THE FUTURE ROLE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN PENNSYLVANIA

AN ASSESSMENT OF NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS | September 2025

[Future Role of Public Libraries in Pennsylvania]

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PREPARED FOR THE OFFICE OF COMMONWEALTH LIBRARIES
BY BLUE WILLOW CONSULTING LLC AND METRO METRICS LLC

INSTITUTE of Museum and Library SERVICES

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“Libraries to me have always been welcoming and affirming. It's a single mom printing out her resume for a new job while her kids are sitting at story hour, or a homeless man reading the newspaper next to the fire on a cold day, or a child first learning how cool reading can be. It's a place for community, a place for exchanging ideas, a place to exist despite whatever is happening at home. I love libraries.”

—*Susquehanna County resident*

Introduction

The evolution of public libraries' role within their Pennsylvania communities is being driven in great part by the demographic and economic changes and technological advances of the first quarter of the 21st century. To effectively serve all Pennsylvanians, libraries must understand residents' needs and expectations in this changing environment so that they are ready to address the emerging needs and developments of the years ahead.

This report is the culmination of a major research effort, conceived of and led by Blue Willow Consulting, LLC, with Metro Metrics, LLC, on behalf of Pennsylvania's Office of Commonwealth Libraries (OCL). The research was built on an inclusive outreach and learning process that gave voice to everyday Pennsylvanians and stakeholders across the library ecosystem. Conducted between October 2024 and June 2025, it was guided by a Steering Committee of Pennsylvania library leaders and informed by an extensive literature review on broader trends affecting the role of public libraries within their communities.

The main objective of the research effort was to assess the needs and expectations of Pennsylvanians—both users and non-users—as they relate to public libraries, now and into the future. This included identifying the most essential and accessible methods needed for delivering library resources throughout Pennsylvania and reimagining how data and information can be commonly accessed and shared at the state and local levels so that libraries can establish and support shared goals and provide evaluative data on outcomes and impacts. Finally, the research identified opportunities and developed campaign materials to increase statewide awareness that public libraries are foundational to the education ecosystem in Pennsylvania. This research covered public libraries in Pennsylvania; it does not include school, academic, or special collection libraries. Additionally, the scope of our research did not include statutory or fiscal matters related to public libraries.

The research began with a series of listening sessions, in which library leaders and statewide partners shared insights into current strengths and opportunities and future aspirations and results for public libraries in Pennsylvania. Key themes that emerged from these sessions shaped more targeted questions about the needs of the state's residents and their expectations of public libraries. We explored these questions through multiple methods, including a major statewide poll of residents and separate statewide surveys of library leaders, staff, and their partners. To capture a full picture, the research also included follow-up interviews with libraries' leaders, staff, and partners; a call for stories and sentiments from library users; and a final community convening of library leaders and partners who participated in earlier research phases, where preliminary findings were presented and discussed.

This report consists of three main sections:

- An introductory "lay of the land," which describes the library ecosystem and trends affecting public libraries in Pennsylvania;
- Major findings from the research effort; and
- Opportunities for public libraries to contribute to a healthy and successful Pennsylvania, and recommendations for how OCL can support this.

Appendices at the end of the report provide acknowledgements of the many individuals and organizations that contributed to the report, an overview of the research methodology, the questions asked in our surveys and poll, and descriptions of the user and non-user personas.

Public Libraries in Pennsylvania: The Lay of the Land

Before assessing the needs and expectations of public libraries in Pennsylvania, we need to understand the context in which public libraries in Pennsylvania now operate and what can be expected for them as they move into the future. This context begins with Pennsylvania's library ecosystem itself: the number and size of libraries that serve the public, their structure and funding sources, the entities that oversee and buttress their operations, and the vast array of partnerships they form with outside entities. Broader trends related to the state's population, workforce, and broadband access also affect the library ecosystem. Taken together, this context informed our data collection, analysis, and the formation of findings for this report.

The Library Ecosystem

Pennsylvania has 444 libraries serving the public, according to data collected from public libraries in 2024, to be released later in 2025.[1] Through 637 public service outlets (including main libraries, branches, and bookmobiles), these libraries collectively serve more than 12.7 million residents, though they vary in their distribution and in the share of the state's population that they serve. Small libraries (defined as serving 10,000 residents or fewer) represent 42 percent of libraries but serve only 7 percent of the state's population; medium libraries (serving between 10,001 and 100,000 residents) represent 55 percent of libraries and serve 57 percent of the state's population; and large libraries (serving more than 100,000 residents) represent just 3 percent of libraries but serve 36 percent of the state's population. *(Figure 1)* The median size of the population served ranges from just under 5,000 for small libraries, to close to 24,000 for medium libraries, to more than 228,000 for large libraries. Even with these differences, one study found that Pennsylvania's public libraries are evenly distributed across the state with regard to population density and race in terms of Black residents, supporting the argument that libraries are "democratic equalizers."[2]

Figure 1. Pennsylvania's Public Libraries: Count and Population Served

Library Size **Size of population served**	**Small** 10,000 or <	**Medium** 10,001-100,000	**Large** 100,001 or >	**All Libraries**
Count	184 (42%)	246 (55%)	14 (3%)	444
Total population served	934,119 (7%)	7,205,458 (57%)	4,569,230 (36%)	12,708,807
Median population served	4,865	23,584	228,493	12,940

Source: Pennsylvania Public Library Statistics for Reporting Year 2024

[1] *PA Public Library Statistics for Reporting Year 2024* (data collected from public libraries in 2024, to be released later in 2025), Office of Commonwealth Libraries – Bureau of Library Development (OCL-BLD). An additional 21 System Administrative Units are also listed in the dataset, but these entities do not directly serve the public.

[2] *Investigating the Relationship Between Public Libraries and Community Indicators in Pennsylvania*, Office of Child Development, School of Education, University of Pittsburgh, June 2022.

Perhaps contrary to public perception, public libraries in Pennsylvania are largely independent entities: Eighty-seven percent of the state's libraries are independent nonprofit 501(c)(3) organizations, each with its own board of directors that hires the library director, oversees operations, and assists with fundraising. *(Figure 2)* The remaining libraries are either part of a local government (9 percent) or another entity such as an authority (4 percent). Notably, the smaller the library, the more likely it is that the library is an independent nonprofit and the less likely that it is part of local government.[3]

Figure 2. Pennsylvania's Public Libraries: Who Operates Them

Library Size **Size of population served**	**Small** **10,000 or <**	**Medium** **10,001-100,000**	**Large** **100,001 or >**	**All Libraries**
Nonprofit 501(c)(3)	166 (90%)	209 (85%)	10 (71%)	385 (87%)
Part of local government	11 (6%)	28 (11%)	3 (21%)	42 (9%)
Other entity	7 (4%)	9 (4%)	1 (7%)	17 (4%)

Source: Pennsylvania Public Library Statistics for Reporting Year 2024.

Just as the entities that operate public libraries in Pennsylvania vary, so do the libraries' budgets. Median total annual revenue for the state's public libraries is close to $280,000, ranging from a low of about $115,000 for small libraries to a high of $6.3 million for large libraries. Median revenue for medium libraries is almost twice the size of the median for all libraries. *(Figure 3)* In aggregate, public libraries in Pennsylvania are primarily funded by local sources. Local governments provide an average of 63 percent of total funding, and revenue that libraries generate themselves, such as fines, fees, or donations, accounts for an average of 20 percent. Not surprisingly, given that smaller libraries are more likely to be nonprofits, the smaller the library, the more it tends to rely on self-generated income and the less support it receives from local government. State funding accounts for just 16 percent, and less than one percent comes from the federal government.[4]

Figure 3. Pennsylvania's Public Libraries: Sources of Revenue

Library Size **Size of population served**	**Small** 10,000 or <	**Medium** 10,001-100,000	**Large** 100,001 or >	**All Libraries**
Median total revenue	$115,324	$523,655	$6,302,417	$279,607
% Federal govt funding	1%	1%	<1%	<1%
% State govt funding	18%	17%	15%	16%
% Local govt funding	37%	54%	75%	63%
% Library-generated	44%	28%	10%	20%

Source: Pennsylvania Public Library Statistics for Reporting Year 2024. Some figures in the columns do not add up to 100% due to round-off error.

[3] *PA Public Library Statistics for Reporting Year 2024*, OCL-BLD.
[4] Ibid

Pennsylvania's public libraries are supported and advised by the Office of Commonwealth Libraries (OCL), a deputate of the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and the Governor's Advisory Council on Library Development (GAC), whose 12 members are appointed by the governor. Administratively, public libraries in Pennsylvania are organized into 29 library districts, with every library included in a district, and 33 county-based library systems though some independent libraries are not part of a system. Library districts are designated by OCL and GAC and receive state aid to provide leadership, coordination, and consultation to local libraries, while library systems are cooperative networks of libraries that share resources and services.

The broader ecosystem supporting public libraries in Pennsylvania extends beyond administrative and governmental structures. It includes statewide organizations such as:

- The Pennsylvania Association of Libraries (PaLA), a membership association of library organizations and individuals working in Pennsylvania's libraries that provides professional development and networking opportunities through events, and
- Hosting Solutions and Library Consulting (HSLC), a nonprofit that hosts both the Pennsylvania Statewide Catalog (the statewide catalog and interlibrary loan system formerly called ACCESS PA) and POWER Library (a comprehensive statewide digital resource platform) and supports Pennsylvania's libraries with consulting in governance, strategic planning, board recruitment, evaluation, and marketing.

As anchors in their local communities, libraries across Pennsylvania also naturally form partnerships with outside entities, including nonprofits, local businesses, chambers of commerce, workforce development agencies, literacy councils, and government departments and programs (e.g., Parks and Recreation). These partnerships vary in nature, from loose arrangements such as allowing the usage of space in a library, to more formal undertakings such as coordinated marketing, joint fundraising, and even the formation of collaborations such as collective impact initiatives.

Trends Affecting Public Libraries in Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania's public libraries operate within a broader set of external factors at the local, state, and even national levels. This section examines three Pennsylvania-specific trends—related to the population, the workforce, and broadband access—that are already playing major roles in how public libraries operate and that most likely will continue to affect them into the future.

Trend #1: Pennsylvania's population is changing in dramatic ways.

First, the population is projected to become less rural and more urban and suburban in the coming decades. By 2050, the overall state population size is expected to stay roughly the same (projected growth of 1.6 percent), but significant population decline is projected for 41 of Pennsylvania's 67 counties, most of them in the rural parts of the state in the north and west. This rural population decline is expected to be offset by strong population growth in Philadelphia and its surrounding suburban counties (with the notable exception of Bucks County).[5]

Pennsylvania's population is also aging rapidly. In other words, older people represent a growing share of the population. One in four Pennsylvanians today is over the age of 60, but by 2030, it will be one in three.[6]

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[5] "*What can slow the population loss in rural Pennsylvania? Local officials have ideas.*" *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 2, 2024.
[6] *The Future is Now: Aging in Pennsylvania*, AARP Pennsylvania, June 24, 2024.

Moreover, the rural population is aging faster than the urban population.[7] Related to an aging population is a projected decline in the working-age population: The number of high school graduates is projected to drop by 17 percent from 2023 to 2041. Lastly, Pennsylvania's population is becoming more diverse. The state's diversity index, defined as the probability that two individuals chosen at random in a given area will be from different race or ethnic groups, increased to 44 percent in 2020, up from 35.3 percent in 2010, with the youth population being more diverse than the adult population.[8] Part of this increased diversity stems from increased immigration: The state's foreign-born population more than doubled in size between 2000 and 2023,[9] and 12 percent of Pennsylvania residents ages 5 or older reportedly speak a language other than English at home.[10]

These demographic changes have major implications for public libraries in Pennsylvania. Serving an older and more diverse population will most likely require adjustments to library collections and services that cater to their needs. A declining population in rural areas, which is already resulting in a lack of critical services such as healthcare providers, will place greater demand on libraries to fill the gaps. This demand includes offering internet access in private spaces for residents to use while participating in telehealth appointments because their healthcare providers are no longer close by. Recruiting and training a workforce, especially one reflective of a more diverse population, will prove challenging when the working-age population is smaller. And communities with dwindling populations to support library fundraising efforts will find it difficult to maintain library infrastructure, especially if it is already old.

Trend #2: Demand for digital skills in Pennsylvania's workforce is high.

Employer demand for digital skills grew gradually in the first two decades of the 21st century, but the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the trend, making digital skills a baseline requirement for most jobs. Today, 45 percent of jobs in Pennsylvania clearly require digital skills and another 45 percent likely do, closely mirroring national averages.[11]

At the same time, the digital skill divide is wide: Nationally, nearly 48 million U.S. workers—about one-third—lack foundational digital competencies, such as basic Excel proficiency and typing skills, which are needed for in-demand jobs across a range of industries and job levels, not only in tech-specific roles. Research suggests that workers who acquire even a single digital skill—like basic spreadsheet use—could see their wages increase by 23 percent, while businesses benefit from lower turnover and higher productivity.[12] Pennsylvania was set to receive up to $25 million from the Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program to address digital skills, devices, and access. However, federal termination of the program in 2025 cut off the funding.[13] In addition, the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services had secured a federal grant to support telehealth access in 10 rural northern counties, but it was similarly canceled.[14]

The growing demand for digital skills has positioned public libraries in Pennsylvania as key players in bridging the digital divide. Many public libraries are expanding basic support by offering hands-on digital skills classes, ranging from the basics of turning on a computer and using a mouse to more advanced training on applications

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[7] *Rural Pennsylvania's Aging Population*, Center for Rural Pennsylvania, July 2023.
[8] *Diversity in Pennsylvania: An overview of the Diversity Index in Pennsylvania*, Pennsylvania State Data Center, 2024.
[9] *Pennsylvania: State Immigration Data Profiles (Data H)ub*, Migration Policy Institute.
[10] *Language Diversity in Pennsylvania*, Pennsylvania State Data Center, February 2025.
[11] *Closing Pennsylvania's Digital Divide*, National Skills Coalition, 2024.
[12] Ibid.
[13] *Digital Equity Act* (webpage), Pennsylvania Broadband Development Authority, 2022.
[14] *Millions for public Wi-Fi, digital skills classes in Pa. cut as Trump targets 'racist' broadband program*, *Spotlight PA*, June 4, 2025.

that are part of platforms such as Microsoft 365 and Google Workspace. For those with internet access, POWER Library provides a wide range of digital resources for work, education, and leisure. Libraries are especially vital for older adults and citizens returning from incarceration who need onramps to digital independence. Library workers themselves are increasingly expected to have strong digital skills, to provide technical assistance to library users, and to manage the growing digital collections and services. As emerging technologies–especially AI–widen the digital skill divide, public libraries will likely face increasing expectations to help bridge it.

