services. Participants with significant late fees found charges so large that they could not pay them, or that they felt it was so disproportionate to what they had done that they were unwilling to pay them. For people without the means to pay, late fees were a hard stop to materials use. Often the late fees reflected a single incident, usually when a card or items were stolen by a friend or family member. This disproportionally affected low income

groups, homeless adults, and at-risk Teens. These participants felt like they had no options for resolving their accounts and regaining access to the library.

Having late fees on a library account made participants feel uncomfortable using other services. Customers felt unwelcome in library spaces, imagining the library would notice them and ask them to pay or leave.

<u>Membership Fee</u>

Reactions to the membership fee were mixed, with some participants speaking about how the fee allowed them to support the library, while others opposed it. Supporters mentioned that they felt the fee was necessary for the library to continue to exist. Those opposed commonly felt that there were moral reasons to keep the library open as a free information resource available to everyone.

Based on participant comments, the impact of the fee on use was subtle. While few participants articulated it directly, participants talked around avoiding the fee and using other options instead of paying for a library card. For some participants, the fee was avoided because of an inability to pay, for others, it was avoided on principle (i.e., the library should be free to all). Other participants noted that, rather than sign up for a card and risk accumulating heavy overdue late fees, they would purchase material themselves. Work-arounds included registering children for cards, receiving books from family members, and buying materials rather than borrowing from the library.

Participants did not understand what was required to waive the fee, and had difficulty believing that we would waive the fee on request without proof of low income. The script staff used to offer to waive the fee did not seem to be as important as whether or not the staff member delivering the information was respectful when asking.

Some participants reported not feeling comfortable asking to have the fee waived, and paid the fee even though it was a financial hardship. This, combined with the common misunderstanding of what is required to have the fee waived, made accessing library services difficult for some participants.
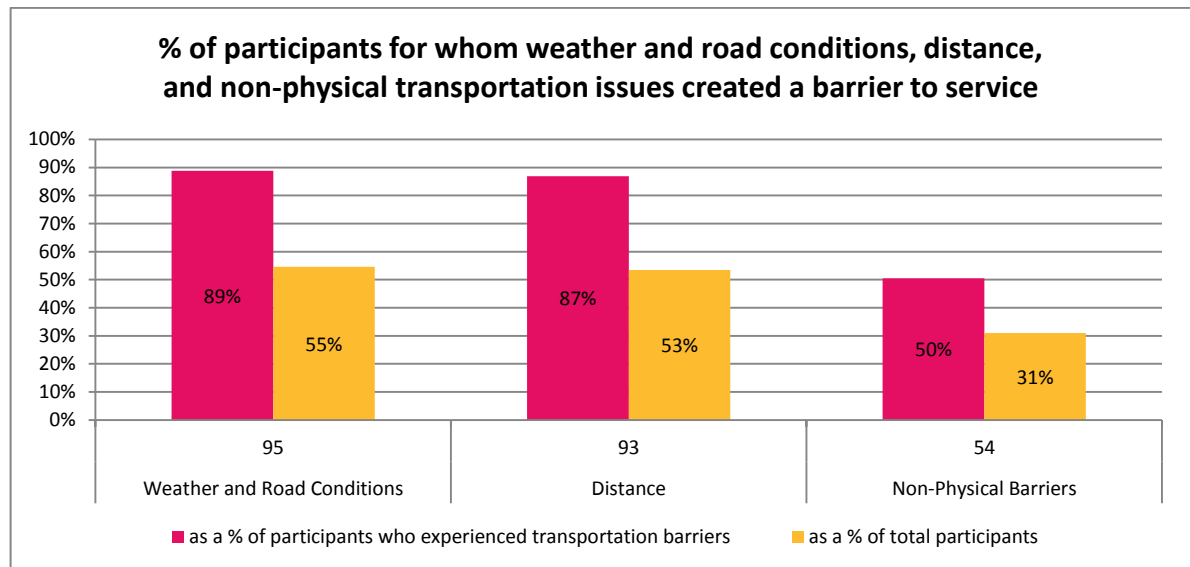
**TRANSPORTATION**

**(61% of participants; n=107)**

Transportation encompasses all issues related to the ability to get to the library in order to access our services.

