



2010 LIBRARY NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT

Meaford Public Library Board
September 2010

2010 LIBRARY NEEDS ASSESSMENT: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In May-June 2010 the Library conducted two needs assessment surveys: a community survey to understand the role the Library plays in the community, and an in-house patron survey to assess how well library services are meeting their needs. Over 3-4 weeks we had 214 respondents to the community survey and 109 to the in-house patron survey. Thank you to all who participated.

It is clear that, among respondents, the Library is a highly valued community resource with 95% saying it is important to have comprehensive library services in Meaford and 99% viewing it as an essential community resource.

Over two-thirds rate the services the Library provides as 'Excellent' with a further 30% saying they are 'Satisfactory'. The Library's strengths are the staff (98% satisfaction) and the collection (86%, an improvement over 75% in the 2004 survey). Interlibrary Loan is popular, and the large number of requests for books from our Library by other libraries demonstrates the quality of Meaford's collection.

There is a lack of awareness about several library services, particularly adult programs, the Library's website and online catalogue, and the introduction of new media such as e-books. Some patrons do not use the computers. Increased awareness and education may improve the uptake of these services. Suggestions for improvements to the collection, computers, staff and programs, as well as analysis of the relative importance and performance of specified services, will guide the Library in how best to respond to patron needs.

The weaknesses cited overwhelmingly involve space considerations. In particular, there are not enough study spaces or reading areas. The collection, which is undersized for the population, is limited by insufficient shelf space. The event room is inaccessible and too small. There are not enough computers. Other constraints are inconvenient opening hours, lack of accessibility and limited parking.

Over three-quarters of respondents agree with the need for or support a new expanded library facility, with 12% disagreeing and 12% choosing not to answer. The need for a new building arose time and again in open comments, and some expressed frustration at the lack of progress, saying "just get on with it". High on the list of services a new facility should include are children's programs, educational resources, Internet/computers, reference and leisure reading material. Over 90% said the Library building should be a distinctive municipal landmark and source of civic pride.

In the 2009 visioning survey, patrons preferred a downtown location for a new Library. In this survey it is clear that more than four out of five patrons combine their visit to the Library with shopping or visiting a bank or the post office. Co-location of the Library with retail provides economic benefits to the downtown establishments.

These surveys primarily reflect the views of patrons in urban Meaford and the former Township of St. Vincent. Increased communication and dialogue with the public at large are needed (and planned) to solicit the views of all residents from all areas of the municipality on how best to provide library services and to engage in conversations about a new library facility.

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2010 LIBRARY NEEDS ASSESSMENT: REPORT

Introduction

In May-June 2010 the Library conducted two needs assessment surveys: a community survey to understand the role the Library plays in the community, and an in-house patron survey to assess how well library services are meeting their needs. The results will be used in the Board’s strategic planning for 2011-2015 and to improve library services to patrons.

The surveys were conducted over 3-4 weeks in May and June. Both surveys were available in paper form in the library and online. In order to reach as many non-users as possible, the community survey was also distributed among the retail establishments, through personal contacts in west Meaford, and advertised in the local online newspaper. The online link to the patron survey was forwarded to patrons on the Library’s e-mail list.

We had 214 respondents to the community survey and 109 to the in-house patron survey. The majority of respondents were regular patrons of the library from the former Town of Meaford and Township of St. Vincent. Seven percent of the community survey respondents were non-users and 4% and 7% of the community and patron surveys respectively were from the former Township of Sydenham.

Respondent characteristics

	Community	Patron
Total respondents	214	109
Place of residence:		
Former St. Vincent	60 30%	32 32%
Former Town of Meaford	113 56%	53 53%
Former Sydenham	9 4%	7 7%
Other	19 9%	8 8%
Type of resident:		
Permanent	199 91%	92 92%
Seasonal/weekend	16 8%	6 6%
Visitor	2 1%	2 2%
Length of residence in Meaford:	Not in survey	
< 10 years		32 36%
10-19 years		27 30%
> 20 years		31 33%
Average length of residence		18 years

	Community	Patron
Gender:	Not in survey	
Female		78 78%
Male		22 22%
Age:		
12 or younger	3 1%	1 1%
13-18	10 5%	0 0%
19-35	27 13%	6 6%
36-49	26 13%	12 12%
50-64	68 33%	41 40%
65+	72 35%	42 42%
Used Library in the last year	195 93%	Assume all
Also completed Community survey		30 31%

Note: Replies to each question may not add to total respondents as replies exclude those who skipped the question.