Trend #3: Reliable high-speed internet is now essential for work, accessing services, and staying connected in Pennsylvania

Broadband is now widespread in Pennsylvania, with 98 percent of households owning internet-capable devices (though for many, this is primarily a mobile phone) and 90 percent subscribing to broadband service.[15] While only 10 percent still lack access due to limited availability or affordability, nearly half (49 percent) of respondents to the Pennsylvania Broadband Survey said affording internet access is challenging. Moreover, among connected households, 43 percent reported that someone in their household could work remotely if internet speeds improved.

Since the Affordable Connectivity Program ended in 2024, more Pennsylvanians now face higher costs, and some could lose service altogether. Although alternatives like the Federal Communications Commission's Lifeline program remain, they may come with barriers to participants, such as requiring a credit card for payment, needing a stable home address, or having to regularly prove eligibility. The Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment Program (BEAD) is infusing $1.6 billion of federal funding into expanding high-speed internet access in Pennsylvania through infrastructure deployment,[16] and the second and final round of applications is open as of July 2025.[17] However, it is unclear as yet whether this investment will make access more affordable.

Broadband access is now a necessity in everyday life. For Pennsylvania areas with poor broadband access or for residents who cannot afford it, especially in low-income or predominantly Black communities,[18] public libraries are often the only access points and, therefore, lifelines. Many are the only source of free, reliable internet and public computers in their communities. Library visitors today are just as likely to encounter public-use computers, internet access, and Wi-Fi as they are physical books, DVDs, and magazines. The rise of costlier satellite internet service will continue to raise concerns about affordability and access to broadband, potentially further increasing reliance on libraries for access.[19]

Pennsylvania has already seen dramatic changes in its population, workforce, and infrastructure in the first quarter of the 21st century, with more to follow in the coming decade. This timely needs assessment addresses important questions about who uses public libraries and who does not, how they use them, and how they might be newly engaged with them, as well as what their needs and expectations are of libraries, now and in the future. The next section presents the findings of this needs assessment.

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[15] *Pennsylvania Broadband Survey*, Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED), 2023.
[16] *Pennsylvania Opens Second, Final Round of BEAD Applications*, *Government Technology*, July 21, 2025.
[17] *Final Application Round for $1.16 Billion in Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Funding Now Open to Expand Affordable, High-Speed Internet Connections Across the Commonwealth* (webpage), PA DCED, July 18, 2025.
[18] *Investigating the Relationship Between Public Libraries and Community Indicators in Pennsylvania*, Office of Child Development, School of Education, University of Pittsburgh, June 2022.
[19] *Pennsylvania Broadband Survey*, PA DCED, 2023.

What Pennsylvanians Need and Expect from Libraries

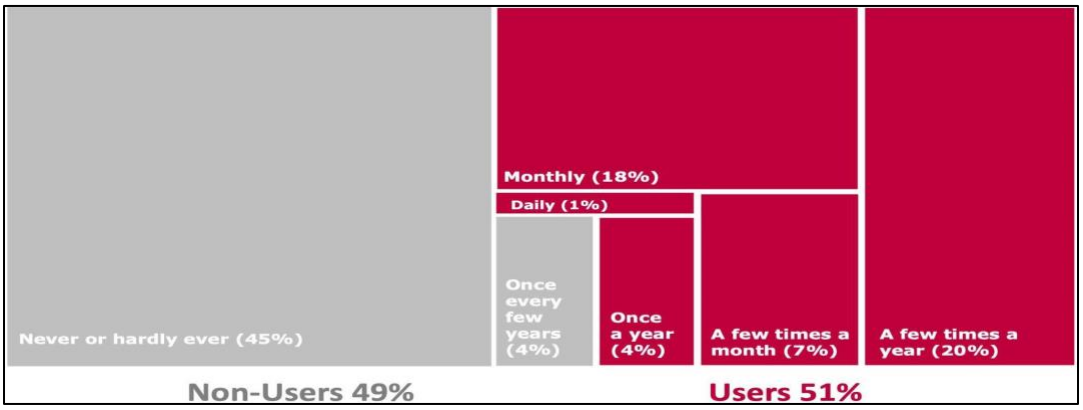
As described in the previous section, public libraries in Pennsylvania are at the center of an ecosystem of entities that directly and indirectly shape their operations and offerings. To reflect this, the research for this report gathered input from across this ecosystem, specifically from library staff (including library directors and district and system administrators), local and state-level library partners, and, most important, the general public, both library users and non-users. This section summarizes the findings from this comprehensive data collection and analysis. It begins with state-level findings about the current and future needs of Pennsylvanians—both from the public's perspective and that of library leaders and staff—and then delves deeper into different types of library users.

Current Needs and Expectations

Finding #1: Slightly more than half of Pennsylvanians are public library users.

Fifty-one percent of Pennsylvanians use a public library, according to our recent statewide poll. *(Figure 4)* A public library user is defined as someone who used a public library—either in person or online—at least once a year in the past three years. Library usage could have been an in-person visit to a local library or usage of online services such as catalog searches or borrowing of digital materials through apps like Libby or Hoopla. Close to half (45 percent) of library users only visit their local public library, while almost as many are both in-person and online users (42 percent); the remaining 13 percent are online users only. (Not shown in Figure 4.)

Figure 4. Library Usage in Pennsylvania



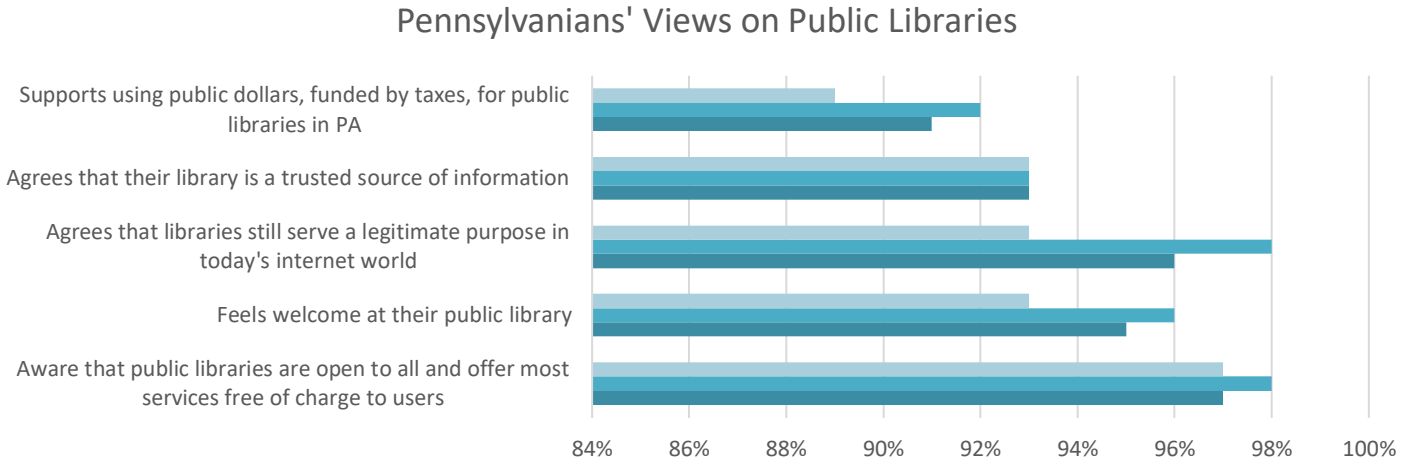
Source: Statewide Public Poll conducted for this project by Susquehanna Polling & Research. Figures do not add up to 100% due to round-off error.

The remaining 49 percent of Pennsylvanians—non-users—used the library at most once every few years, or they hardly ever or never used their public library in the last three years. (Note: The percentages in Figure 4 do not add up to 100 percent due to round-off error.) Non-users were a broad group, and no single reason stood out for why they were not regular library users. Two small sub-groups of non-users did emerge: About 23 percent said they "don't have any interest in visiting a library," and 15 percent of non-users said they have "access to the internet and/or printers and copies," presumably at home or at their workplace. These two reasons for not using a public library regularly were not mutually exclusive.

Finding #2: Almost all Pennsylvanians have very positive views of public libraries, even those who do not use them regularly.

This support for public libraries is multi-dimensional. At the personal level, almost all Pennsylvanians (97 percent) are aware that public libraries are open to everyone and that most services are provided at no cost to the user. Respondents see public libraries as welcoming (95 percent) and as a trusted source of information (93 percent). At the societal level, they believe libraries still serve a legitimate purpose in today's world of ubiquitous online access and content (96 percent). *(Figure 5)* Pennsylvanians also believe in investing in their libraries—91 percent support using public funds, funded by taxes, to ensure that libraries remain financially strong. These positive views are shared by library users and non-users alike.

Figure 5. Pennsylvanians' Views on Public Libraries



	Aware that public libraries are open to all and offer most services free of charge to users	Feels welcome at their public library	Agrees that libraries still serve a legitimate purpose in today's internet world	Agrees that their library is a trusted source of information	Supports using public dollars, funded by taxes, for public libraries in PA
Library Non-Users	97%	93%	93%	93%	89%
Library Users	98%	96%	98%	93%	92%
All Pennsylvanians	97%	95%	96%	93%	91%

Source: Statewide Public Poll conducted for this project by Susquehanna Polling & Research Note that some labels in the graph have been edited for brevity and clarity.

Pennsylvanians' positive views of public libraries were very much reflected in sentiments we collected through an online form as a follow-up to the statewide poll. *(Figure 6)* When asked to share what the library meant to them, respondents used terms such as *backbone, refuge, haven, sanctuary, portal to the world, third space, vital asset, great equalizer, heart and soul of the community, magical place, treasure, oasis, community anchor, my happy place,* and *beacon of learning*. Many respondents relayed specific childhood memories at the library (e.g., getting their own library card, waiting for the bookmobile to arrive) and of passing on their love for the library through present-day visits with their children and grandchildren. Others spoke of librarians remembering their names, making individualized book recommendations, and hunting down answers to their questions. Being able to access e-books, audio books, and other digital materials through services such as Libby and Hoopla was another common point of praise.

Figure 6. Sample Sentiments: General Views on Public Libraries from Users

"I love that my libraries have interlibrary loans within the county and within the state. This has saved me so much time and money over the years! When I was homeschooling my sons, this was especially useful." - Adams County resident

"The library is my happy place! I've had a library card since Lassie was a pup, and it is one of my most treasured possessions." - Beaver County resident

"Everything in the world is expensive and unattainable. Libraries are the only thing that's free, educates people, and gives people a better view of the world." - Berks County resident

"I love our public libraries, have been going to the library in my community – which has varied through the years – on a regular basis since Mom and I rode our bikes to the bookmobile when I was a kid." - Cumberland County resident

"I believe public libraries are immensely important even today. People come in for knowledge, companionship and to be acknowledged. It is hard to find a place where everyone is viewed as equals no matter their economic state, their gender, their race. The library is one of the few places that offer this and it is given freely." - Dauphin County resident

"The library is very important to me as a senior citizen on a low fixed income." —Dauphin County resident "I am so thankful for a place to get books that I can't afford to buy." - Jefferson County resident

The library means connection—connecting with new people and old friends, with new ideas and new authors and old favorites. Libraries are portals to the world." - Luzerne County resident

"It's [the library] a constant … even if I may not use it regularly, I know it's always there when I need it." - York County resident

Source: Statewide Call for Stories and Sentiments about Public Libraries

Finding #3: There is strong statewide consensus—among everyday Pennsylvanians and library leaders and staff alike—that all public libraries should offer, at a minimum, services and programs in four core areas.

In the statewide poll, Pennsylvanians were asked about eight areas of services and programs that public libraries could be offering and whether each one was a core service. *(Figure 7)* Core services and programs are defined as areas where (1) 90 percent or more of statewide poll respondents said they felt they had a need that public libraries could fulfill, and (2) 75 percent or more of respondents to the survey of library leaders and staff said all libraries in the state should provide.

Figure 7. Core and Discretionary Library Services and Programs

Core Services and Programs
Encouraging reading Examples: Popular print materials, summer reading programs, readers' advisory, interlibrary loans
Education and lifelong learning Examples: Reference services, health and wellness programs, adult literacy support
Early childhood learning Examples: Storytimes, play areas with educational toys and materials, outreach to preschools and daycares
Digital inclusion Examples: Public access to computers, printers, copiers, Wi-Fi, computer classes

Discretionary Services and Programs
Civic and community engagement Examples: Meeting space for community groups, assistance filling out non-library forms, convening conversations, direct social services
Arts, culture, and creativity Examples: Arts and crafts programs, preservation of local history, maker spaces
Economic and workforce development Examples: Career services through PA CareerLink®, job fairs, digital navigation, resume writing workshops
Supporting language learning Examples: Classes for English language learners, collections and signage in languages other than English

Source: Statewide Survey of Library Leaders and Staff; Statewide Public Poll conducted for this project by Susquehanna Polling & Research

Three of the four core areas are typically associated with public libraries: encouraging reading; education and lifelong learning; and early childhood learning. Strong consensus around the fourth area**,** digital inclusion, shows the important role that public libraries have come to play over the last 20 years in bridging the digital divide. Providing 21st-century technology and a basic level of training is now a baseline expectation of public libraries in Pennsylvania.