Seniors, low income individuals, Newcomers, at-risk youth, and parents were particularly affected by this barrier. There were three primary issues affecting

participants' ability to get to the library: **Weather and road conditions**, **Distance**, and **Non-physical barriers.**

**% of participants for whom weather and road conditions, distance, and non-physical transportation issues created a barrier to service**

| | Weather and Road Conditions | Distance | Non-Physical Barriers |
|---|---|---|---|
| as a % of participants who experienced transportation barriers | 89% | 87% | 50% |
| as a % of total participants | 55% | 53% | 31% |
| | 95 | 93 | 54 |

## Weather and Road Conditions

*I don't like taking her out places in the winter. It's hard to move her stroller around. Unless I can get a ride, I'm not going many places.*

*Joy, Teen Parent, WOO*

Most participants mentioned difficulty using library services in the winter. Dangerous driving conditions were mentioned by participants with access to cars, but more often participants talked about trying to navigating sidewalks and public transit, which often caused frequent delays. This was especially significant for people with low incomes, or those that had young children. Participants reported difficulty navigating sidewalks with strollers, or safely walking from their home to the library with school aged children. Unplowed sidewalks required participants to drag strollers through large snow banks, and concerns about frostbite and low temperatures limited travel outside.

Participants reported winter storms limited their ability to access the library to return materials or attend programs. Storms were seen as limiting material use, as customers interrupted or reduced their use in the winter months.

## Distance

Distance from the library was identified as a significant issue for many participants. Those in communities located far away from libraries most commonly noted this, but distance was relative based on what transportation options people had access to.

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> *For me it's just the distance. I have five kids and I don't drive. So it's the transportation to and from.*
>
> *Cynthia, Isolated Community Member, LON*

People with fewer transportation options experienced distance as a barrier more often than those with more transportation options.

The key factor determining whether long distances prevented library use was whether or not participants saw the library as offering a specific service they needed; some customers who perceived the library as offering extremely valuable or necessary services went to extraordinary lengths to access library resources despite major distance obstacles.

Participants from isolated communities with higher incomes reported two mitigating factors allowing them to use the library with some ease despite distance: those who worked near libraries tended to access the libraries near their workplace, and some parents described chaining visits to the library together with other activities, including school pickups, music lessons or sports practices.

Non-Physical Barriers

The complexity of finding a library and arranging to get there can be daunting, particularly for parents and English Language Learners. Many newcomer participants reported giving up because all the information that might explain how to get to the library (bus schedules, directions, etc.) was only available in English and they did not know how to ask for more information. Parents reported that children made it more difficult for them to access library services, with challenges surrounding attending library programs at fixed times. They found current program times inconvenient, and a small number of participants had concerns about library opening hours, but there was no consensus on appropriate times in either case.

Seniors reported difficulty accessing the library because they did not trust themselves to drive, or faced difficulty when driving. This significantly impacted their access to library services. Seniors reported getting family members to pick up material for them.

Some customers who had accessed library services at other points in their life saw certain libraries as inaccessible to them, and would sometimes make arrangements to get to inconveniently located libraries instead. Sydney (Low Income Adult) described being unable to access her closest library because in the past she had struggled with addiction and she felt she could find drugs near the branch. Teen parents frequently reported being afraid they would meet people from earlier in their life they were trying to avoid if they visited their closest library.

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Whatever the transportation-related barrier, inability to get to the library when needed had a significant effect on the late fees participants incurred. This, in turn, introduced another barrier; participants incurred late fees because of transportation issues preventing them from returning material, and then were unable to use EPL services due to late fees they were unable to pay.

## SERVICE AWARENESS

> *I seen some programs on the wall. But I never… just only three or four year olds. So can you go there at two years old, the kids?”*
> - *Caroline, Aboriginal Adult, WOO*

**(54% of participants; n=94)**

Few participants, including frequent customers, had a detailed knowledge of the services offered by the library. Most participants had a narrow view of the library as a source for specific materials or services, and were unaware of its other offerings. Some regular library users were unaware of existing offerings directly relevant to their needs. Victor (Isolated Community Member) specifically described wanting more access to current films, but was unaware of the "Flicks to Go" collection despite weekly visits to a library branch. This was typical of responses from all identified groups.

During interviews, participants from all groups tended to ask questions about services, and seemed interested in hearing more when the services were directly relevant to them. This suggests that customers are more interested in library services when they are directly relevant to problems they are trying to solve.

Newcomers faced unique issues related to awareness. Some participants reported needing to address immediate needs before visiting the library. The library was not seen as a place where they could receive support meeting their initial needs, but rather as a source for after they had already become settled. For example, Maliyah, a Newcomer interviewed at MLW, stated that the library is a place for reading and that she does not go there because she does not understand the language yet, while Gwendolyn, another Newcomer interviewed at MLW stated she hasn't gotten to the library yet because she has only been in the country for four months.