The Library in the community

The community survey confirms the important role that the Library plays in the municipality. For 95% of the respondents, it is important to have comprehensive library services in Meaford, with 78% saying it is very important. Almost everyone (99%) views the library as an essential community service.

Location

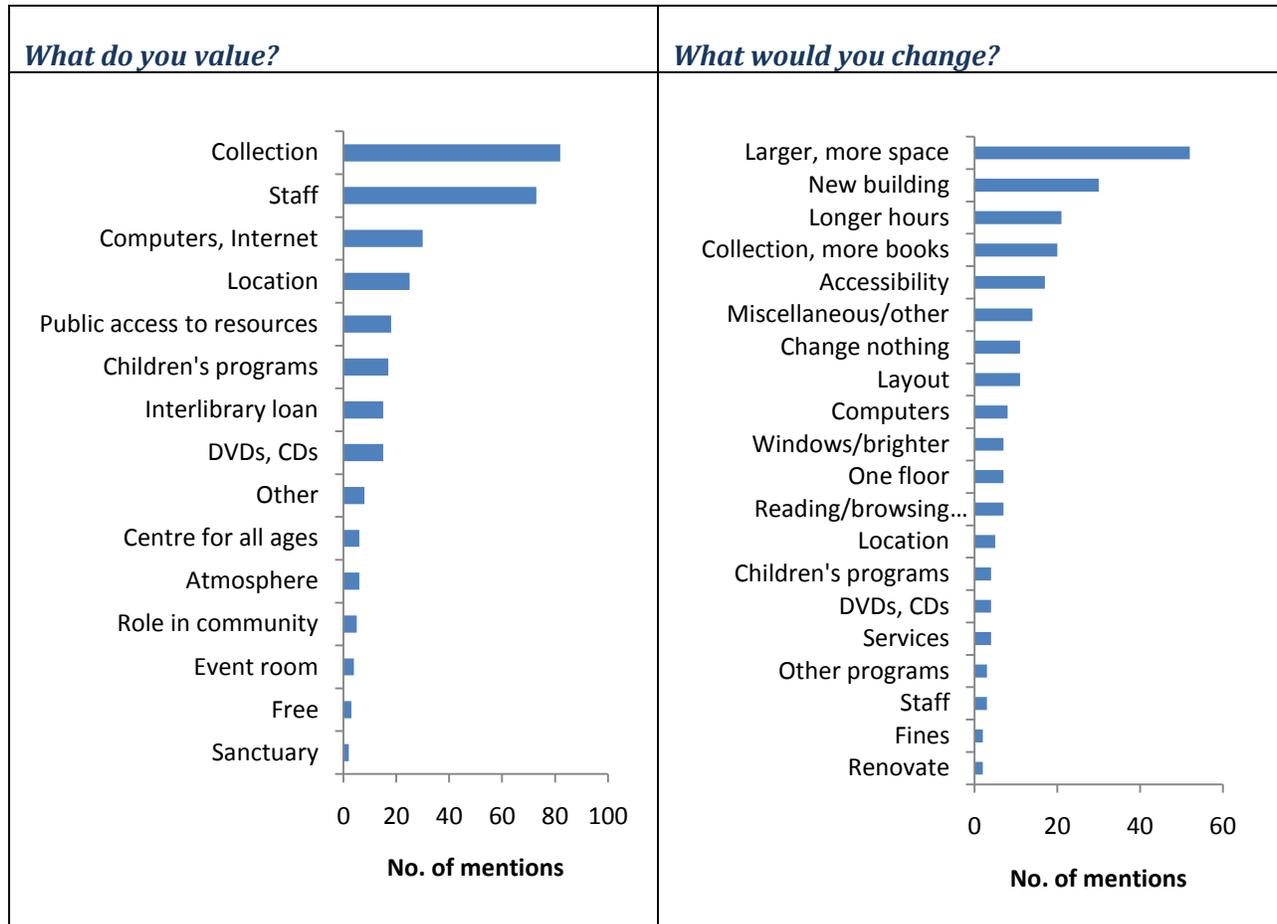
Most of the respondents take advantage of the location of the present library within the retail core to combine a visit to the library with shopping (88%), banking (66%) or to go to the post office (60%). This is an increase over 2004 (76%, 53% and 54% respectively). Co-location with retail establishments brings benefits to both. This is consistent with the findings in 2009 of a Library “visioning” survey in which the majority said the location of a new library should be downtown.