Among the core services, early childhood learning stands out as a central and deeply valued part of what public libraries offer across Pennsylvania. As expressed in the stories and sentiments submitted by users, public libraries are often a family's first and most lasting connection to community learning and enrichment. *(Figure 8)* They offer early literacy programs such as Storytime, sensory play, and family reading initiatives, along with circulating kits—such as play packs and LEGO®—for use at home. Many libraries partner with preschools and childcare providers to support pre-literacy, social development, and caregiver-child bonding. Libraries also introduce young children to technology through hands-on tools like Bee-Bots, which are programmable robots that teach foundational computational thinking, directional language, problem-solving, and estimation. Libraries are essential for homeschooling families as well, providing learning materials and social encounters with peers.

Figure 8. Sample Sentiments: Views on Early Childhood Learning

"My children have grown up at the library, from meeting friends for toddler Storytime to now joining book clubs. I credit the library for their love of books and reading. The summer reading challenge is always a favorite, as well as Art in the Park, Wacky Wednesdays, and so many other programs." - *Allegheny County resident*

"Without libraries, my children would lose the ability to homeschool and have social interactions." - *Bradford County resident*

"The library is the biggest resource for us as homeschoolers. My homeschool budget would need to be double if I were to purchase all those books. The librarians have been phenomenal in helping us: one librarian looked at my request list and asked if I'd ever heard of a particular picture book biography that she thought would fit into what we were studying. We hadn't, and I was so thankful for her pulling up 'Snowflake Bentley'!" - *Dauphin County resident*

Source: Statewide Call for Stories and Sentiments about Public Libraries

Finding #4. The remaining four areas of library services and programs are viewed as being discretionary and ways in which public libraries reflect their communities.

Although support for the four remaining areas—civic and community engagement; arts, culture, and creativity; economic and workforce development; and supporting language learning *(Figure 7)*—was still very strong among Pennsylvanians (no service or program in these areas had less than 79 percent support in the statewide poll), library leaders and staff did not see them as being areas that all public libraries should provide as a baseline. Rather, respondents to the statewide survey said that public libraries should have the discretion to offer services and programs in these areas based on community needs and in alignment with community assets.

Libraries in communities with a strong interest in arts and culture, for example, might put time and resources toward offering exhibitions and performances, while libraries in communities with a strong base of interest in entrepreneurship might offer networking events or meeting space for startups and small businesses.

Libraries being reflective of, and accountable to, their communities was a major theme that arose from the very beginning of the research process. In our first research activity—listening sessions held with library leaders and partners—points related to "community" were the most commonly cited among 11 themes identified. Session participants spoke of public libraries as evolving into "community anchors," which they defined as entities that proactively seek to understand and be responsive to community needs, forge strong connections with other community assets, and tie their impact to communities' overall well-being. *(Figure 9)*

Community-related points were especially prominent in the context of future-oriented questions about results that were posed in the sessions, such as: What tangible outcomes should libraries be striving for? What measures can libraries track to indicate success? How do they know when they have achieved their goals? Participants envisioned libraries as becoming "drivers of community conversations," where their ultimate impact would be measured by their relevance to the community and in the sharing of stories of impact. If core services and programs are baseline offerings that every public library in Pennsylvania should have, then discretionary services and programs are what could truly make a public library a community anchor. OCL itself has made the idea of community-oriented libraries a fundamental part of its strategic thinking. In the Five-Year Plan for 2023-2027, Goal 2 identifies public libraries as "community catalysts," with OCL enabling and encouraging "every library to understand and serve the needs of their communities through deep engagement, effective partnerships, and strategic resource sharing." OCL sees "a need for libraries to be responsive to community needs and engage actively with communities with particular focus on populations in the margins, a need for support in strategic foresight and established healthy governance structures." The plan outlines ways that OCL can support this goal, including the funding of special projects that empower libraries to connect with community partners, consultation support for user-focused services design, and the setting of standards for governance and leadership of public libraries at the local level, among other activities.[20]

Interviews with library leaders and staff shed additional light on how public libraries already use discretionary services and programs to serve the specific needs of their communities. Libraries in communities with significant immigrant populations are an example. A library in South Central Pennsylvania said that a large portion of their population are immigrants, mostly Latino and Haitian. In their experience, newly arrived immigrants do not necessarily know what public libraries are or what they do. Staff have to address questions like "how much does it cost to sign up?" and "may we come in if we don't have a library card?"

[20] *Office of Commonwealth Libraries Five Year Plan (2023-2027), Goal 2: Libraries as Community Catalyst*, OCL.

To address these unique needs, staff is working hard to get the word out to the community, such as handing out "go packs" of crafts outside as people walk by, which often gets people in the door. These passers-by sign up for library cards and sometimes for English language learning classes. This library recently purchased a translator tablet, and it is partnering with a local community college to offer Spanish classes to staff.

Libraries are also designing interesting and accommodating spaces to meet community needs. One library in Central Pennsylvania created a "sensory room" for adults with intellectual disabilities, a growing segment of their community. Games are projected onto the floor, and players move their bodies to play.[21] The room is soundproof so that it can be used for telemedicine appointments, as well. Another library in Southeast Pennsylvania spoke about creating special spaces for teens by simply moving around tables and shelves.

Figure 9. Listening Session Participants' Views on Community

"Libraries [of the future] should reflect the communities they serve, with staff and spaces that are welcoming and familiar."
"When community members come to us [libraries] first, [it] is an indicator of achieving goals."
"[Libraries should aspire to form] more partnerships with community orgs that support the library's mission and vice versa."

Source: Listening Sessions with Library Leaders and Partners

Finding #5: Navigating the gap between users' needs, available resources, and actual demand is a challenge for library leaders.

Pennsylvania's public libraries are already responding to user needs by offering programming that goes beyond traditional library services. According to data collected from public libraries in 2024, to be released later in 2025, all but six offer programming to the public, whether for specific age groups or broader audiences.[22] Interviews with library leaders and staff also revealed that many libraries regularly host and participate in community events and deliver an ever-changing roster of services and programs based on user requests.

However, these well-intentioned efforts sometimes result in uneven participation or a lack of community interest. Many library leaders described the strain of balancing needs, capacity, and community demand.

To manage this gap with limited resources, some librarians spoke of asking community members interested in new programs to recruit a minimum number of participants, usually ranging from three to 10 regular attendees. Others described piloting low-attendance programs before deciding whether to eliminate them for lack of user interest. Typically, they allow three to six months to assess interest and engagement. Similarly, decisions about partnerships are often filtered through considerations of time, resources, efficacy, and impact. Some library directors noted that they avoid duplicating services already provided by other organizations, instead focusing on core services and programs as well as collaborations with proven community participation and demonstrable value.

Even with attempts to manage the gap, services and programs can strain library capacity, a reality that is often not visible or well understood by library users. Indeed, library leaders repeatedly said in the statewide survey and follow-up interviews that the perception of library services as "free" obscures the strain that these rising

[21] "A welcoming space: Tyrone-Snyder Library opens sensory room for people of all ages and abilities," *Altoona Mirror*, November 14, 2024.

[22] *PA Public Library Statistics for Reporting Year 2024*, OCL-BLD.

costs place on the ability to provide new services. Several library users expressed frustration with long waitlists or unavailable digital titles without recognizing that these issues often stem from cost-driven limitations.

Library leaders spoke of discussions between colleagues who want to provide more for their community and those who feel there should be a better definition of mission and boundaries. “We should stop saying we are too small for things and try to find a way,” said one library director in an interview, while another countered “[Stop] feeling like we have to say yes to every suggestion.” They also spoke of navigating complex and competing demands: managing staff and volunteers; budgets and operations; public relations; coordination of programs and partnerships; maintenance of facilities, and repairs and renovations. They pointed out that many of these responsibilities fall outside the scope of what is traditionally taught in library science degree programs. As a result, they often are left to learn essential leadership and administrative skills on the job, often without formal support. The work is demanding, multifaceted, and increasingly central to a community’s well-being—yet too often unrecognized and under-resourced.

Finding #6: Rural libraries face additional challenges shaped by topography and other realities of being in smaller communities.

Many rural communities in Pennsylvania have hilly terrain, narrow roads, and unpredictable weather, which makes travel difficult at certain times of the year and the installation of fiber internet cost-prohibitive. On the one hand, these geographic barriers limit rural users’ ability to access digital resources from home, making the library a critical center for internet access. On the other hand, rural users who do have home connectivity are increasingly using library services remotely. As one library director observed: “Digital connectivity vacuumed all the air out of the room and took all the patrons with it.” This puts rural libraries in a double bind: They serve as vital technology access points, while simultaneously seeing reduced in-person engagement from the very users they have helped bring online.

This double bind has major implications for rural libraries, which tend to be located in small communities and, therefore, are more likely to operate independently as nonprofits. Their directors report to locally elected boards and bear the responsibility of raising most of their budgets through local contributions. Personal connections are especially important in these cases. One library’s success hinged on a director who, according to a colleague, is a “pillar of the community” and whose departure would threaten hard-won local trust and connection. Another director noted that the high rate of turnover among staff, coupled with the limited local hiring pool in a small community, made it difficult to build continuity or engage in consistent outreach.

Library leaders in these communities also spoke of the difficulty in meeting varied local needs with limited control. One noted that they do not have a say in book selection and often receive titles that do not align with community interests. Meanwhile, state requirements for collection size force libraries to maintain large physical holdings, even when space for programs and community gatherings is a growing priority. Several libraries offer passport services when passport centers are far away, creating both community value and modest revenue.

Others are exploring stronger partnerships with local organizations, and one director spoke of trying to coordinate services with a neighboring rural county to reduce competition and share resources. Library leaders spoke candidly about the challenges they face, but the voices of library users in these rural communities *(Figure 10)* offer a powerful reminder of the deep value and appreciation that communities hold for their public libraries.

Figure 10. Sample Sentiments: Views of Rural Public Library Users

"I am living in a senior community and many people here rely on libraries to provide them with the opportunity to stay in touch with world events and also with books to keep them company and to exercise their brains. Many of the current 'seniors' are not savvy with computers and technology. I am hoping to see libraries continue with their current system and will not totally automate how information and books are available to the general public in the near future." - *Bradford County resident*

"Bradford County Library has been my local library for more than 45 years. It has grown and met my needs as an elementary teacher, college instructor, new mom, homeschooling my children and now I take my grandchildren. It really is the hub of our rural community. The librarians are quick to learn all our names and become like family." - *Bradford County resident*

"I am a small business owner and sole proprietor. I appreciate that I can use the library as an office to print and scan and make copies. It has saved me a ton of money not having to buy those items! I love that I can take my grandchildren there for learning time and also pop in to pick up a fun book for myself!'' - *Bradford County resident*

"Our library is a vital part of our small town and provides so many valuable services for all members of our community." - *Cambria County resident*

"The library provides a lifeline for oldies like us." - *Clearfield County resident*

"Our libraries are a much needed resource in our communities. They are a gathering place, a place to learn, to explore, a place for internet and Wi-Fi for those who need it. Books, puzzles, movies, and even books on CD for those who may not be able to read for themselves any longer. Love interlibrary loan options to share materials in the region and the online resources like Libby and Hoopla. We need public libraries. They are a safe place for all." - *Columbia County resident*

"The library has meant different things to me throughout my life. A quiet place for studying, research and to read. A place for my children to go on a regular basis for all the same reasons. Now it is a place to share time with my grandchildren. It is a place that has provided many opportunities we otherwise would have not been allowed to have." - *Washington County resident*

"As a senior citizen I have fond memories of wandering through the shelves looking for books on our weekly visits to the library. Now I appreciate having access to the library through Libby and e-books." - *Schuylkill County resident*

Source: Statewide Call for Stories and Sentiments about Public Libraries

Finding #7: Library staff and leaders are keenly attuned to identifying specific services and programs where there appears to be a lack of awareness or diminished interest.

Although there is generally strong consensus that all public libraries should offer core services and programs, respondents to the statewide survey of library leaders and staff identified several specific programs and services that they felt the public generally was not aware of. These were: media accessible to people with disabilities (e.g., braille, audio, described movies, and large print); interlibrary loan services; reference and information services (in person or via phone or video conference); public access to computers, printers and copiers; and Wi-Fi available on site or through lendable hot spots. It could be that the ubiquity of online services and materials through private pay is what is keeping some people from using library services, but the promotion of these no-or low-cost offerings of public libraries still could be appealing to the broader public.

Library leaders and staff similarly identified several specific services and programs that appear to be peripheral to the mission of public libraries in that public interest in them has not been what it once was, and, therefore, the resources and effort needed to plan and implement them are increasingly difficult to justify. This is an important consideration, especially for smaller libraries that might lack staff capacity, skills, and resources to directly offer services and programs beyond traditional ones. Specific peripheral services identified through the survey of library leaders and staff included: "one community, one book" projects; test proctoring; assistance with filling out non-library forms; hosting ballot boxes; citizenship classes; performances, art exhibits, and film screenings; career services and job seeker workshops; meeting space for small businesses; computer training; and English language learning classes. Some librarians were reluctant to get rid of these services and programs altogether, knowing the need for them exists in many communities.

Finding #8: Library leaders and staff view partnerships with outside organizations as opportunities to create added capacity and value for their communities.

As these findings show, Pennsylvanians have high expectations of the public libraries' services and programs. In responding to these expectations, libraries might find themselves offering a service or program that falls outside their mission, area of expertise, or staff capacity. Partnerships with outside organizations whose mission is more directly tied to a service or program have been an effective way for public libraries to meet these expectations.

