

Oradell Public Library

Patron Experience Survey

Executive Summary

Background

In an effort to better understand the needs and preferences of its patrons, the Oradell Public Library proactively undertook a Patron Experience Survey from January 30 – March 15, 2015. The Board of Trustees created the survey instrument, administered it through Survey Monkey and publicized it broadly through the news media, social media, library listservs, patron outreach, contests, and on-site signage. The survey received a total of 304 responses. Of those who participated, 88.16% were Oradell residents; 86.4% were Oradell library cardholders; 20.07% visit the library more than once a week; and 59.21% visit the library between one and four times a month.

Below is a summary of the results of the survey by general theme:

Operations [hours, fines, etc.]

- The survey was fielded prior to the further reduction of Library hours in May 2015 and still, the overwhelming comment from survey respondents was a call for additional hours.
- Over the years as the Library's budget was reduced so, too, were the hours that the Library was open to patrons. Specifically, residents identified the following cuts as being problematic to how and when they could use the library:
 - Weekday mornings from 9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.
 - Thursday evenings from 5:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
 - Junior room early closings (at 7:00 p.m. (not enough in budget to pay a librarian to be on second floor))
 - Sunday closings 1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.
 - Saturday closings in May and June (even though school is still in session)
- ✓ **ACTION TAKEN:** When the Borough declined to fund the Library at the level required to maintain operations at even the drastically reduced level, the Library Trustees, Library Foundation, and Friends of the Library mounted a grassroots resident/patron campaign to bring the plight of the Library to the top of the Borough's agenda. The campaign leveraged a Change.org petition, news media and social media to galvanize residents [library users and non-users alike] to demand that the Borough restore the Library's newly cut

- hours. While the Library requested \$36,000 to restore Thursday hours, as well as Sunday hours for the next 12 months, the Borough only provided \$20,000. With partial funding granted, the Library restored Thursday hours and re-opened on Sundays. To celebrate the Sunday openings and to thank Oradell residents for their vehement and vocal support, the Friends of the Library hosted a celebration open to all residents.
- Another operational topic that garnered commentary in the survey centered around the fines that the Library charges for overdue materials and replacement costs for lost materials. It is important to understand that the physical assets of the Library belong to the Borough of Oradell and are also circulated throughout the BCCLS consortium. To that end, when materials are not returned on time, a fine is assessed for keeping the material out of circulation. The maximum fine is \$20 and the patron's library card is frozen until the issue is resolved. Should the material be lost, an additional fine is levied to fund the replacement of the item. All libraries within the BCCLS consortium levy fines.
 - ✓ **ACTION TAKEN:** Given the comments and lack of clarity around the fine system, the following actions were taken:
 - The fine policy was posted on the Library's website
 - The Board of Trustees reviewed the correspondence [3 letters] that is sent to patrons when materials are late or missing. The Trustees benchmarked the letters against those of other neighboring libraries [RiverEdge and Paramus] to determine if Oradell's were unnecessarily harsh. The Trustees found the letters to be appropriate and even less strident than others.
 - In 2016, BCCLS is looking into the possibility of creating a universal fine policy and Oradell will participate in those deliberations.

Facilities

- The two most frequently mentioned issues regarding the Library's facilities were parking and the landscaping around the Library.
- Parking issues in Oradell are not unique to the Library and there is a limit to what the Library can do to alleviate the inconvenience to its patrons. That said, the Library has over the years met with the Oradell Police Department to see if parking spots could be designated for the Library. Heretofore the answer has been no.
- The Library does not have any discretionary money in its budget to pay for landscaping and it is reliant upon whatever time and resources the DPW can put into maintaining the property. Unfortunately, due to the strains on their budget, very little attention has been paid to the Library property (other than snow removal for safety purposes), and it looks shabby and unbecoming a Borough building that has been called 'the heart of the community'.

- ✓ **ACTION TAKEN:** The Library is investigating the possibility of soliciting pro-bono services from local landscapers in exchange for placing their promotional signage on the Library property.