## LITERACIES
## (57% of participants; n=100)

> *I don't go to the library because I don't know how to read. What's the point of going to the library when you don't know how to read?*
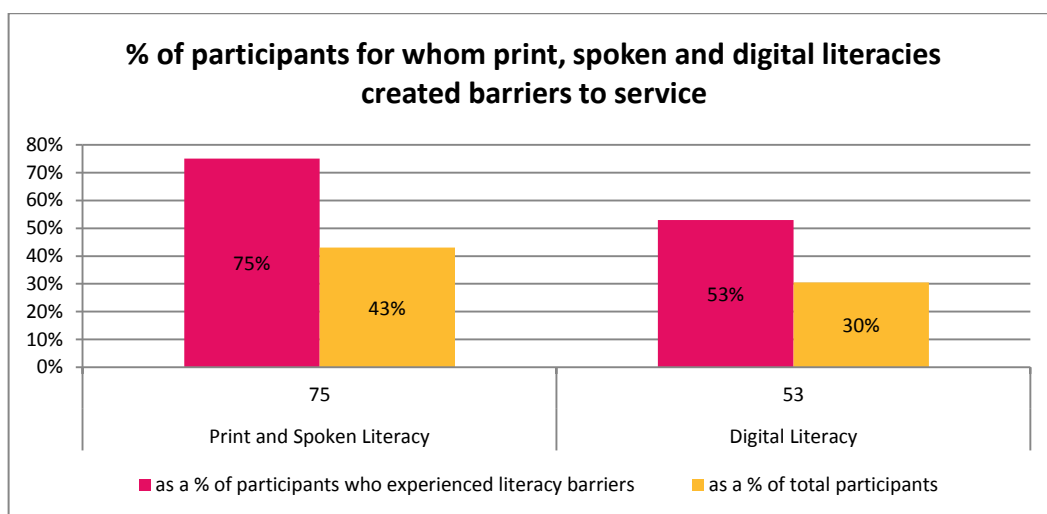> *Isabella, Low Literacy Adult, ABB*

The social stigma surrounding illiteracy makes it difficult to determine how prevalent literacy issues are, or exactly what problems are caused by them. Outside of non-

English speaking Newcomers, few participants reported literacy issues, including those currently working to improve their literacy as adults.

Issues with literacy were not often expressed in relation to having difficulty navigating library systems; rather, participants described simple avoidance of library use strategies that required heavy reliance on literacy skills.

The kinds of skills most discussed were **print and spoken literacy** and **digital literacy.** While few customers were willing to directly discuss issues with print literacy, customers that spoke about digital literacy did so directly.

**% of participants for whom print, spoken and digital literacies created barriers to service**

| | Print and Spoken Literacy | Digital Literacy |
|---|---|---|
| as a % of participants who experienced literacy barriers | 75% | 53% |
| as a % of total participants | 43% | 30% |
| | 75 | 53 |

■ as a % of participants who experienced literacy barriers  ■ as a % of total participants

## Print and Spoken Literacy

[translated] *She never got to the library and didn't try because of the language barrier. She is a young mom with a number of children and no daycare. So many issues. She does not get great information.*

*Gwendolyn, Newcomer, MLW*

Librarians and front-line library staff tend to be highly educated, relatively affluent and have high literacy skills. Library systems are complicated and require high literacy skills to navigate. For Edmontonians who struggle with literacy, the library can be intimidating because it is a space configured for people who have high literacy skills and staffed by people who are well equipped to navigate it.

With few exceptions, non-Newcomer participants did not discuss literacy issues directly, although they did describe disliking books, ignoring signage, and requiring help to access materials. When participants did discuss literacy issues, they focused on tools the library could offer them to help solve problems or described

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having no interest in library services, which they saw as heavily focused on print (see Isabella's comment, above).

Newcomers frequently described greater issues with spoken rather than written English. This may result from the group of newcomers included in the research, who were primarily well-educated, skilled workers from India, where English language instruction is common. Written English skills are necessary for success in academic study, so it is likely they developed those skills before moving to Canada.

Digital Literacy

> *Computer is a four letter word.*
> *Bayham, Senior, CPL*

Participants who reported discomfort with using computers described significant discomfort with any type of computer system. Participants described a range of skill levels. Some participants had no digital literacy skills, and were unable to access any services that required using a computer. Others possessed skills they could use in specific contexts, but found using computers awkward and frustrating.