Follow-up interviews with library partners highlighted the many community partnerships that mutually enhance libraries' reach, relevance, and impact. *(Figure 11)* These interviews illustrated the reach of the library ecosystem, which spans a wide range of sectors:

- **Education:** Library leaders wrote and spoke about their education partnerships with childcare providers and preschools, providing supplemental early literacy and numeracy support and enrichment opportunities. At the elementary and secondary levels, some libraries offer resources to schools that have no libraries and provide a safe space for students to do homework when schools are closed. In one county system, the library has an "opt out" approach, whereby all school students are offered library cards. Students also can use their school ID card instead of a library card. Some school districts house a public library. At the post-secondary level, partnerships with libraries form around student clubs and training programs, for example.
- **Workforce Development:** Libraries often provide referrals to PA CareerLink® and in a few instances PA CareerLink® offices are co-located with libraries. Many libraries also provide work-readiness classes and early work experiences for middle and high school students. One library has a mobile service that brings a computer lab to partner organizations and provides digital literacy classes.
- **Economic Development:** Library relationships with businesses often centered on sharing information about events and trends in the business community, and meeting and identifying potential board members at chamber of commerce events. One library was the beneficiary of a Neighborhood Assistance Program grant as a result of connecting with the head of the local redevelopment authority (with funds from the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development). In rural areas, libraries partner with farm bureaus around broadband and internet access.
- **Social Services:** Libraries also partner with health and social services organizations, specialized housing facilities, and mental health providers. Some libraries use their bookmobiles to bring library services to these facilities.
- **Community Meeting Space and Access:** Some libraries provide meeting space for performances or legal aid organizations; host gardening classes in partnership with university extension programs; host informational sessions with elected officials and local government; and partner with community centers on outdoors programming.

Partnerships strengthen libraries' ability to understand trends in their community, serve diverse populations, and position libraries as trusted partners in advancing broader community goals.

Figure 11. Library Leaders and Partners: Views on Partnerships

"We are always looking for how we as a hub of information and resource access can broaden the scope of our public's understanding that resources aren't just books, they're doses of Narcan, they're job development opportunities for young people, they're one-on-one contact for people who may not reach us other ways. We have a very broad concept of the role of the library as a resource provider." - *Library Director in South Central Pennsylvania*

"Library staff need to be active participants in community initiatives—serve on boards, volunteer at events, attend meetings – you don't always have to be promoting the library directly!" - *Library Director in Central Pennsylvania*

"It would be helpful for library leaders to be able to acknowledge that the situation in all places is not the same; that you're not a failure if you can't do everything." - *Nonprofit leader in Central Pennsylvania*

Source: Interviews with Library Leaders, Staff, and Partners

Future Needs and Expectations

Having examined Pennsylvanians' current needs from their libraries, this section turns to their future needs—distinct from, though not mutually exclusive with, the present. Together, these perspectives offer a broader understanding of how libraries can respond to evolving community expectations

Finding #9: Pennsylvanians want libraries that reflect the digital world we live in now—flexible, connected, and always within reach—but might not understand the costs of integrating digital services.

In just a couple of decades, the public has grown accustomed to 24/7 access to information, entertainment, and shopping, and this expectation is being transferred to public libraries. When asked about future approaches for public libraries, 76 percent of statewide poll respondents supported the idea of a fully virtual library that offers digital materials around the clock. Now that "click and buy" and two-day delivery are the norm, 74 percent of respondents expressed interest in the convenience of mobile delivery services and physical access points such as book lockers and drop-off boxes located in easily accessible community spaces like community centers and along commercial corridors. *(Figure 12)*

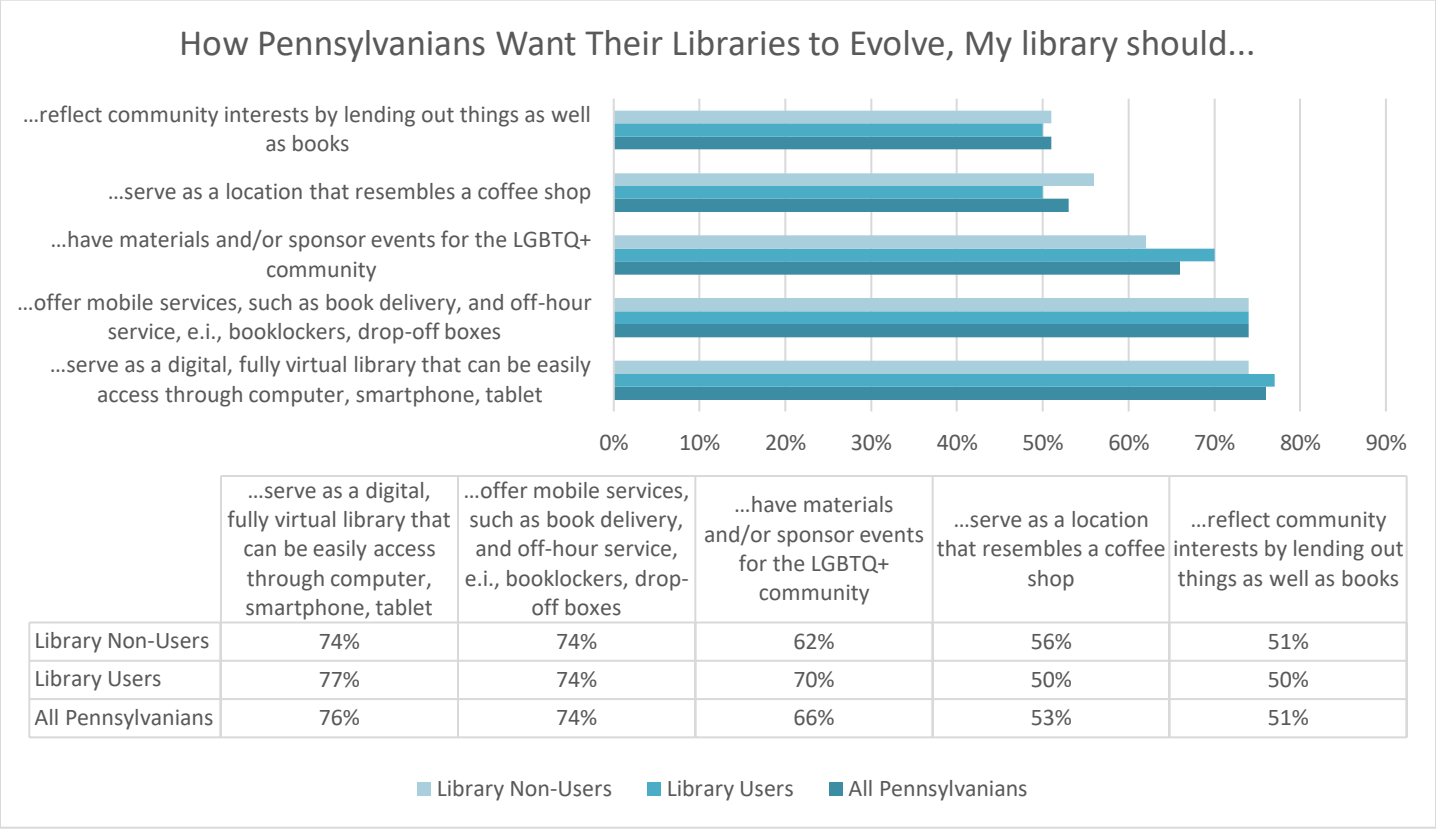
Public libraries in Pennsylvania are already answering the call for "anytime, anywhere" digital materials and services. According to data collected from public libraries in 2024, to be released later in 2025, 100 percent offer e-books, audiobooks, and online specialized databases; 75 percent provide access to electronic newspapers, magazines, and journals; 73 percent offer online learning platforms; and 64 percent offer video and streaming services.[23] Meanwhile, a handful of public libraries in Pennsylvania offer delivery services through a bookmobile, according to the same 2024 dataset.

Many library users are already familiar with the apps offered by their libraries, such as OverDrive (the largest commercial provider of e-books, audiobooks, and other digital content to public libraries in North America), Hoopla (a digital provider of movies, music, audiobooks, e-books, comics, and TV shows), and Kanopy (a video streaming service that specializes in critically acclaimed films, documentaries, and educational videos).

[23] *PA Public Library Statistics for Reporting Year 2024*, OCL-BLD.

Demand for digital materials surged during COVID lockdowns, and it continues to increase: Most recently, usage of OverDrive's Libby and Sora apps grew by 17 percent from 2023 to 2024.[24]

Figure 12. How Pennsylvanians Want Their Libraries to Evolve



	…serve as a digital, fully virtual library that can be easily access through computer, smartphone, tablet	…offer mobile services, such as book delivery, and off-hour service, e.i., booklockers, drop-off boxes	…have materials and/or sponsor events for the LGBTQ+ community	…serve as a location that resembles a coffee shop	…reflect community interests by lending out things as well as books
Library Non-Users	74%	74%	62%	56%	51%
Library Users	77%	74%	70%	50%	50%
All Pennsylvanians	76%	74%	66%	53%	51%

Source: Statewide Public Poll conducted for this project by Susquehanna Polling & Research

Comments submitted by library users indicated that the cost of offering digital materials and services, especially using popular platforms such as OverDrive, Libby, Hoopla, and Kanopy, may not be well understood by the public. Unlike physical books which libraries purchase outright, digital materials and services must be licensed from publishers, often at significantly higher costs. Licensing models vary, but they typically involve ongoing fees based on the number of checkouts and users. For example, while a hardcover book may cost $18-$20, the same title in digital format might cost $55 for a two-year license or $550 for 20 years. Furthermore, online publishers may not maintain titles for more than a few years, leaving libraries in the position of not offering a title or purchasing a hard copy in later years. In interviews, library leaders and staff said that demand for digital materials has started to outpace libraries' ability to pay for them. One Pennsylvania public library reported having to reduce the Libby check-out limit from 20 to 10 items and the Hoopla check-out limit from 10-15 per month to 5 because of rising costs and budget constraints. Another Pennsylvania librarian pointed out that the business model for digital materials runs counter to the traditional public library model of reduced costs through a shared collection: The more the service is used, the higher the cost becomes. Stories have emerged of library users whose local libraries do not provide access to popular digital platforms wanting to obtain library cards from local libraries that do. This model of local libraries having to fund popular digital

[24] *Libraries Break Digital Lending Records in 2024 with Over 739 million Checkouts*, OverDrive (Blog Post), January 27, 2025.

platforms themselves has not only led to duplication of costs, but also artificial geographic boundaries and inequitable access to digital services.

Public libraries across the country, not just in Pennsylvania, are having to respond to and even push back on the budget-straining cost of offering digital materials and services. Library leaders spoke about the need for more communication with users. They also wanted tools for handling dissatisfaction when materials are not immediately available, when users face considerable waiting times, or when users find that online titles have been discontinued at their local library. Several states, including neighboring Maryland, New Jersey, and New York, are exploring or introducing legislation to curb costs.[25]

Finding #10: Pennsylvanians largely want LGBTQ+ offerings to remain in libraries amid minor, localized pushback.

The statewide poll found broad public support for libraries to include LGBTQ+ materials, despite occasional high-visibility objections: Sixty-six percent of respondents believe public libraries should include LGTBQ+ materials and/or sponsor related programs. *(Figure 12)* This public support reflects the inclusive mission of public libraries, which are grounded in the values of intellectual freedom, equality, equity, privacy, and access for all. Many public libraries now feature curated inclusive collections, Pride Month events, Drag Story Hours, and safe, affirming spaces, continuing a tradition that began in the 1970s with the founding of the American Library Association's Task Force on Gay Liberation.[26]

Despite this support, some libraries have experienced controversy. As conveyed in interviews with several library leaders and staff, displays of LGBTQ+ books and programs like Drag Story Hour, in particular, have sometimes resulted in community pushback, book challenges, and even threats of eliminating funding for public libraries. One librarian in South Central Pennsylvania spoke of receiving a bomb threat in 2024.

In our collection of stories and sentiments from library users, in which the users overwhelmingly described libraries as positive forces in their lives, less than 5 percent of all submissions mentioned LGBTQ+ offerings and other themes related to "inclusion." These comments were both positive and negative. Many library leaders and staff remain committed to providing inclusive services, though libraries in more conservative or rural areas may be approaching these topics with added caution.

Finding #11: Pennsylvanians want public libraries to evolve with the times, but not change too much.

When asked whether libraries should serve as a location that resembles a coffee shop (i.e., a comfortable spot that allows for individuals to enjoy drinks and light snacks while reading or working), slightly more than half of poll respondents agreed (53 percent). *(Figure 12)* In interviews with library leaders and staff, several spoke of relaxed policies about bringing drinks into the library and noise levels from conversations, in an attempt to be more welcoming, and some even offer café-like services (often as a new source of revenue). However, when compared to the stronger level of support in other areas, as many Pennsylvanians are content for public libraries to stay as they are, as are those chafing for change.

Similarly, compared to other services, Pennsylvanians are less interested in their public libraries lending out non-traditional items. Collectively known as "libraries of things," these are special collections of games and puzzles, cooking equipment, musical instruments, and tools, among many other items, that library users can borrow. Although this concept seems like a useful idea, Pennsylvanians are split on whether their library should

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[25] *Libraries Pay More for E-Books. Some States Want to Change That.*, *The New York Times*, July 16, 2025.
[26] *Rainbow Round Table History Timeline*, American Library Association.

lend out things in addition to books, according to the statewide poll (51 percent). *(Figure 12)* It could be that special collections are based on niche interests that only appeal to certain parts of the community.

Library User Personas

Finding #12: The different types of public library users in Pennsylvania can be categorized into personas, using behavior patterns, attitudes, and more, and these personas cut across geography.

Interestingly, the poll and survey revealed no statistically significant differences across regions or even counties. Because public libraries are embedded in hyperlocal communities, counties may simply be too large a unit to capture meaningful variation. What the data did show, however, were important differences in how Pennsylvanians use their public libraries, and how libraries can organize around them.

These differences led to our development of eight distinct library user personas. Each one represents the goals, behaviors, and needs of a hypothesized group of users, based on patterns observed in the data. A profile of behavioral patterns, goals, skills, and attitudes was developed for each persona. Although the personas are grounded in research, they are also somewhat subjective in their descriptions and interpretations. They are not intended to be exhaustive or mutually exclusive; some users may fit more than one persona. Nevertheless, library user personas offer a valuable framework for understanding who uses or could be using public libraries, how to reach them, and what would be the best messages and channels of communication tailored for them.

