

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK RECEIVED

August 2010



Over 500 people participated in Part 2 of the Community Conversation. Discussion focused on if/how participants would adjust Library services under three different funding scenarios: if the Library received an increase in funding; if the Library received no change in funding; and if the Library received a decrease in funding. For each funding scenario, participants were asked how they would adjust five different areas of Library service including: Collections, the Digital Experience, Hours, Locations, and Programs & Outreach. Some clear themes emerged from this feedback, as well as some differences in opinion, and these have been highlighted below and in the chart on the final page.

This summary was written by Nicole Swerhun, Independent Facilitator, and is intended to accompany the individual Workshop Summary Reports available on the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh website. If you have any comments or suggested edits to it, please contact Nicole at nicole@swerhun.com or by phone at 416.999.2665 or Maggie McFalls, Community Engagement Coordinator, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, feedback@carnegielibrary.org or 412.622.8877.

KEY MESSAGES FROM COMMUNITY CONVERSATION PART 2

- 1. Most participants clearly said they would like to see existing branches kept open, however if there is no change or a decrease in Library funding, there were participants in every public workshop, both staff workshops, and a number of online survey respondents who supported a decrease in investment in locations.** There were a number of different reasons behind this feedback, including: some who felt that if a Branch was closed than it could be replaced with other library services (such as kiosks and book mobiles); some who felt that the Library should consider moving to more functional buildings or cheaper, busier locations; some who suggested setting up satellite library locations in schools to pick up and drop off books; and some who suggested that a free bus be provided to transport people from communities without a library to the nearest library. There were also participants who highlighted the importance of serving the whole city, not just those neighborhoods that currently have branches.
- 2. Maintaining the digital experience was seen as critical by the vast majority of participants,** with limited interest in cutting back on this service, regardless of the funding received (with several indicating that “digital is the way of the future”). Specific comments emphasized that the digital experience is necessary to attract and maintain library use by younger populations. A few times the point was raised that the Library doesn’t need to be a “first adopter” of cutting edge technology, however it is important to keep up with technological advances. There were questions raised about if and how the digital experience can replace or supplement the Library’s collections, which led to discussions regarding the mandate of the Library (see next point).
- 3. When asked to make choices about Library services, several participants reflected on the mandate of the Library.** Some felt strongly that Collections make a library relevant, however others focused on things like the role of the library as a community anchor with programming and free services, computer access, and the presence of Library staff – each described as the defining characteristic of the Library. Participating Library staff discussed whether the Library mission is to provide popular materials (like best sellers) or to provide electronic databases, and wondered whether this leads to a tension between whether a Library should provide educational or entertaining materials. It was frequently felt that different users have different needs. Some staff compared the library to the hardware store, where people go when they have a problem and no idea what the

answer is or where to find it. They go because they know they'll find the answer – and this is exactly what a Library does. It was also suggested that in certain ways the concept of a Library is countercultural since it involves sharing things, waiting for things, and a number of behaviors that involve the common good, while we live in a time where society is demanding things faster, cheaper, and focused more on the individual. The Library can and should be aware of how it responds to this changing context.