Participants with poor digital literacy skills described mitigation strategies which included asking staff for help, ignoring the digital components of services and using non-library sources for the same services. Participants who struggled with digital literacy often relied on another member of their family to manage their digital services. This applied especially to seniors who often relied on their children. Participants expressed either an enthusiasm for learning how to use technologies, or had no interest in improving their digital literacy skills; this was a polarizing issue.

Discomfort with digital services extended beyond computers to other technologies including tablets and eReaders. Customers without experience tended to be more hostile to newer devices.

## DISCUSSION

### POLICY AND PROCEDURES: CLARIFICATION AND CONSISTENCY

Policy Barriers were the most prevalent reported barrier, as well as being the most complicated. Policy barriers involved a variety of aspects, including: actual policy content, policy enforcement, policy communication, and policy understanding.

Most descriptions of barriers involved very little discussion of the content of EPL policies and procedures; rather descriptions of barriers frequently involved misunderstandings related to policies and procedures, suggesting that, where possible, policies should be simplified and continually clarified with staff. Following the conclusion of data collection for this project, EPL took steps to simplify borrowing policies, giving all items a 3 week loan period, regardless of format

(excluding Hits to Go). A no-address card was also implemented that allows Edmontonians without ID to sign up for memberships.

In addition, ensuring front-line EPL staff are aware of, understand and are able to effectively communicate EPL policies and procedures will reduce the amount of confusion and inconsistency in messaging to our customers. The Discovery Services Team continues to develop and implement new customer service training modules to ensure all staff are aware of and able to provide accurate EPL policy information to customers.  Further opportunities for staff training include discussion of specific topics at Cluster meetings, and Up to Speed cafes.

## FEES: INCREASING FLEXIBILITY, PROVIDING OPTIONS

Library late fees were a significant issue for underserved populations. While many supported the idea of late fees in theory, nearly half of participants also stated that their own late fees prevented them from using library services. Unlike some of the other barriers, late fees were a hard barrier where customers felt they had no options and no possible work-arounds that might allow them to use library services despite a fine situation they were unable to manage via fine payment.

The issue of unmanageably large late fees that prevent library use for underserved populations are a potential site for EPL intervention to reduce barriers. EPL already enforces a maximum fine amount per item, wherein, after material has been overdue for a specified period, customers are charged the replacement cost for the item and overdue fees do not continue to accrue. In addition, if these extremely overdue items are eventually returned, customers are charged a replacement cost of no more than 18 dollars per item. With the approval of our Deputy CEO we also waive late fees for customers who have had library cards stolen, and or have had difficult life experiences that resulted in lost or long overdues.

EPL could also increase the flexibility of late fee policies. Participants often felt trapped with their late fees as there did not seem to be any options available to them that might allow them to pay their late fees. EPL already hosts Food4Fines events that allow customers to pay off late fees by donating food for the food bank. Fine-free days to take place every second year will be implemented as per the 2014-2016 business plan. More events like this that provide payment options to customers who cannot pay their late fees should be explored.

Investigate providing Community Librarians—the group most likely to build relationships and have contact with underserved community members—a higher discretionary late fee reduction limit may also provide underserved customers the flexibility they require to be able to pay late fees they can manage.

Dated late fees were mentioned by participants and seen as a particularly unfair barrier. EPL conducted a system clean-up in 2011 that eliminated all late fees more than three years old without collections on the accounts. Beginning in 2014, EPL is

making this a yearly process, thereby ensuring that customers are not prevented from using our services due to outdated fees (see: https://staffweb.epl.ca/BlogsStaff/BlogComments.cfm?entry=17795 for details)

Finally, increasing the transparency of our late fees policies and clarifying the reason we charge late fees with our staff will reduce policy barriers as well as fee barriers, as staff will have an improved ability to explain things to customers, resulting in a better understanding of how our late fees systems work, where they fit in those systems and, ultimately, why those systems exist.

## TRANSPORTATION: CONTINUING TO PUSH BEYOND OUR BUILDINGS

EPL has no control over transportation options to and from branches. Therefore, we must continue to develop and expand our innovative options for service access beyond our branch locations. Leveraging our already existing library deposit program and expanding it beyond just Seniors' centers should be considered, and new options for off-site borrowing and returns should be investigated. The Grant MacEwan and Century Park Lending Machines continue to provide off site options for borrowing and returns for our customers, and 2014 will see EPL's first Literacy Van traveling the city, allowing customers alternative access points for EPL services. eplGo sites will be implemented in 2014-16 providing more access to citizens who do not have branches in their communities.