The eight library user personas are:

- **The Book Lover** is a heavy user of public libraries, especially traditional services such as book-borrowing. They like to “try before they buy” books, but do not necessarily spend a lot of time in the library per visit. They might not participate in library programs, but they are open to them. They use digital resources and services, but not necessarily those of public libraries.
- **The Child-Focused** user visits the library with their young (ages 0-5) and/or school-aged children (6-12). They are not only a book borrower, but also a regular participant in library programs, such as Storytime, summer reading, and clubs for homeschoolers. They are looking for a safe and welcoming in-person environment, and their family could be new to the United States.
- **The Youth Lounger** is a teenager (ages 13-18) looking for a safe place to hang out after school. They could be homeschooled. They want their own space in the library, separate from adults and younger children. They prefer to select books independently, somewhat preferring physical books, and get recommendations from TikTok and YouTube.
- **The Digital Independent** is a proficient and prodigious user of digital services and resources, though not necessarily those of public libraries. They are very supportive of libraries providing a full range of digital offerings and virtual programs. Demographically, they are more likely to be registered as an independent voter, have a four-year degree, and be employed part-time or self-employed.
- **The Community Connector,** who tends to be older, is looking for opportunities to stay mentally and socially engaged. They value dexterity activities, from knitting to Tai Chi, and are seeking access to trusted health and finance information. They value navigating aging with dignity and autonomy and, therefore, need barrier-free buildings, digital coaching, and easy-to-read materials.
- **The Resource Seeker** might not be a regular user of traditional library services or programs. Rather, they view public libraries as a place for getting support with social service needs, such as job-seeker assistance or career exploration, completing tax returns, or signing up for public benefits. They might be unemployed or underemployed and are more likely to have at most, a high school degree.

- **The Rural Retiree** is interested in traditional services of libraries such as book-borrowing, as well as mobile and off-hour services. They are more likely to have a disabled person in the household, possibly themselves. They are more conservative in cultural views, more likely to be registered as a Republican and to be white. This persona is especially present in northern and central Pennsylvania.
- **The New American** could be a recent arrival to the United States and might be learning English and becoming acquainted with U.S. cultural customs. They are likely to have young children and might be seeking homework assistance and safe spaces for them in the library. They tend to be part of a community of shared heritage, clustered in various parts of the state.

To capture user needs and expectations, the library user personas are designed to be broad enough to apply across regions yet specific enough to be useful at the community level, where public libraries make their impact. Whether libraries choose to tap into all of the library user personas or focus on a subset, the personas can help libraries make decisions about collections and programming, focus resources for staffing and skills development, and inform marketing and outreach efforts. And they can facilitate discussion and collaboration between libraries or with library partners, whether they are geographically close to each other or share an interest in a particular group. For more details about each persona see Appendix D.

Awareness Campaign billboard, e-billboard, posters, and bookmarks. Full kit available on LibGuides

Opportunities and Recommendations

This section presents five opportunities drawn from the research findings. For each, we outline bottom-up suggestions for public libraries, followed by top-down recommendations for OCL.

Opportunity #1: Fully orient toward communities.

For libraries to truly become community anchors, leaders and staff should ask questions about needs and interests at the community level in a more systematic and consistent manner. Just as this research effort collected data on needs and interests at the state level, public libraries could collect data from both users and non-users at the community level. In fact, many already do, as heard in follow-up interviews with library leaders and staff. These local needs assessments could draw from the set of questions asked at the state level, which would allow for comparisons against the state results, and they could also include questions related to certain topics and questions that are relevant to a specific community.

When asking about how a service or program was received by community members, questions should not just get at users' experience participating in the service or program, but what difference participation made for them. Data collected could be quantitative in nature—for example, the percentage of participants who had a positive experience in the service or program—and it could also be qualitative, particularly in the form of compelling stories and sentiments that demonstrate the unique impact that public libraries have in their communities. The Public Library Association's Project Outcome[27] is an example of an excellent resource for public library outcome measurement.

Fully orienting toward communities will help public libraries balance the expectations of the community with actual offerings, especially in the context of constrained resources and staff capacity. With firm data in hand, ideally collected over time, libraries can facilitate an ongoing conversation with their communities and even foster a sense of ownership and inclusion for them.

Always asking questions is the key for one library director: "What's their impact? What is the final product? Is it meeting our goals? Are we connecting to the various segments of our society? Is it being diverse versus the same old, same old stuff? Is it aligned with our mission and helping us accomplish what we want to do? You have to not necessarily look at what your heart wants to do, versus what we really ought to be doing."

Recommendations for OCL:

- Make data collection tools for community needs assessments and program evaluations available to public libraries.
- Provide technical support and/or funding for data collection, especially for rural and small libraries that lack staff capacity.
- Aggregate community-level data to ascertain additional findings at the state level that can be shared widely, potentially as a longitudinal effort.
- Disseminate best practices and support learning communities around data collection, analysis, and data-driven decision-making.

[27] For more information on Project Outcome see https://www.ala.org/pla/data/outcomemeasurement

Opportunity #2: Build awareness of public libraries through a statewide campaign.

A key challenge facing public libraries today—underscored by the commissioning of this statewide assessment—is how to translate the public's broad, often emotional support for libraries into greater awareness, active use, and advocacy. Although many Pennsylvanians express deep appreciation for the idea of public libraries, this sentiment does not always translate into direct engagement with the services they offer. The Awareness Campaign we created for OCL is a messaging and outreach strategy designed to promote both the use of and support for Pennsylvania's public libraries. At the heart of this campaign is a clear and compelling value proposition: Public libraries are inclusive, trusted community anchors that provide free access to knowledge, technology, and opportunity for all.

The campaign is anchored by a call-to-action— "Check out the Library!"—which is an invitation to Pennsylvanians to act on their interest, by visiting a public library near them, taking advantage of statewide digital resources, or supporting libraries through volunteer work or donations. The campaign could direct them to a centralized location—such as a website—where they can learn about different ways they can "check out the library" in Pennsylvania, as a first step.

To support this campaign, we developed a comprehensive messaging and outreach kit to help libraries reach both current and potential users. Grounded in the eight research-based library user personas, the materials help humanize the data and make the messaging more relatable by tying it to real-life needs. Some personas are intended to strengthen the connection with existing users; others aim to engage those who underutilize services or who are unaware of what their library offers. The downloadable kit will be available on LibGuides, and it includes customizable print-ready graphics and messaging templates, many of which can be adapted for digital platforms. This ensures that libraries of all sizes have access to consistent, high-quality tools to showcase their programs and services.

The kit also includes a fact sheet highlighting the research findings, which libraries are encouraged to use in tandem with local advocacy efforts. These may include engaging elected officials and community leaders, partnering with education providers, social services, civic, cultural and workforce organizations, and business groups, and amplifying user stories and testimonials.

To further expand the reach and resonance of the statewide awareness campaign for public libraries, messages can be aligned with larger national and even international movements that share overlapping values. For example, campaigns addressing youth well-being—such as those cautioning against excessive social media use among children and teens—highlight the need for safe, enriching, screen-free spaces. Pennsylvania's public libraries are uniquely positioned to serve in this role. By connecting the campaign's messaging to widely recognized public concerns and social movements, libraries can amplify their relevance and engage broader audiences, cultivate new allies, and reinforce their essential role as community anchors supporting youth, caregivers, and lifelong learners.

Recommendations for OCL:

- Support the creation of a central hub, such as a website, where interested Pennsylvanians can find out how to engage with public libraries.
- Develop talking points and action items for local libraries and their boards to use in conjunction with this report and the Awareness Campaign kit.
- Distribute the Awareness Campaign kit to local libraries in Pennsylvania and consider offering incentives or rewards for libraries that use the kit as provided or adapted (e.g., for postcards, hanging or standing banners/stanchions at events).

- Share the Awareness Campaign kit with statewide organizations that have an interest in promoting public libraries, such as Pennsylvania Citizens for Better Libraries, the Pennsylvania Association of Nonprofit Organizations, PaLA, and other partners.
- Tie the awareness campaign to adjacent and emerging messages and campaigns backed by other entities (e.g., campaigns for restricting access to screens for tweens and teens).

Opportunity #3: Develop human capital.

One vital opportunity for Pennsylvania's public libraries is to strengthen the human capital that powers them—the library leaders, staff, and trustees whose leadership, skills, and community relationships are central to each library's success. A recurring theme in the interviews was the need for enhanced support, expanded training opportunities, and sustained strategic investment in library staff. Leaders spoke about the lack of training in areas such as leadership, advocacy, and business management—skills that are essential to overseeing budgets, facilities, and strategic partnerships, yet often absent from formal library education. They also noted in particular the need for more professional development for mid-career leaders and staff who are navigating evolving trends, as well as ongoing support in understanding and managing the digital offerings and options for their libraries.

Staff reported gaps in technical skills training and emphasized the need for greater recruitment of diverse staff reflective of the community, especially those who are bilingual or have lived experience in the communities they serve.

Library boards of trustees also face challenges. Well-functioning boards are essential to the stability and long-term success of public libraries, and trustees, like staff, need structured support to fulfill their roles. Library boards are often composed of dedicated volunteers, but many lack formal training or support to govern effectively. Interviewees expressed a need for trustee onboarding, continuing education, guidance on recruiting new members with a focus on board members representative of the community, and access to best practices in areas such as board terms; materials and program challenges, including those related to the LGBTQ+ community; and library advocacy. By prioritizing the development of human capital, OCL can help ensure that every public library in Pennsylvania, and in particular the smaller, more rural libraries, are led by well-supported people, equipped to meet the complex, evolving needs of running contemporary and future libraries.

Recommendations for OCL:

- Survey library directors and staff about unmet training and professional development needs, including technical, managerial, and community engagement skills, and survey the board members and directors to understand expectations, identify strengths and gaps in board performance, and inform trustee-support strategies.
- Disseminate best practices for library leaders and board members to manage challenges to materials and events, including those related to the LGBTQ+ community.
- Promote workforce strategies, including recruitment pipelines for bilingual staff in some regions.

Opportunity #4: Leverage consortia for digital offerings.

One of the most promising opportunities for strengthening public libraries in Pennsylvania lies in expanding the use of consortia for purchasing and accessing digital materials, rather than individual libraries each purchasing their own. This is particularly important for the smaller independent libraries. HSLC is already a strong partner to libraries in providing systemwide digital infrastructure through platforms like the Pennsylvania Statewide Catalog (ACCESS PA) and POWER Library, as well as a group purchasing program.

Interviews with library leaders and staff revealed an interest in deeper collaboration, including shared-service models and collective purchasing. Some library leaders expressed a desire for platforms that allow libraries to jointly manage automation services for handling increasingly complex, multi-format holdings (print, digital, special collections). The Allegheny County Library Association, for example, distributes the cost of digital offerings among all of its member libraries through a consortium model funded at the county level, which might be worth exploring at the state level.

Recommendations for OCL:

- Conduct a statewide study of local library spending on popular digital platforms such as OverDrive, Libby, Hoopla, and Kanopy to build a business case for state or regional consortia to negotiate with vendors.
- Identify initiatives that are successful in other states, including legislative actions, and evaluate their applicability to Pennsylvania.
- Explore ways to incentivize and provide technical support for libraries to form or join consortia and shared procurement and digital service agreements, especially in rural and under-resourced areas.
- Support the continued expansion of the statewide platforms POWER Library and the Statewide Catalog (ACCESS PA) to ensure their ability to provide multi-format collections, digitization, and user access across consortia.

Opportunity #5: Engage in cross-sector collaborations.

Libraries are already natural partners in their communities: they co-host events with partners, offer their space to other organizations for delivering services, and participate in community meetings, among many other activities. Yet these partnerships are sometimes transactional, offering exchanges of benefits without broader community impact. To serve as true community anchors, public libraries should aspire to engage in longer-term, cross-sector collaborations organized around larger issues of social impact. Such collective impact efforts often align with state priorities and may qualify for state funding.

An example of a cross-sector collaboration comes from a community in Southwest Pennsylvania organized around the issue of community development, as relayed by a library partner in an interview. The local public library was part of a group of 10 organizations, including a cultural trust, a health clinic, and a food pantry, which came together as a collaboration in order to qualify for the Neighborhood Assistance Program (NAP), operated by the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED). NAP gives tax breaks to businesses that invest in projects in distressed areas. Now in its 11th year, the collaboration brings much-needed funding to the partners and facilitates the exchange of information and the planning of joint activities at their quarterly meetings.

In interviews, library leaders and staff brought up additional issues that lend themselves to cross-sector collaborations, including workforce development; nutrition, food security, and health; arts and culture; children and youth; and environmental protection, sustainability, and conservation. State departments and agencies such as the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Health, the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, the Department of Environmental Protection, and DCED often have programs designed to fund cross-sector collaborations focused on issues of social impact, and public libraries could be part of such collaborations, or perhaps even convene them.

Recommendations for OCL:

- Provide technical assistance and incentives for public libraries to join and/or convene cross-sector collaborations.
- Publicize opportunities for cross-sector collaborations that include libraries to apply for funding from other state programs.

Final Thoughts

The findings of this research effort are clear: Pennsylvanians love and value their public libraries. They have strong positive views of libraries at the personal and societal levels, they want their tax dollars to fund them, and they have a clear sense about baseline services and programs that all libraries should be offering. Beyond the core services, they want their libraries to tailor additional services and programs to community needs and align them with community assets. Looking ahead, Pennsylvanians, library leaders and staff, and OCL alike want public libraries to evolve into true community anchors, deeply rooted in their local contexts and reflecting the character and needs of the population they serve. Given this solid basis, public libraries in Pennsylvania have a significant opportunity to contribute to a healthy and successful state.

"I think of libraries as a place of dependable access, dependable education, a dependable set of resources to be able to access. Its most important social service is to be dependable for families and dependable for organizations. That kind of expectation is something that's grown over a very long time – generations of families knowing that the library will be there for them. We should always keep that as a core value."

- Susan Banks, Deputy Secretary & State Librarian at the Pennsylvania Office of Commonwealth Libraries

Appendix A: Acknowledgements

We extend our sincere thanks to the many individuals and organizations who contributed their time, insights, and support to this project: library leaders, library staff, trustees, partners, and community leaders who participated in listening sessions, surveys, and interviews; library leaders who assisted us with the research process by posting flyers publicizing the survey and the call for stories and sentiments; and the more than 2,000 library users and non-users across Pennsylvania who participated in polls and surveys. Your voices and perspectives were essential to shaping this work.