4. **Both public and staff participants highlighted the importance of looking at the library system on a neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis.** They noted that branches already provide different types of services to different populations. Some branches are larger, some are smaller, and rather than eliminating Library services in an area, the Library should think about how to replace services with some other options (e.g. “pop up” libraries were suggested as a way to move library services between neighborhoods). It was also suggested that each library branch be assessed for its strengths and weaknesses, and that decisions for the future be made on a case-by-case basis so that services are customized to meet the unique demands of each neighborhood (and money is not wasted on services that aren't take advantage of).
5. **If the Library funding stays the same or decreases, participants were most likely to support a decrease in Hours and Programming & Outreach.** Several participants (both public and staff) said they see cutting hours as preferable to cutting locations, since providing some access to the building is preferable to providing no access at all. If branch hours were to decrease, some participants would like to see other service options provided (like kiosks) and/or an increase in programming & outreach. There were differences of opinion as to whether a cut in hours should happen across the system or whether it should be targeted to the unique needs of each branch. Several participants suggested staggering branch hours differently based on location (so if one branch was closed early, a nearby branch could be open late). While there was a lot of support for decreasing Programming & Outreach services, several concerns were also expressed about this. Participants noted that this feedback probably reflects the fact that users of programming & outreach services may have been less likely to participate in the Community Conversation process. At every workshop there were those who felt strongly that if people were more aware of the importance of programming & outreach services, fewer people would support cuts. Several staff participants indicated that they would increase the Library's investment in programming & outreach even if there were no increases to funding.
6. **Feedback on the operation of the Library and participation in the Community Conversation process was received at a few workshops,** with some participants noting that the workshops likely did not attract a full range of Library users or the general public, and at least one participant who expressed interest in seeing the Library Board operate with more transparency.

In addition to the above points, there were also suggestions made regarding ways to save money and/or raise additional revenue, including (but not limited to):

- Seeing the Library market itself better, because many people don't understand what libraries do;
- Getting Library utilities sponsored (e.g. “Your Library's lighting is sponsored by...”);
- Partnering with the private sector to support different library users (e.g. partner with Children's Hospital or daycares to support children's library services, or similar partnership to support seniors);
- Renting space within branches to local non-profit or community groups;
- Charging extra for the transfer of books between libraries;
- Cost sharing with schools and medical facilities; and
- Asking companies to pay for some services (e.g. pay for research).

SUMMARY CHART

The chart below summarizes the results from the public workshops and feedback received online. Note that an “up” arrow (↑) was used to indicate an increase in a service area, and a “down” arrow (↓) was used to indicate a decrease in a service area. An equals sign (=) was used to indicate no change. **Note that the Community Conversation has been deliberately designed as a qualitative process, and focuses on identifying and understanding different perspectives on the future of the Library rather than counting the number of people who hold these different perspectives. The percentages in the chart below are presented in that spirit, and are intended only to help spot trends and big themes.**

		Collections			Digital Experience			Hours			Locations			Programs & Outreach		
		↑	=	↓	↑	=	↓	↑	=	↓	↑	=	↓	↑	=	↓
INCREASE in Funding	Public Workshops	95%	5%	-	95%	5%	-	65%	35%	-	30%	65%	5%	65%	35%	-
	Online survey	70%	25%	-	60%	30%	5%	45%	50%	-	20%	65%	5%	40%	40%	5%
NO CHANGE in Funding	Public Workshops	5%	70%	25%	30%	65%	5%	-	70%	30%	5%	90%	5%	5%	60%	35%
	Online survey	25%	65%	5%	25%	60%	15%	10%	70%	10%	5%	75%	15%	10%	50%	20%
DECREASE in Funding	Public Workshops	5%	65%	30%	10%	55%	35%	-	20%	80%	-	75%	25%	-	20%	80%
	Online survey	10%	65%	20%	10%	45%	35%	5%	45%	45%	-	55%	30%	5%	30%	50%

Participants see the Digital Experience as critical to the Library, and many are interested in increasing or maintaining these services.

Participants are generally interested in maintaining locations, though some supported a decrease if the Library did not receive additional funds.

Many participants felt strongly that Collections are what defines the Library.

Several participants preferred a decrease in branch hours to losing locations. Many talked about opportunities to stagger hours on a branch-by-branch basis.

There was support for decreasing Programming & Outreach, however several participants felt that this may be because there is insufficient awareness of the value of these programs.

Notes on the data in the chart: The information reflects feedback from 180+ Public Workshop participants and 300+ online surveys. Workshop results are based on the feedback from small table discussions. All results are rounded to the nearest 5%. Note that Survey results do not add up to 100% (difference between total and 100% is the number that did not complete the question or answered “Don’t Know”).