Transportation as a barrier was importantly connected to late fees, as many participants reported incurring library late fees because they were unable to get to the library to return materials on time. These issues might be addressed by increasing the flexibility of our renewal options; however, what flexibility we can offer depends on the capabilities of the systems we employ. Increasing awareness around our already existing flexibility would help customers deal with transportation issues. For example, ensuring customers are aware that we can extend short term renewals on items that have reached their renewal ceiling if a customer is unable to return the item due to unforeseen circumstances (extreme weather, transportation problems, etc.)

Finally, increasing awareness around which organizations we work with in the community, and our outreach activities and events might also mitigate transportation issues by ensuring customers are aware of options for accessing staff, programming and resources outside our buildings.

## AWARENESS: ADVERTISING WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

While all participants in this study were aware of EPL's existence, not many were aware of all the various services we offered and many did not use our services because they did not think we had services and materials suitable for them. EPL's award-winning marketing team has done an incredible job promoting awareness of

EPL; we should continue to find new and innovative ways to promote awareness of the variety of services we have to offer.

In addition, ensuring the resource and services directories we do provide are organized in customer-centric, easily navigable ways may aid in ensuring customers are able to quickly and easily find the services they need.

**LITERACIES: INCREASING PARTNERSHIPS**

Given the stigma surrounding low literacy, EPL should strive to increase the ease with which people can learn about and access literacy services. Partnering with literacy organizations that could provide programming and instruction in our spaces would allow increased visibility of literacy resources (both our own and those available in the community) increase EPL staff awareness of literacy services outside our walls, and increase awareness of our services and resources among staff and volunteers at literacy organizations.

Newcomers identified having differing language needs, ranging from highly educated skilled workers who needed training to prepare them for accreditation programs to people who needed very basic training. Regardless, few participants attended any EPL language programs, though many noted they were aware the library hosted language learning programs. This suggests our ELL programs may not be aligning with the needs of our ELL and newcomer customers. A review of our current literacy and language learning program offerings would allow us to ensure our programming is optimally meeting the needs of these groups, and would allow us to concentrate resources more efficiently and effectively.

In addition, some newcomers noted that our language learning programs were not useful to them because they needed to study for specific language proficiency tests and felt programming that did not address these tests was an inefficient use of their limited study time. EPL should consider offering programs or partnering to offer programs based on specific English language proficiency tests.

Finally, this project emphasized the need for flexible digital literacy support in branch. Participants had unique, and sometimes specific issues they needed addressed, requiring staff who are comfortable providing on-the-spot, customer-specific, co-learning based digital literacy help.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

1) Design and implement staff training and orientation programs to ensure all front-line staff know and understand EPL membership, customer conduct, borrowing, fee policies and procedures, and that all staff enforce these policies consistently. (COMPLETE)

2) Simplify EPL's borrowing policies by: (COMPLETE)
   a. Investigate implementing a universal daily fine amount for all item types
   b. Instituting a single loan period for all item types
3) Simplify EPL's membership policies by: (COMPLETE)
   a. Issuing temporary internet passes without ID - COMPLETE
   b. Implementing a no-ID access card - COMPLETE
   c. Investigating alternative card options for group home residents

## FEES

1) Institute a yearly system clean-up that would eliminate/forgive outdated late fees and fees (COMPLETE).
2) Explore simplification of late fees (included in 2014-2016 Business Plan).
3) Explore the creation of additional events like Food4Fines that provide alternative ways of paying late fees (establishing fine-free day is included in 2014-2016 Business Plan and planned for October 2014).

## TRANSPORTATION

1) Increase access points for materials and services by:
   a. Investigating the expansion of library deposit programs to more than just Seniors' centers
   b. Investigating options for off-site borrowing and returns

2) Increase promotion of off-site services, programs, and visits by Community Librarians and other staff.

## SERVICE AWARENESS
1) Categorize library services from a customer-centered perspective (in terms of how customers use the service) and list them on the website

## LITERACIES
1) Encourage literacy instruction programs from partner organizations
2) Encourage and increase the provision digital literacy instruction.