We are grateful for the guidance and insights of the Steering Committee and the Ad Hoc Marketing Group members: Melissa Adams, Kelly Choi-Bazzo, Carrie Cleary, Sarah DeMaria, Dan Flaherty, Dale Hamby, Jessica Hilburn, Samantha Hull, Jennie Knies, Beth Mellor, Kathy Mulroy, Maryam Phillips, Jennifer Powell, Casey Smith, Christina Steffy, Jennifer Styran, Robyn Vittek, Jenn Williams, and Laurie Zierer.

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- Victoria McCallum and her graphic design team members Shenika Nolan, Deanna Arroyo, and Tomeka Kimble at Na'Toria Marketing & Design Solutions, whose creativity and skill illuminate the Awareness Campaign graphics; and
- Juli Warren, editor extraordinaire.

And finally, we deeply appreciate the vision, wisdom, and leadership of Susan Banks, Deputy Secretary of Education, Commissioner for Libraries and State Librarian at the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and Heather Sharpe, Bureau Chief of Library Development, Office of Commonwealth Libraries, Pennsylvania Department of Education, and value their collaborative approach to shaping this assessment for the maximal benefit of library leaders and staff and all Pennsylvanians.

This research and report were developed by Hadass Sheffer of Blue Willow Consulting LLC and Annette Mattei of Metro Metrics LLC.

Appendix B: Research Overview

Data Sources

The research presented in this report is based on the analysis of data and information collected through several activities:

- **Listening Sessions with Library Leaders and Partners (July-August 2024)**
  More than 120 library leaders and partners participated in one of six listening sessions. Participants shared their insights in discussions and provided their thoughts in written form on the current and future states of public libraries in Pennsylvania.
- **Statewide Survey of Library Leaders and Staff, plus Follow-Up Interviews (October-November 2024)**
  The survey covered eight areas of library services and programs, asking respondents to say whether they felt these services and programs fulfill the needs of Pennsylvania residents. Invitations to participate in the online survey were sent to directors of all 444 public libraries in Pennsylvania, and they included instructions for sharing the survey with staff. Completed surveys were received from 429 leaders and staff from 59 of Pennsylvania's 67 counties. Survey respondents were invited to participate in a follow-up interview, and 56 respondents opted to do so. In the interviews, respondents had the opportunity to expand on their survey responses and answered additional questions related to program development and evaluation, library partnerships, and community engagement.
- **Statewide Survey of Library Partners and Follow-Up Interviews (February-March 2025)**
  The survey was sent to the heads of organizations that commonly form partnerships with public libraries, including nonprofits, workforce development agencies (such as PA CareerLink®), chambers of commerce, and literacy councils. Respondents were asked questions about their views of public libraries and any partnerships with libraries that their organization might have. Completed responses were received from 80 library partners from 47 of Pennsylvania's 67 counties. Survey respondents were invited to participate in a follow-up interview, and 8 respondents opted to do so. In the interviews, respondents had the opportunity to expand on their survey responses, particularly questions related to their partnerships with public libraries.
- **Statewide Poll of Library Users and Non-Users (February-March 2025)**
  Blue Willow Consulting commissioned this statewide telephone poll, conducted by Susquehanna Polling & Research. Poll questions were jointly developed. Poll participants were asked about their usage and views of public libraries, what needs or interests they have that public libraries might be able to fulfill, their views of different approaches that libraries can take in the future, and demographic information such as age, employment status, and education attainment. The poll was conducted February 24 – March 9, 2025, with 800 household members at least 18 years of age. Respondents were contacted using random selection procedures. All telephone interviews were conducted using live telephone agents. The sample frame was compiled using random telephone sequence methods and included both landline and cellular households, purchased from a certified list vendor. All households were pre-screened to eliminate household numbers on the federal Do Not Call registry, in compliance with all applicable federal and state laws. Respondents were not told who the sponsor of the survey was, nor were they told about the specific topic of the survey as a condition of participation. Interviews were closely monitored to ensure a representative sample of the Pennsylvania population was achieved based on party registration, geography, gender, age cohort, and other demographics. The margin of error for a sample size of 800 interviews is +/-3.46% at the 95% confidence level.

- **Statewide Survey of Library Users, Non-English Speakers (February-March 2025)**
  This online survey was a shortened version of the statewide poll, and, in an effort to reach immigrant populations, it was translated into seven languages: Ukrainian, Korean, Portuguese, Vietnamese, Spanish, Mandarin, and Arabic. The survey was fielded with the assistance of libraries. A flyer with QR codes linked to the translated versions of the survey was emailed to libraries, along with the request that they print it out and post it in a public place. Paper copies of the survey were supplied when requested. Only a handful of non-English survey responses were received, all in Mandarin. Given the low response, this dataset was not included in the analysis.
- **Call for Sentiments and Stories from Library Users (June 2025)**
  Library users in Pennsylvania were invited to share stories and sentiments about their libraries through this online form, which was fielded with the assistance of libraries. A flyer with a QR code linked to the form was emailed to libraries, with the request that they print it out and post it in a public place. A total of 1,167 submissions were received from 59 of Pennsylvania's 67 counties.

Methodology

A mixed method research approach was taken in analyzing the data. Qualitative data collected from the listening sessions was analyzed for patterns, resulting in the identification of 11 themes related to public libraries. These themes informed the development of the survey instruments, poll questions, and interview protocols. They also served as the framework of analysis for the data collected through these activities. Quantitative data collected through the surveys and poll were analyzed using standard descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations by key characteristics. Visualizations of the data were also created to aid with interpretation. Qualitative data collected through interviews was reviewed and coded by theme. Research summaries synthesizing the quantitative and qualitative analysis were created at the completion of each step, and preliminary findings were shared with the Steering Committee for additional interpretation. As a separate step, submissions of stories and sentiments to the online form were reviewed for relevance, with a select number of quotes identified that underscored major research findings.

Additional activities helped shape the components of the awareness campaign. An ad-hoc committee of individuals with marketing expertise, largely drawn from the project's Steering Committee, was formed to help develop the library user personas. And in May 2025, library leaders and partners who participated in earlier phases of the research process were invited to a "community convening." Preliminary findings were presented at this session, and then participants were invited to ideate and discuss the library user personas. These activities resulted in the finalization of the eight library user personas that informed the marketing materials designed by project partner Na'Toria Marketing and Design Solutions LLC. Opportunities for public libraries to contribute to a healthy and successful Pennsylvania and recommendations for OCL were developed by the research team, with input from the Steering Committee.

Appendix C: Poll and Survey Instruments

Statewide Survey of Library Leaders and Staff

The following questions were asked through a statewide survey to library leaders and staff that was fielded October through November 2024. Invitations to participate in the online survey were sent to directors of all 444 public libraries in Pennsylvania, and they included instructions for sharing the survey with staff. Completed surveys were received from 429 leaders and staff from 59 of Pennsylvania's 67 counties.

1. What county is your library in? (Choose one.)
   [Pre-set list of 67 counties in Pennsylvania]

2. What type of library best describes where you work (Choose one.)

   ◯ Academic/Research/Reference/Special collections
   ◯ Branch
   ◯ County
   ◯ District
   ◯ Independent
   ◯ Municipal
   ◯ School
   ◯ System
   ◯ Other:

3. What size population does your library serve?

   ◯ Less than 10,000
   ◯ 10,001 to 100,000
   ◯ More than 100,000

4. Which title most closely describes your role at your library?

   ◯ Director/Branch Manager
   ◯ District Consultant
   ◯ Librarian
   ◯ Library Technician
   ◯ Volunteer
   ◯ Board Member
   ◯ Other:

Below is a list of services and programs in eight general areas commonly provided by libraries.

- Encouraging Reading
- Education & Lifelong Learning
- Early Childhood Learning
- Civic & Community Engagement
- Arts, Culture & Creativity
- Economic & Workforce Development
- Digital Inclusion
- Supporting Language Learning

For each area, please share your views on whether these services and programs are needs of PA residents that libraries should be fulfilling in the future. In each area you have an option of adding items that you think should be represented in this survey.

5. Encouraging Reading

Service	Which of these does your library currently offer? (Answered by Library Leaders Only)	This fulfills a need that **all** libraries should provide to PA Residents (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	This fulfills a need that **some** libraries should provide based on their community 's needs (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	This fulfills a need of PA residents that libraries should partner with other entities on, either in the library or off site (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	This is not a need of PA residents that libraries should fulfill (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	Not sure (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)
Popular print materials	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Reading Recommendations, Reader's Advisory	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Summer reading program	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Afterschool programs	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Author talks	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Interlibrary loan services	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Book discussion groups or book clubs	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
E-books and online newspapers	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
"One city, one book" projects	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Other, please specify:

6. Education & Lifelong Learning

Service	Which of these does your library currently offer? (Answered by Library Leaders Only)	This fulfills a need that **all** libraries should provide to PA residents (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	This fulfills a need that **some** libraries should provide based on their community 's needs (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	This fulfills a need of PA residents that libraries should partner with other entities on, either in the library or off site (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	This is not a need of PA residents that libraries should fulfill (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	Not sure (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)
Reference and information services (in person or virtual)	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Homework help or center	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Tutoring	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Test proctoring	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Adult literacy programs and services	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Language classes	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Outreach to schools	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
STEM programming	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Health and wellness programs	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Self-improvement programs	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Genealogy resources	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Financial literacy programs	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Homeschooling resources and programs	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Media accessible to people with disabilities	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Other, please specify:

7. Early Childhood Learning

Service	Which of these does your library currently offer? (Answered by Library Leaders Only)	This fulfills a need that **all** libraries should provide to PA residents (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	This fulfills a need that **some** libraries should provide based on their community 's needs (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	This fulfills a need of PA residents that libraries should partner with other entities on, either in the library or off site (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	This is not a need of PA residents that libraries should fulfill (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	Not sure (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)
Storytimes	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Special programs for young children (Music & Movement, Baby Boogies, 1,000 Books before Kindergarten, etc.)	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Play area with education toys and materials	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
New baby welcome kits	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Activity kits for young children	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Computers and tablets with early learning software	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Parent and/or caregiver early literacy trainings	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Outreach to preschool and/or childcare providers	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Activities or resources that support early childhood health and wellness	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Other, please specify:

8. Civic & Community Engagement

Service	Which of these does your library currently offer? (Answered by Library Leaders Only)	This fulfills a need that **all** libraries should provide to PA residents (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	This fulfills a need that **some** libraries should provide based on their community 's needs (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	This fulfills a need of PA residents that libraries should partner with other entities on, either in the library or off site (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	This is not a need of PA residents that libraries should fulfill (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	Not sure (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)
Town halls	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Speaker programs	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Provision of social services (unhoused, mental health)	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Assistance with filling out forms for non-library services	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Hosting ballot boxes	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Citizenship classes	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Teen Council	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Meeting space for community groups	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Library of "things" (seeds, tools, toys, museum passes, etc.)	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Other, please specify:

9. Arts, Culture & Creativity

Service	Which of these does your library currently offer? (Answered by Library Leaders Only)	This fulfills a need that **all** libraries should provide to PA residents (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	This fulfills a need that **some** libraries should provide based on their community 's needs (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	This fulfills a need of PA residents that libraries should partner with other entities on, either in the library or off site (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	This is not a need of PA residents that libraries should fulfill (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	Not sure (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)
Arts and craft programs	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Digital media (videos, movies, music, etc.)	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Performances	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Preservation of local history	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Writer workshops or programs	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Exhibits	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Film screenings	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Maker space (e.g. 3D printer)	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Other, please specify:

10. Economic & Workforce Development

Service	Which of these does your library currently offer? (Answered by Library Leaders Only)	This fulfills a need that **all** libraries should provide to PA residents (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	This fulfills a need that **some** libraries should provide based on their community 's needs (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	This fulfills a need of PA residents that libraries should partner with other entities on, either in the library or off site (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	This is not a need of PA residents that libraries should fulfill (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	Not sure (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)
Small-business resources	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Job fairs	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Career services (e.g., PA CareerLink)	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Software training (such as Microsoft Office)	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Access to databases	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Technology training	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Grantmaking centers	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Networking opportunities	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Meeting space for small businesses	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Social media workshops	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Resume writing workshops	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Other, please specify:

11. Digital Inclusion

Service	Which of these does your library currently offer? (Answered by Library Leaders Only)	This fulfills a need that **all** libraries should provide to PA residents (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	This fulfills a need that **some** libraries should provide based on their community 's needs (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	This fulfills a need of PA residents that libraries should partner with other entities on, either in the library or off site (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	This is not a need of PA residents that libraries should fulfill (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	Not sure (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)
Public access computers and/or computer lab	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Wi-Fi access	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Circulating technology (laptops, tablets, hotspots, etc.)	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Computer classes (how to use a mouse, Microsoft and Google tools, etc.)	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Classes or training on how to use tablets or phones	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
E-resources (digital media,,	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Other, please specify:

12. Supporting Language Learning

Service	Which of these does your library currently offer? (Answered by Library Leaders Only)	This fulfills a need that **all** libraries should provide to PA residents (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	This fulfills a need that **some** libraries should provide based on their community 's needs (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	This fulfills a need of PA residents that libraries should partner with other entities on, either in the library or off site (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	This is not a need of PA residents that libraries should fulfill (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)	Not sure (Answered by Library Leaders and Staff)
English as a Second Language classes and resources	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Adult programming in languages other than English	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Storytimes in languages other than English and/or bilingual storytimes	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Bilingual staff	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Library information materials in languages other than English (library card application, etc.)	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Signage in languages other than English	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Online information in languages other than English	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Active collection development in languages other than English	▢	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Other, please specify:

13. What more would you like to share about any programs or services listed above? These could be concerns, frustrations, exciting ideas, or questions you have about any of them. (Open-ended)
14. In a few sentences, please describe a notable partnership your library is currently or has been engaged in. Include who the partners are (or were), the goals and key elements of the partnership, and what has been (or was) productive (or not productive) for your library. Space is provided for up to three partnerships.

    Partnership 1:
    Partnership 2:
    Partnership 3:

15. What is one thing that PA libraries do that people typically do not know about? (Open-ended)
16. What are three keywords that you would use to describe PA libraries?

