

**Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh: Sustaining Our Future
Community Conversation – Part 1 of 3**

SUMMARY OF KEY THEMES IN COMMUNITY FEEDBACK RECEIVED

June 2010

More than 200 people participated in the four community workshops held during Part 1 of the Community Conversation and/or submitted a completed Discussion Guide. This summary reflects the key themes that emerged from this feedback. More detail is available in the Summary Reports completed for each workshop. Note that the draft workshop reports have been distributed to participants for review and will be finalized and posted on Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh's website by the end of June 2010. Results of the online survey will also be available on the Library's website by the end of June (379 surveys were completed).

- 1. Considerable discussion focused on ways for the Library to diversify and increase the funding it receives.** The community suggested expanding general fundraising, donations, foundation grants and exploring corporate partnerships. A number of other ideas were also identified, including exploring the feasibility of a dedicated tax for the Library (a portion of income tax, property tax, sales tax and amusement tax were suggested). Seeking support from lottery funds and education funds were also suggested.
- 2. A key theme of all discussions was the importance of recognizing the supports that the Library provides to several other public services (and the private sector).** Several participants in all workshops identified the critical supports that libraries provide to schools, and particularly those schools in which their school library has been closed or has the potential to close in the future. Participants also talked about the void created when government services are reduced or eliminated (e.g. immigration, judicial, social security and unemployment), and the critical role that libraries play in filling this void. It was reported that there are many service providers who tell their clients to “go to the library” for more information and/or to access a service. Some people indicated that the same is true in terms of support to the private sector – people come to libraries to apply for jobs online, to get copy of their paystubs online (because companies no longer provide paper paystubs) and even medical services. *The importance of identifying and valuing library service was raised repeatedly and participants see an opportunity for the Library to use this as leverage for establishing partnerships and making the case for increased funding from government.*
- 3. It's critical to recognize that libraries function as community anchors.** Building on the previous theme, many participants focused on the importance of the physical presence that libraries have in communities, particularly when other community spaces (like schools and recreational facilities) are closing. Participants repeatedly indicated that libraries have become one of the few remaining safe gathering places in the community, especially for children. When discussing opportunities for the future, participants talked about the natural partnerships that could be established between the Library and other organizations providing community services.

This summary was written by Nicole Swerhun, Independent Facilitator. 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.

4. **Evolving the current library service model is important.** Participants at all workshops discussed the importance of the Library evolving its service model to keep up with new technologies. There were suggestions for pilot projects such as kiosks and automatic checkouts. There were also several suggestions for the Library to explore partnerships with community service providers, whether to share space, ensure no duplication of services or to provide ease of access to users. The potential for the Library to have a national presence, and potentially to become a national digital library (and perhaps partnering with Google to do this), was raised.
5. **Physical space is essential to some and not to others.** It's clear that some users of the Library rely heavily on the physical location (this is reflected particularly in feedback from people with children and teens), while others access the Library online and really only need a place to pick up and drop off books. The fact that different library users interact with the Library in different ways and value different services was discussed at all workshops, and the importance (and challenge) of meeting diverse needs was widely recognized.
6. **The importance of effective outreach and communications was raised repeatedly.** Public Service Announcements were suggested a number of times, as was the need to tell stories of how the Library affects people, including how it has helped shaped local and national leaders. Participants expressed a strong desire to see a much stronger advocacy campaign on behalf of the Library and felt that this outreach needed to be directed to the broad public (since not only library users value the Library) as well as elected officials.
7. **The need for more community organizing in general was also raised a number of times, and not just when branches are on the doorstep of closing.** Several participants highlighted the importance of getting more people to understand their role in advocating with elected officials. They also suggested an increased effort be put toward involving leaders of the community – people with money and people with power (leaders from the sports community were mentioned often). The important role of the community in taking ownership over the Library and valuing the Library was raised frequently, as was the importance of a “bottom up” approach to identifying and addressing issues and opportunities related to the Library.
8. **A number of participants indicated that the Library faces challenges associated with perceived/lack of confidence in the Board of Trustees and the executive direction.** There were suggestions for increased transparency at board meetings (open them to the public), and increased public representation on the board. It was also suggested that the board could gain the trust of the community by removing the prospect of closing any library branch.