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## APPENDIX A: Template for email to Community Librarians

Hello NAME OF COMMUNITY LIBRARIAN,

As part of my internship, I have been tasked with identifying the top five barriers underserved Edmonton communities face when attempting to access library services. This project involves connecting with underserved communities to record their descriptions of the difficulties they have had accessing library services. To do this, I need your help.

Part of the difficulty in identifying the top five barriers potential customers face to library access is that "community" can be defined in many different ways. Community can describe people connected by shared geography, history, beliefs, cultural identity or need. Communities based on any of those five categories, socially vulnerable or not, can be underserved and denied library access. Community membership can also overlap, with individuals belonging to multiple communities at the same time.

Given that, which communities in your catchment do you feel are underserved? This can include groups you are working with as well as those that EPL has not yet built a relationship with. If you are working with groups at the edge of or outside of your catchment, I am interested in those as well.

Of those communities, which do you think requires the most specific focus and why? If you could respond within two weeks [by May 30th] it would really help me out.

Thanks!

## APPENDIX B: STUDY ADVERTISEMENT

**|||| epl** EDMONTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

## VOLUNTEERS NEEDED:

### What Do You Want From Your Library?

The Edmonton Public Library wants to make it easier for you to use the library.

If you volunteer, in one-on-one or group sessions lasting 15-60 minutes you will talk about difficulties you have had accessing Library services, why you use or do not use the Library, and any other experiences you have had with the library. The interviews will be recorded and what people say will be turned into recommendations that will help make it easier for everyone to use library.

If you would like to help, or have any questions please contact Peter Maguire before **December 7th, 2012**:

**Peter Maguire,**
Community-Led Intern Librarian
Edmonton Public Library
pmaguire@epl.ca
(780) 495-9876

**Spread the words.**

Public Services Department · Stanley A. Milner Library · 7 Sir Winston Churchill Square · Edmonton, AB · T5J 2V4
T:(780) 495-9876 F:(780) 496-7097

**|||| epl** EDMONTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

**Spread the words.**

## Appendix C: Consent Form

**epl** EDMONTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

As a participant in this study you will take part in a group interview. I will ask you to describe your experiences with Edmonton Public Library (EPL) services, difficulties you have had accessing those services and your general attitudes towards libraries. The interview will last around 60 minutes and be audio recorded. Collected information may be used to create EPL reports, conference presentations, and other publications.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. You may choose not to answer any question asked during the interview. You may leave at any time.

A transcript will be made from the audio recording of the interview and a pseudonym will be assigned to you. Both the transcript and the recording will be securely stored and will only be accessed by the Community Led Libraries Intern, the Director - Library Services, the Executive Director – Public Services and the Manager, Assessment and Research or differently titled persons in equivalent positions. Transcripts and recordings may be kept indefinitely, and will be kept for at least one year from the date of transcription. Any personally identifiable information that you disclose during the interview will be kept confidential and EPL will not reveal your identity. Personal information is collected under the authority of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, Section 33(c) and will only be used to administer the interview.

I, _____, agree to take part in a group interview that will explore my opinions of EPL's services, my experiences trying to access them and my general attitudes towards libraries.

I agree to participate in this interview under the following conditions:

1.  I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that my identity will not be revealed.
2.  I have the right to leave the interview at any time for any reason.
3.  The information gathered from this interview will be used only for EPL reports, conference presentations, and other publications.

I agree to these conditions:

Signature _____

Date _____

If you have any questions about this study, please contact:

**Peter Maguire,**
Community-Led Intern Librarian
Edmonton Public Library
pmaguire@epl.ca
(780) 495-9876

**Spread the words.**

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**epl** EDMONTON PUBLIC LIBRARY
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## Appendix D: Demographics Form

```
NAME: _____
- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -
Pseudonym:_____
   COM:_ PROG:_ SPA:_ CAR:_
   AGE:__ GEN:__ FSA:_____

Community:_____

Hinc: <10 / 10-20 / 20-30 / 30-40
   40-50 / 50-60 / 60-70 / 70-80
   80-90 / 90-100 / >100 / NA

        #HH:_ #CHH:_
EdA:_____
1La: _____
CA:_____
```

**Key for Shortened Terms:**
**COM:** Computer Use
**PROG:** Program Attendance
**SPA:** Space Use
**CAR:** Cardholding
**GEN:** Gender
**FSA:** Forward Sorting Address
**Hinc:** Household Income
**#HH:** Number of people in household
**#CHH:** Number of children in household
**EdA:** Educational Attainment
**1La:** 1st Language
**CA:** Catchment

## Appendix E: Interview Guide

1. What words would you use to describe the library?

2. Have you used the library in the past?
   - Prompts:
     i. Computers,
     ii. To work?
     iii. To study?
     iv. Hanging out?
     v. As a child?