    Keyword 1:
    Keyword 2:
    Keyword 3:

17. What is one thing that you think your library should do (or do more of) in order to be successful? (Open-ended)
18. What is one thing that you think your library should stop doing in order to be more successful? (Open-ended)
19. What do you hope PA libraries look like in 2035? (Open-ended)

Survey of Library Partners

The survey was sent to the heads of organizations that commonly form partnerships with public libraries, including nonprofits, workforce development agencies (such as PA CareerLink®), chambers of commerce, and literacy councils. The survey was fielded in February and March 0f 2025. Completed responses were received from 80 library partners from 47 of Pennsylvania's 67 counties.

1. At what type of organization do you work? (Choose one.)

   ◯ PA CareerLink® or local Workforce Development Board
   ◯ Non-profit
   ◯ Chamber of Commerce
   ◯ Literacy Council
   ◯ If other, please specify:

2. Is your organization currently engaged in a partnership with a public library in your community? (Choose one.)

   ◯ Yes
   ◯ No

3. (If answered "yes" to Question 2) In a few words, please describe the partnership(s), including whether this is a current or past partnership, why it was formed, main partners, goals and key elements, and what has been productive (or not productive) for your organization/agency. (Open-ended)

4. (If answered "no" to Question 2) Please share any reasons why your organization does not partner with a library. (Check all that apply.)

   ▢ Our work does not intersect with public libraries.
   ▢ Our work might intersect with a public library but we have not explored or pursued this direction.
   ▢ We tried to work with a public library, however the partnership did not flourish.
   ▢ Other, please specify:

5. In what PA county do you reside? (Choose one.)
   [Pre-set list of 67 counties in Pennsylvania]

6. For the following statements, please say whether you agree or not. (Choose one answer per row.)

Statement	I agree	I disagree	I am not sure
My library is a trusted source of information.	◯	◯	◯
Libraries still serve a legitimate purpose in today's world, where consumers have easy access to information via the internet and social media.	◯	◯	◯

7. Do you support using public dollars, funded by taxes, for public libraries in Pennsylvania? (Choose one.)

   ◯ Yes
   ◯ No
   ◯ Not sure
   ◯ No answer

8. How often have you personally used a public library or online public library services in the last three (3) years? (Choose one.)

   ◯ Daily
   ◯ A few times a week or weekly
   ◯ Monthly
   ◯ A few times a year
   ◯ Yearly
   ◯ Once every few years
   ◯ Never or hardly ever
   ◯ No answer

9. (If did not answer “Never or hardly ever” in Question 8) What is the primary reason why you visit a public library or use library services? (Choose up to three.)

   ▢ Free books, magazines, and other print materials
   ▢ Free digital materials, e-books and audio books, and apps, such as Libby and Hoopla
   ▢ Tutoring, study spaces, and homework help
   ▢ Bringing children to the library
   ▢ Free access to computers, internet, or Wi-Fi
   ▢ Meeting up with friends and/or family for socializing
   ▢ Attending programs or classes
   ▢ Access to specialized research materials and databases
   ▢ Services and programs for professionals and entrepreneurs, such as business start-up information, nonprofit resources, network, etc.
   ▢ Other, please specify:

Statewide Poll of Library Users and Non-Users

The following questions were administered through a statewide telephone poll commissioned by Blue Willow Consulting and conducted by Susquehanna Polling & Research. Poll questions were jointly developed. The poll was conducted February 24 – March 9, 2025, with 800 household members at least 18 years of age. Respondents were contacted using random selection procedures. All telephone interviews were conducted using live telephone agents. The sample frame was compiled using random telephone sequence methods and included both landline and cellular households, purchased from a certified list vendor. All households were pre-screened to eliminate household numbers on the federal Do Not Call registry, in compliance with all applicable federal and state laws. Respondents were not told who the sponsor of the survey was, nor were they told about the specific topic of the survey as a condition of participation.

Interviews were closely monitored to ensure a representative sample of the Pennsylvania population was achieved based on party registration, geography, gender, age cohort, and other demographics. The margin of error for a sample size of 800 interviews is +/-3.46% at the 95% confidence level.

1. Do you use library services by visiting a local public library or by going online for services like catalog searches or apps like Libby or Hoopla? By public library, we mean one that serves the community, not at a college or university or in a school. (Choose one.)

   ◯ Yes, online only
   ◯ Yes, visit local library only
   ◯ Yes, both online and visit local library
   ◯ No
   ◯ Refuse

2. Do you have a library card? (Choose one.)

   ◯ Yes
   ◯ No
   ◯ Not sure
   ◯ Refuse

3. How often have you used a public library in the last three (3) years - daily, a few times a week, monthly, a few times a year, yearly, once every few years, hardly ever or never? (Choose one.)

   ◯ Daily
   ◯ A few times a week
   ◯ Monthly
   ◯ A few times a year
   ◯ Yearly
   ◯ Once every few years
   ◯ Never or hardly ever

4. (If did not answer “Never or hardly ever” to Question 3) What is the primary reason why you visit a public library or use library services? (Open-ended)

5. (If answered “Never or hardly ever” to Question 3) What is the primary reason why you don't use library services? (Open-ended)

6. Did you know that public libraries are open to everyone and that most services are free? (Choose one.)

   ◯ Yes
   ◯ No
   ◯ Not sure
   ◯ Refuse

7. Do you support using public dollars, funded by taxes, for public libraries in Pennsylvania? (Choose one.)

   ◯ Yes
   ◯ No
   ◯ Not sure
   ◯ Refuse

We're interested in knowing what needs or interests you have that a library might be able to fulfill. I am going to read you a list of different services and offerings that may be available at your local library. After each one, please tell me if this is something you would take advantage of at your local library. If you aren't currently using library services, answer each question based on what you think libraries should offer.

8. Asking your local library professional for information or to help you find information? (Choose one.)

   ◯ Yes
   ◯ No
   ◯ Not sure
   ◯ Refuse

9. Programs for school-aged children, such as after school programs, summer reading programs and programs for homeschoolers? (Choose one.)

   ◯ Yes
   ◯ No
   ◯ Not sure
   ◯ Refuse

10. Programs for adults, such as book clubs, author presentations, workshops on managing finances, health and wellness, and online safety? (Choose one.)

    ◯ Yes
    ◯ No
    ◯ Not sure
    ◯ Refuse

11. Storytimes and programs for young children? (Choose one.)

    ◯ Yes
    ◯ No
    ◯ Not sure
    ◯ Refuse

12. Access to Wi-Fi on site, especially to sit and work? (Choose one.)

    ◯ Yes
    ◯ No
    ◯ Not sure
    ◯ Refuse

13. Preservation of local history, for example special collections of historical documents, genealogical resources, etc.? (Choose one.)

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Not sure
- ◯ Refuse

14. Meeting space for civic and community groups? (Choose one.)

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Not sure
- ◯ Refuse

15. Public access to computers, printers, scanners, and copiers? (Choose one.)

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Not sure
- ◯ Refuse

16. Computer classes. For example, accessing information sources, Microsoft and Google tools etc.? (Choose one.)

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Not sure
- ◯ Refuse

17. Books and other materials in languages other than English? (Choose one.)

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Not sure
- ◯ Refuse

18. Services and programs for job seekers, such as resume writing workshops, job fairs, etc.? (Choose one.)

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Not sure
- ◯ Refuse

19. Access to specialized research materials and databases? (Choose one.)

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Not sure
- ◯ Refuse

20. Services and programs for professionals and entrepreneurs, such as business start-up information, nonprofit resources, networking, etc.? (Choose one.)

    ◯ Yes
    ◯ No
    ◯ Not sure
    ◯ Refuse

21. What additional services or programs, if any, can libraries offer to make you more likely to want to use their services or visit more frequently? (Open-ended)

I would like to read to you a few different approaches for how libraries can identify themselves in the future. Regardless of whether or not you use the library, after each one, please tell me if you agree or disagree with each.

22. My library should serve as a digital, fully virtual library that provides all reading materials in a digital format that can be easily accessed through a computer, smartphone, tablet or any other electronic device. (Choose one.)

    ◯ Agree
    ◯ Disagree
    ◯ Not sure
    ◯ Refuse

23. My library should reflect community interests by lending out things in addition to books. For instance, tools, seeds, board games and puzzles, sewing machines, baking equipment, musical instruments, etc. (Choose one.)

    ◯ Agree
    ◯ Disagree
    ◯ Not sure
    ◯ Refuse

24. My library should offer mobile services, such as book delivery, and off-hour services, such as book lockers and drop-off boxes. (Choose one.)

    ◯ Agree
    ◯ Disagree
    ◯ Not sure
    ◯ Refuse

25. My library should serve as a location that resembles a coffee shop. That is, a comfortable spot that allows for individuals to enjoy drinks and light snacks while reading or working. (Choose one.)

    ◯ Agree
    ◯ Disagree
    ◯ Not sure
    ◯ Refuse

26. My library should have materials and/or sponsor events for the LGBTQ+ community. (Choose one.)

    ◯ Agree
    ◯ Disagree
    ◯ Not sure
    ◯ Refuse

Finally, I am going to read you a short series of statements about how people might think of libraries. Please tell me if you agree or disagree with each.

27. I feel welcome at my public library. (Choose one.)

- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Not sure
- ◯ Refuse

28. Libraries have become a place where unhoused people or people with mental health issues disrupt or jeopardize the comfort and safety of libraries. (Choose one.)

- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Not sure
- ◯ Refuse

29. My library is a trusted source of information. (Choose one.)

- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Not sure
- ◯ Refuse

30. Libraries still serve a legitimate purpose in today's world, where consumers have easy access to information via the internet and social media. (Choose one.)

- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Not sure
- ◯ Refuse

31. Do you live in an area that can be described as urban, suburban or rural? (Choose one.)

- ◯ Urban area
- ◯ Suburban area
- ◯ Rural area
- ◯ Not sure
- ◯ Refuse

32. Approximately how far (in miles one way) do you live from the closest public library in your community? (Choose one.)

- ◯ Less than 5 miles
- ◯ 5-10 miles
- ◯ 11-25 miles
- ◯ 26-50 miles
- ◯ More than 50 miles
- ◯ Not sure
- ◯ Refuse

33. Are you registered to vote as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent or with another political party? (Choose one.)

- ◯ Republican
- ◯ Democrat
- ◯ Independent
- ◯ Other
- ◯ Not registered to vote
- ◯ Refuse

34. What was your age on your last birthday? (Choose one.)

- ◯ 18-29
- ◯ 30-44
- ◯ 45-54
- ◯ 55-64
- ◯ 65-74
- ◯ 75-84
- ◯ 85+
- ◯ Refuse

35. Do you have any children in the household and if yes, what ages are they? (Check All That Apply)

- ◯ Yes, up to 5 years old
- ◯ Yes, 6 to 12 years old
- ◯ Yes, 13 to 18 years old
- ◯ Yes, 19 years or older
- ◯ No, no children living in the household
- ◯ Refuse

36. What is your highest level of education? (Choose one.)

- ◯ High school diploma or less
- ◯ Some college, but no college degree
- ◯ 2-year college degree/technical or trade degree
- ◯ 4-year college degree
- ◯ Post-graduate degree/masters/doctorate studies
- ◯ Refuse

37. Are you, or is anyone in the household living with any kind of disability? (Check all that apply)

- ◯ Yes, respondent
- ◯ Yes, other in household
- ◯ No
- ◯ Refuse

38. Are you employed on either a full-time or part-time basis, are you unemployed, are you retired, are you a homemaker or something else? (Choose one.)

- ◯ Employed full-time
- ◯ Employed part-time
- ◯ Retired
- ◯ Unemployed
- ◯ Homemaker
- ◯ Student
- ◯ Self-employed
- ◯ Something else/other
- ◯ Refuse

39. What is your main racial or ethnic background? (Choose one.)

- ◯ African American/Black
- ◯ Asian American/Asian
- ◯ Hispanic/Latino
- ◯ Multiracial/Multiethnic
- ◯ Native American/Alaska Native
- ◯ Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- ◯ White (not Latino/Hispanic)
- ◯ Race/ethnicity not represented by above categories
- ◯ Refuse

40. Gender (Predetermined)

- ◯ Male
- ◯ Female

41. Area/Region (Predetermined)

- ◯ Northwest
- ◯ Southwest
- ◯ The “T”/Central
- ◯ Northeast/Lehigh Valley
- ◯ South Central
- ◯ Southeast
- ◯ Allegheny County
- ◯ Philadelphia

Appendix D: Library User Personas

The research identified eight user personas that illustrate how Pennsylvanians engage–or could engage–with their public libraries. By connecting library use and non-use patterns to real needs and behaviors, these personas humanize the data collected for this research and provide libraries with a practical framework for tailoring outreach, strengthening relationships with current users, and engaging those who underutilize or are unaware of available services. The personas also served as the foundation for the Awareness Campaign materials. Building on these insights, libraries can choose to tap into all of the personas or focus on a subset to guide decisions about collections and programming, focus resources for staffing and skills development, and shape marketing and outreach efforts. The personas can also facilitate discussion and collaboration among libraries and their partners. All persona-related materials are available for free download.