Collections/Programming

- The survey probed extensively into patrons' satisfaction with both the collections (adult and children's) and programming (adult and children's) available.
- Since 2008, the Library's budget for materials has decreased from nearly \$90,000 to \$58,000. During that same time, the cost of goods has increased so the spending power of that \$58k is even less. As a result, the Library has been forced to make difficult choices about what new materials to acquire, what tattered and torn material to replace and what subscriptions to let lapse.
- Patrons expressed their clear disappointment in the breadth and depth of the collections, including not being able to get best sellers or first run DVDs at the Oradell Public Library, needing to wait for materials to be gotten from other BCCLS member libraries, driving around themselves to other libraries in order to get books that they believe the Oradell Public Library should have, etc.
- Patrons were similarly disappointed in the Junior Room collections from the tattered and torn books that are constantly in circulation, to the lack of materials to support school projects and new requirements of the Common Core curriculum; and to the gaps in materials for certain grade levels.
- With respect to patron satisfaction with programming it is important to recognize that 100% of adult programming is made available by the volunteers who make up the Friends of the Library. Working closely with the Library Director, it is the Friends who produce, fund and execute the programming events.
- While some programming in the Junior Room is produced by the part-time Children's Librarian, additional programming is dependent on community volunteers and the Friends. It is exceedingly difficult to produce and staff relevant and engaging programming for babies and toddlers through to high school students with little to no budget or staff. That said, every effort is made to ensure that there is some programming available to all users of the Junior Room.
- Patron satisfaction was high for the programming available but there was a clear call for more programming overall and greater diversity of content.
- ✓ **ACTION TAKEN:** The results of the Patron Survey have been shared with the Children's Librarian and Library Director to help inform the programming choices going forward. Additionally, an analysis is being done of current and planned programming by topic and demographic to identify gaps that can be filled should resources and staff become available.

Customer Service

- As the impetus for the Patron Experience Survey, customer service was a topic that elicited a lot of feedback. And, it became apparent that patrons were experiencing less than optimal customer service. Complaints touched on perceived unfriendliness and inadequate responsiveness.
- In reality, poor morale was a growing issue. Staff had not received raises in many years. Many of their hours had been cut due to reduced hours of operation and desk assistants were further cut to make up for budget shortfalls. And, they were on the front lines of receiving patron complaints about the collections and programming – issues over which they had no control or opportunity to address.
- All of that said, the Board of Trustees and Library Director agree with patrons that unfriendly or unresponsive behavior is completely unacceptable and have taken steps to address it head on.
- ✓ **ACTION TAKEN:** Upon reviewing the results of the Patron Survey, the Director engaged an outside Customer Service expert to conduct mandatory training for the entire staff. The Library Foundation paid for the training session and the cost of having staff attend. By all accounts, the training session was very helpful. As an outcome of the training the following actions have been taken:
 - Each staff member made a commitment to personally improve their customer service
 - Customer Service is addressed on a regular basis at staff meetings; and
 - Each staff member is held accountable for their customer service commitments during their performance reviews.

Conclusion

- The purpose of the Patron Experience Survey was to learn first-hand from Oradell Library patrons about how the Library is meeting their needs and where there is room for improvement in order to inform operational and budgetary decisions going forward. And, while it is natural and necessary to focus on the shortcomings in order to improve upon them, it is also worthwhile to celebrate the successes.
- In closing, here are a few of the heartwarming comments received from patrons:
 - I think the Oradell Library is a very important hub of the community. It provides a variety of programs, has a great array of books, films, etc. The staff are helpful and the environment is inviting. A wonderful place to browse and sit.
 - I love the library- when it comes to libraries and what they can offer more always seems better. My kids love the library too ! They always ask to go and visit / hang out there. I'm in the junior room so much that I rarely go into the adult section.

- Oradell Library is one of the best libraries I have visited! The Junior room has always been awesome! I have lived in Oradell over 30 years and I have never had a bad experience! I have nothing negative to say! I have brought Cub Scout dens and Daisy & Brownie Girl Scouts to the library, my children grew up with Mrs. Camins, we were very proud when a book was donated with our child's name in it, we have enjoyed so many interesting and educating exhibits and collections! I have always said that Oradell is blessed with a wonderful library! The people who work there are extraordinary people! Thank you all for all you do!