3. Why you are **using** or **not using** the library now?

4. What would make it easier to use the library?
   - Prompts:
     i. How do you think the library can help you use its services and space?

5. Is there anything else you want the Edmonton Public Library to know that we have not discussed here, or anything that we have discussed that you want to make sure is emphasized?

## Appendix F: Detailed Descriptions of Underserved Communities

**Aboriginal peoples** are self-identified members of any First Nations, Metis, or Inuit group.

In Canada, Aboriginal Peoples are frequently identified as a marginalized group. While a detailed history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada is not within the scope of this report, systematic discrimination has caused many to face poverty, limited educational opportunities and other social issues, all of which could limit their ability to fully access the library (Joseph and Joseph, 2007). Aboriginal people living off-reserve were one of five groups identified in Burstein (2005) as at-risk for long-term unemployment and persistent low income in Canada.

Library Services for Aboriginal people in Edmonton were evaluated comprehensively by EPL through the 2005 Services to Aboriginal Peoples Report. In the report, 72 recommendations were made intending to meet 14 objectives. These recommendations have resulted in EPL restructuring its services to Aboriginal People several times in the last few years. This commitment makes reaching out to them in the context of this project especially important.

Staff suggested that Aboriginal peoples have difficulty accessing library services because of broader, systematic mistreatment they received in the past. Staff identified that Aboriginal experiences are variable, but focused on Aboriginal people who were members of other socially vulnerable groups.

**At-risk teens**: "At-risk" has no consistently used definition (Moore, 2006). For the EPL Barriers Study, "At-risk teens" are defined as teens that are homeless, living in group homes, or accepting services from local emergency shelters.

Teen library users are often perceived as disruptive, disrespectful or threatening by library staff and customers (Brehm-Heeger, 2008). Prior surveys of teen attitudes towards libraries suggest that they often feel that library staff members view them with suspicion, targeting them for unfair treatment (Jones, Gorman and Suellentrop, 2009). At-risk teens are often overlooked in discussions of teens (Hill, 2013).

EPLs "Independent Juvenile" card is targeted at at-risk teens, allowing them to obtain a card without requiring a guarantor. Identification and address restrictions result in group home youth being ineligible for cards. Youth in group homes are required to secure a guarantor, usually the head of the group home or their Case Worker. This places responsibility on a civil servant who the children do not always know in a position with frequent turnover. This policy is a barrier, but the impact is hard to evaluate without greater information about what youth want from the library.

Staff viewed the library as providing computer access and materials, but highlighted the importance of offering a safe space that can allow teens to escape unstable home and personal lives.

**Homeless Adults:** are adults who report being unable to secure housing for an extended period of time.

Library policies often target homeless users by discouraging their use of library spaces, preventing them from accessing materials and services, and reducing resource availability in communities experiencing poverty (Berman, 2006).

EPL has made a commitment to improve the experience of Homeless library customers. In 2012, EPL implemented a library card that does not require proof of address. The Community Outreach workers at MNA have been successful at providing relevant services to the inner-city customers. While homeless customers still face challenges, EPL has created opportunities for them to access our services.

The homeless community was primarily identified near MNA, SPW and STR. Homeless adults living outside those areas face challenges as most agencies serving the homeless are concentrated in the inner-city. Staff were concerned about homeless customers access to library materials and susceptibility to library late fees. Many people struggling with housing are unable to provide ID or follow our borrowing policies due to circumstances beyond their control.

**Low Income Adults and Families:** are adults and families who are accepting services from an agency designated to help people with low income.

Persistent low income is a significant measure of social exclusion. Families and adults were separated because of differences in typical experiences of long term poverty. Individuals experiencing long term poverty often struggle with other issues, moving in and out of poverty throughout their life. Families, especially one parent households, experience consistent poverty, unless there are major changes in a parent's education (Burstein, 2005).

UK studies associated low income with low social class, and low social class with unfamiliarity and hostility towards library services (Pateman and Vincent, 2010). That unfamiliarity is compounded by bureaucratic policies and "localism", a focus on serving narrowly defined communities (Holt & Holt, 2010).

The biggest concerns related to the impact of late fees, which prevented people from borrowing materials or made people feel unwelcome in library spaces. EPL Staff identified late fees and insecure housing as major concerns for members of this group, as staff saw library late fees as less important than basic needs.