The Book Lover

Characteristics of the Book Lover

- Heavy user of public libraries and bookstores
- Comfortable reading both printed and digital books, or listening to books
- Always on the hunt for book recommendations and might even be a content creator
- Likes to “try before they buy” books
- Isn’t necessarily spending a lot of time in the library per visit
- Might not participate in library programs, but is open to them
- Uses digital resources and services, but not necessarily those of public libraries

What frustrates them about the library

- The library’s hours don’t work for them, or they don’t have time to get to the library
- It might not be clear to them how to obtain books when they are not physically in the library (e.g., digital checkouts, interlibrary loans)
- The library does not have popular titles or enough selection
- The library lacks a preferred genre or a complete series
- They might be turned off by people who are spending all day in the library and taking up space
- The library is perceived as “old fashioned” and out of date and has too many rules
- The library’s shelves are unappealing and the books are falling apart

How libraries might newly engage them

- Encourage them to join or even lead a book club or book meetup
- Partner with local bookstores they frequent
- Start a series or genre of books that they want to read in order
- Welcome them to the library through special community events (e.g., reading challenges)

Messages that an awareness campaign might convey to the Book Lover

- Save money -- drop your subscriptions and get your digital materials for free from the library
- Get any book you ever wanted through an interlibrary loan
- Find your next (serendipitous) great read at your local public library
- Experience the convenience of putting books on hold and auto-renewal
- Become part of the book-loving community at your library

Communication channels by which an awareness campaign could reach them

- Advertisements on websites with book recommendations (e.g., Goodreads) or other creative pursuits (e.g., Pinterest)
- Library e-newsletters, especially book recommendations
- Social media: Instagram
- Newspaper column in the local newspaper
- Podcasts or blogs
- Posters in the community where they frequent (e.g., bookstores, cafes)
- Grab-and-go palm cards or QR codes of books recommendations that they can add to the Goodreads list

The Child-Focused

Characteristics of the Child-Focused

- Visits the library with their very young (0-5) and/or school-aged children (6-12)
- Not just a book borrower, but also a regular participant in library programs, such as Storytime, summer reading, and clubs for homeschoolers
- Looking for a safe and welcoming in-person environment
- Family could be new to the US
- Could be a grandparent, foster parent, or hired nanny/babysitter
- Might be homeschooling their children and looking for educational resources
- Potentially feels isolated in the caregiver role
- Their children might have special needs (e.g., neuro divergent)
- Likely to have memories of when they visited the library as young children

What frustrates the Child-Focused about the library

- They feel judged when they arrive with young children and stressed when they have to keep their children quiet
- The library's hours of operation are not convenient for them
- Getting to the library can be difficult with children, especially if there is a lack of parking and/or public transit options
- For families learning English, they might have difficulty communicating and programming might only be offered in English
- Fines and fees discourage usage

How the Child-Focused might newly engage with a public library

- Offer parenting and education resources and activity packs, including ones they can keep
- Make comfortable, casual seating available, to encourage interaction with other adults
- Host events and programs such as support groups, pre-K registration fairs, and vision/dental clinics

Messages that an awareness campaign might convey to the Child-Focused

- Connect with other families with young children in the area at the library
- Get valuable information and resources on parenting and education
- All abilities are welcome at the library, including neuro divergent children
- Give your child a head start on preschool with educational programs, resources, play areas
- Be in a safe, clean space for your children
- Introduce your child to other cultures through world languages collections

Communication channels by which an awareness campaign could reach the Child-Focused

- Walkthrough video of the facility or a map so caregivers know what to expect before visiting
- Bulletin boards at local parks and other community settings
- Flyers and newsletters distributed at childcare facilities, churches, pediatrician offices, food distribution centers, schools, senior centers
- Email and online newsletters
- Local radio and newspaper (ads, free media)
- Social media: Facebooks, Instagram, TikTok
- Word of mouth

The Youth Lounger

Characteristics of the Youth Lounger

- Teenager (ages 13-18) looking for a safe place to hang out after school
- Could be homeschooled
- Wants to hang out with other kids in their own space in the library, separate from adults and younger children
- Prefers to select books independently
- Gets book recommendations from TikTok and YouTube and music recommendations from YouTube Music and Spotify
- Somewhat prefers physical books (Gen Z)
- Often gets their homework done during school hours
- Their behavior can sometimes clash with traditional library norms or patron expectations
- Learning about volunteerism and community engagement
- Might not have libraries in their schools
- Probably have their own devices (at least a smartphone)

What frustrates the Youth Lounger about the library

- Bullying that carries over from school
- Excessive monitoring and supervision
- Getting to the library after school
- Rules, such as having to stay quiet
- Their perception of the library as a space for older adults
- Impatience with slow moving processes and people

How the Youth Lounger might newly engage with a public library

- Offer clubs, such as gaming clubs (e.g., esports) and role playing games (e.g., Dungeons and Dragons)
- Encourage teens to start their own clubs with support from the library
- Offer transportation to the library after school
- Provide homework assistance and study halls
- Provide food, snacks
- Give them a private space, like a study pod
- Offer tools for content creation and creativity (e.g., 3D printing, writing activities)
- Loan out things of interest to teens, such as video games or consoles and sports equipment

Messages that an awareness campaign might convey to the Youth Lounger

- Free, fun, no judgement -- drop in at your local library after school to hang out, explore your interests, and meet other young people
- “Lean into nerdy” at your local public library
- “LAFO” (look around, find out) at your local public library

Communication channels by which an awareness campaign could reach the Youth Lounger

- Endorsements from sports or entertainment celebrities
- Improved library website and special web sections for teens
- Parents/extended family
- School libraries/librarians and teachers
- Social media: TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram
- Social media influencers
- Streaming services (e.g., Spotify)
- Stickers (for their water bottles, laptops, cars) and other swag (T-shirts, bracelets)
- Word of mouth through peers

The Digital Independent

Characteristics of the Digital Independent

- Proficient and prodigious user of digital services and resources, though not necessarily those of public libraries
- Very supportive of libraries providing fully virtual digital offerings
- Demographically, is more likely to have a four-year degree, be employed part-time or self-employed, and be registered as an independent
- Has phone handy at all times
- Less inclined to interact with people
- Might not relate to people who are not tech savvy
- Has a laptop at home but may not have a printer
- Expects services to be available online
- May prefer an app over a website

What frustrates the Digital Independent about the library

- Their library's hours of operation do not match their availability for in-person visits
- Their library's Wi-Fi is weak, slow or unstable
- There can be long wait-times for resources
- Their library does not have public printers
- Their library can be crowded
- Their library's website is not optimized for speed or user-friendliness and there is no chat for customer support
- Digital services are not customizable, if they are even available online
- They do not like having to wait for a librarian to access a resource

How the Digital Independent might newly engage with a public library

- Offer digital library cards
- Maximize digital offerings: eBooks, databases, and other digital resources
- Invite them to volunteer to help others with tech, co-create digital programs
- Market virtual programs to them
- Offer co-working spaces/support co-working
- Provide access to digital production equipment

Messages that an awareness campaign might convey to the Digital Independent

- Save money on digital materials – don't pay for subscriptions, get them free at the library
- Invest your money in your future, use your library for the FREE stuff
- Experience F2F or being screen-free for a while -- visit your local public library!
- Help bridge the digital divide in your community - volunteer at your public library

Communication channels by which an awareness campaign could reach the Digital Independent

- Social media (TikTok, Instagram, other platforms)
- Radio and television commercials (Spotify, YouTube, Apple Media, Netflix)
- Online news outlets
- Tech networking events
- Volunteer networks
- Library e-newsletter
- Texting services
- Community events
- College e-resource lists; pair with local colleges (e.g. CampusPhilly)

The Community Connector

Characteristics of the Community Connector

- Might be older but not necessarily a senior citizen and does not want to be labeled “old” or “senior citizen”
- Is looking for opportunities to stay mentally and socially engaged and values dexterity activities
- Seeks access to trusted health and finance information
- Values navigating aging with dignity and autonomy, but may be lonely
- Needs barrier-free buildings, digital coaching, easy-to-read materials
- Less interested in attending activities after dark
- Wants and has time to volunteer at the library, but might be less physically able
- May have lots of free time
- May have the skills and know-how to teach others

What frustrates the Community Connector about the library

- Their library’s hours are not consistent from day to day
- Their library might not have sufficient spaces or seating that are comfortable or accessible
- They lack means to get to the library (car, public transit options)
- They do not like noisy activities in their library
- They are uncertain about what to expect at their library, as it might look different from what they remember when they were children
- They are not comfortable with online signups or automated answering services
- They do not have clear information about services or programs offered by their library

How the Community Connector might newly engage with a public library

- Promote volunteer activities to them
- Invite them to learn a new hobby or skill
- Provide genealogical and local history resources
- Offer group activities or social events (e.g., luncheons) so they can come with a friend or meet new people

Messages that an awareness campaign might convey to the Community Connector

- Interested in family history? Check out free genealogical resources at the library.
- Get connected, meet new people at the c library
- Make a visit to the library a part of your week
- Times change, but the library is always here
- Rediscover your passion, learn a new hobby or skill -- free resources and programs at your local public library
- On a fixed budget? Library users save money!
- Spend quality time with your grandchildren at your local public library
- Need help preparing your taxes? Signing up for government benefits? Visit your local public library.

Communication channels by which an awareness campaign could reach the Community Connector

- Newsletters for seniors distributed via community and faith-based organizations, medical facilities, senior apartment complexes
- Social media groups, high school reunions
- Presentations at senior centers
- Tables at health fairs/local community events
- Grief support groups
- Travel agencies or groups
- Word-of-mouth, bring/tell-a-friend campaign

The Resource Seeker

Characteristics of the Resource Seeker

- Might not be a regular user of traditional library services or programs
- Views public libraries as place for getting support with social service needs, such as job seeker assistance or career exploration, completing tax returns, setting up payroll access, signing up for public benefits, starting a business
- Might be unemployed or underemployed and is more likely to have at most a high school degree
- Might be a volunteer or support worker helping others in their community
- May not have a computer or Internet access at home
- May not have transportation to get to the library

What frustrates the Resource Seeker about the library

- They might be embarrassed about asking for help
- They might be suspicious of public libraries because libraries are perceived as being connected to government
- They might be intimidated by crowded conditions in the library
- Their local library might lack resources and staff knowledge in areas where they need assistance
- Their library might have limited hours
- They might have had past negative or challenging experiences at their library (e.g., unpaid fines, lost items)

How the Resource Seeker might newly engage with a public library

- Accommodate walk-in help for urgent needs
- Make quiet, private spaces available
- Provide access to Internet and computers
- Offer one-on-one assistance with devices
- Connect with them by telephone

Messages that an awareness campaign might convey to the Resource Seeker

- Free Wi-Fi, free printer, free job search tools, free moral support, no judgement
- Librarians are trained to find resources
- More than books (non-traditional resources)
- Tell/help a friend who needs services
- Many resources at no cost or low-cost (printing, faxing, etc.)
- The library might not have WHAT you need but can point you in the right direction
- Libraries are a judgement-free zone

Communication channels by which an awareness campaign could reach the Resource Seeker

- Ads on Apple music or popular apps, Facebook, Instagram
- Social media Direct Message or chatbots
- Community Facebook groups
- Improved library websites
- Billboards, buses
- Homeowners associations
- Referrals from social services agencies (provide info to agency (e.g., PA CareerLink®)
- Grocery stores and other businesses
- Word-of-mouth from individuals or other organizations

The Rural Retiree

Characteristics of the Rural Retiree

- Most interested in traditional services of libraries, such as book borrowing, as well as mobile and off-hour services
- May have an outdated view of what libraries do and who they serve
- May be resistant to new technologies and distrustful of online resources
- Often likes friendly interactions
- More likely to have a disabled person in the household, possibly themselves
- More conservative in cultural views
- Could be isolated (physically and socially) or may live far away, so planning visits requires intentionality and transportation
- May have recently moved into assisted or communal living and left their personal book collection behind
- More present in northern and central PA

What frustrates the Rural Retiree about the library

- They are possibly not interested in interacting with others who look or behave differently
- They might be turned off by some policies
- They could be influenced by misinformation campaigns
- They do not like when staff do not have time for discussion or personal interactions, especially at the desk if it is busy/unattended
- Their library might have noisy surroundings
- Homeless people or people facing mental health challenges in the library
- Constrained by limited accessible parking, facilities, transportation alternatives
- They are discouraged by venturing out in the dark or wet or slippery weather conditions

How the Rural Retiree might newly engage with a public library

- Invite them to attend a program of interest
- Invite them to bring grandchildren to a kid's or multigenerational program
- Encourage in-person communication
- Provide them opportunities to volunteer

Messages that an awareness campaign might convey to the Rural Retiree

- On a fixed income? Libraries bring the world to you with no-cost resources.
- Learn the skills to connect with tech savvy children and grandchildren
- The library offers programs you might like
- Bring your grandchildren to a multi-generational program, learn together
- Enjoy in-person interaction, make new friends
- Participate in programs that relate to local history and encourage memories
- You never outgrow the library – rediscover your favorite childhood setting!
- Give back to the community by volunteering at the library

Communication channels by which an awareness campaign could reach the Rural Retiree

- Community centers, cultural centers, religious centers, community meetings
- Local newspapers, radio and TV programs
- Mailers
- Flyers at local restaurants, hair salons, stores
- Posters at bus stops and public transit hubs
- Social media
- Word of mouth
- Show up at community meetings
- Referrals from health providers and social service

The New American

Characteristics of the New American

- They could be a recent arrival to the US
- They might be learning English and becoming acquainted with US cultural customs
- They are likely to have young children and might be seeking homework assistance and safe spaces for them in the library
- They tend to be part of a community of shared heritage, clustered in parts of the state
- They might be looking for citizenship resources and assistance
- They may not have a permanent address and might be living with other relatives or friends
- They may not know how (US) libraries work
- They may be intimidated by the library as an institution, leading to concerns about safety and security

What frustrates the New American about the library

- The library lacks signage in an immigrant group's native language
- They lack transportation to the library (car, public transit options)
- They might experience communication barriers in everyday library transactions
- They do not see staff who look like them

How the New American might newly engage with a public library

- Explain how libraries in the US work
- Offer reading materials in languages spoken in the community and English language learning courses or materials
- Make referrals to and receive referrals from social services
- Provide citizenship resources and assistance
- Offer multilingual children's programming, Storytimes, and afterschool programming
- Provide meeting space for cultural celebrations
- Offer them opportunities to co-design messages to their community

Messages that an awareness campaign might convey to the New American

- Libraries are your gateway to America -- free resources, safe spaces, and useful services
- Most library services are offered at no cost to you
- Citizenship resources/tests are available
- Resources are available in many languages (signage, website, bilingual collections and/or online Language learning resources)
- Everyone is welcome at the library

Communication channels by which an awareness campaign could reach the New American

- Community organizations, community centers, cultural centers, religious centers
- Local newspapers, local radio, and other local news outlets
- Bus stops and public transit hubs
- Social media
- Local businesses
- Word of mouth