**Adults with low literacy skills** are adults who struggle with literacy skills.

Library use correlates closely with level of education, and libraries are very closely associated with books (Sin and Kim, 2008; Zickuhr, Rainie and Purcell, 2013)**.** While the last world-wide assessment of literacy identified Alberta as performing well internationally, it identified that 40% of adult Albertans struggle with literacy to some degree (Barr-Telford, Nault, and Pignal, 2005). This suggests that many Albertans are unable to access library services.

Adults with low literacy skills tend to feel shame because of their inability to read. This shame encourages them to develop elaborate coping mechanisms that allow them to hide their illiteracy (Fingeret and Drennon, 1997). This makes illiterate adults difficult to identify as they tend to hide and deny their illiteracy. Adults with poor literacy skills often avoid the public library because of its association with books (WTP, 2008).

Staff expressed concern that adults experiencing literacy issues would avoid visiting the library because they felt that the library would have nothing to offer them. Comments from agency reviews suggested that literacy affects families, with illiterate adults providing less support to their children's literacy development. **Geographically Isolated Communities** are communities located greater than 5KM away from a library.

The 5KM number was selected based on the "needs assessment" guidelines in the EPL Library Board's Branch Development Policy, which requires branches be placed 4-5 KM from each other, creating 5KM or greater blocks of space without library service at the edges of outlying Library catchments. Using *Google Maps*, 5KM areas around libraries using major roadways were marked off, and communities outside of those areas were noted as potential target communities.

Concerns were raised over specific communities, some less than 5KM from library, but facing barriers related to city design and transportation options. The largest concern was that people in isolated communities could not use our service because they could not reliably access our branches.

**Newcomers** are people currently receiving services from agencies helping people adjust to life in Canada.

Edmonton is one of the most popular entry points for Newcomers to Canada, with large numbers of educated worker and refugee class immigration (Rossiter and Derwing, 2012). Newcomers are often well educated but likely to experience persistent low income (Burstein, 2005).

Specific concerns related to English Language proficiency and orientation to Canadian culture. Respondents noted that many newcomers were unaware of library services, or their role in Canada. Concerns were raised for newcomer seniors and women, who staff believed were more socially isolated due to cultural expectations.

**Seniors** are adults aged 65 or older.

The number of Canadians over 65 is expected to double by 2036. (Statistics Canada. 2007). In Edmonton, it is expected that by 2041 1/3 of the population will be over 65. Seniors represent a diverse population, but tend to have lower incomes, mobility issues, and health problems that interfere with daily life (ESCC, 2010).

Baby Boomers view themselves as different from previous generations of seniors. They envision themselves retiring older or beginning a second career after retirement, as being more involved in the community, and they tend to define old age later than previous generations. (Honnold and Mesaros, 2004).

Staff identified digital literacy as a barrier. Isolation was a concern for seniors without extended support networks. Newcomer Seniors were viewed as a particularly isolated group. Organizational reviews identified concerns from seniors about maintaining contact with the broader world.

**Teen Parents** are parents aged 17 or younger.

Approximately 4% of babies born in Alberta are to parents aged 15-19 (Statistics Canada, 2013). Teen parents tend to have reduced educational outcomes, reduced career opportunities, and persistent low income. These effects can potentially be mitigated by providing appropriate support for teen parents in achieving educational outcomes that will allow them full participation in the workforce (Luong, 2008)**.** Teen parents are in an uncomfortable position, often facing barriers associated with at-risk youth and low income families. They face their responsibilities with very few resources and social supports (Klor, 2012).

Staff were concerned about Teen Parents ability to access children's programming, as they are made to feel unwelcome by other parents. Teen parents were seen as hard to reach between school, work and parenting commitments.

**University of Alberta Students** are students enrolled at the University of Alberta.

University students are infrequently targeted by public libraries. EPL has partnered with the University of Alberta to allow students to register their student ID as a library card (L-PASS), giving them access to library services without cost. Despite

promotion, *Director's Station* data suggest less than 7% of eligible students registered for an L-PASS in 2011 borrowed more than 10 items from the library within a year of registering. This suggests that students are not using the library.

Students and recent graduates are easy to overlook when so much focus in community work has been on vulnerable populations. STR staff identified possible fruitful partnership among different groups at the University of Alberta. Because of the L-Pass and EPLGo, University of Alberta students were targeted. Their responses may give insight into the experience of other Edmonton students.