The Library should have a distinctive physical presence in Meaford’s civic infrastructure. When considering a new library, over 90% of those who answered the question thought that the library should be a municipal landmark, a source of civic pride. This has implications for both the design and location of a new library.

Strengths and weaknesses

The most valued aspects of the Library are the collection and the staff. These are great strengths. The feature that the respondents would most like to change is to have more space. A new building, longer hours, more books, and accessibility were also often mentioned. These weaknesses were all found in the 2004 survey. See the section on Library operations for further discussion.

Strengths and weaknesses



Some comments on what respondents value about the Library ...

Location, excellent staff – friendly, helpful, knowledgeable.

Interlibrary loans, children's library.

The books, the people who work there.

My family and I use most of the Library facilities a great deal of the time. We like the staff (like old friends), the convenience of "coming down from the rock" to communicate with the world through our computer, the access to books and magazines – we love it all, the whole package.

That it is centrally located. Its free service to citizens can be a very useful source of information.

Everything – this is my "sanctuary". The staff are the best!! And great book choices etc. ...

Great collection of books. Friendly knowledgeable service.

Wireless Internet connection. Resources – people, books, etc.

It's a knowledge source that enriches the minds of children and adults alike. It's all to value.

Provides free necessary and valuable access for the whole community, coverall all age groups, to printed and other media materials.

Books – up-to-date and readable books/current reads/research resource. A library is invaluable to a community.

Easy access to Meaford's history, internet, movies, etc. Friendly, courteous and knowledgeable people to help you, always.

... and what they would change

More space.

Newer/bigger, on one floor.

Larger, longer hours.

More computers.

Build a new accessible building, larger than this one.

A nice, all-on-one floor building – more computers and windows.

I would modernize the building a little bit, including the layout and computer system.

More computers in the Library and more computer time per person.

Paying fines – it's kinda not needed.

I would change the building itself; that is, have a more comfortable, clean, accessible building but located central to the main street, as it is, or on the main street if possible.

Add hours open to the public.

Chair at end of each aisle to sit and check through a book.

Make it bigger, more lounge areas and windows.

New building. Compare with Thornbury and Markdale.

Space – to research without being so crowded. Aesthetics – places to sit and peruse books/magazines.

Make it larger – more selection of books.

It should have more space. Shelving is a problem for the elderly – shelves too high and too low.

Anew building with lots of natural light, more up-to-date technology, meeting rooms, one floor, outside gardens, and a great indoor cafe.

Less adversarial attitude towards Owen Sound library (excellent research library). Outreach approach to the entire municipality needed.

Make it accessible. For all!

Make it bigger. Brighter, more natural light. Better hours (open Monday).

Hours – to make it more accessible to people who work. Make it easier to find books. More people available to help.

[No changes.] It is no longer an acceptable facility.

Washroom facilities desperate!

It's hard to imagine how such a limited facility could be better than it is. Great use of available space and resources.

Use of other local libraries

Meaford has reciprocal library agreements with Town of Blue Mountains and Grey Highlands as well as the contract with Owen Sound. Almost three-quarters of the respondents did not use any of these local libraries. Some of those that do take advantage of these agreements use more than one other library. For Owen Sound, given the low response rate from residents of former Sydenham, the results will not reflect use of the Owen Sound library by all residents of the municipality. (Approximately 1,200 residents of Sydenham are members of the Owen Sound library.)

Use of other local library

	%	No.
Do not use other local library	73%	149
Town of Blue Mountains	16%	32
Grey Highlands	5%	10
Owen Sound	4%	9
Total		204

The most frequent reason why respondents did use another local library was *Nice facility* (26), followed by *Close to home/work/school* (23), *Good collection* (17) and *Good service* (16). The fact that people use another local library because it is a “nice facility” may be a flag that Meaford’s library building is at a competitive disadvantage compared to its neighbours.

Library building

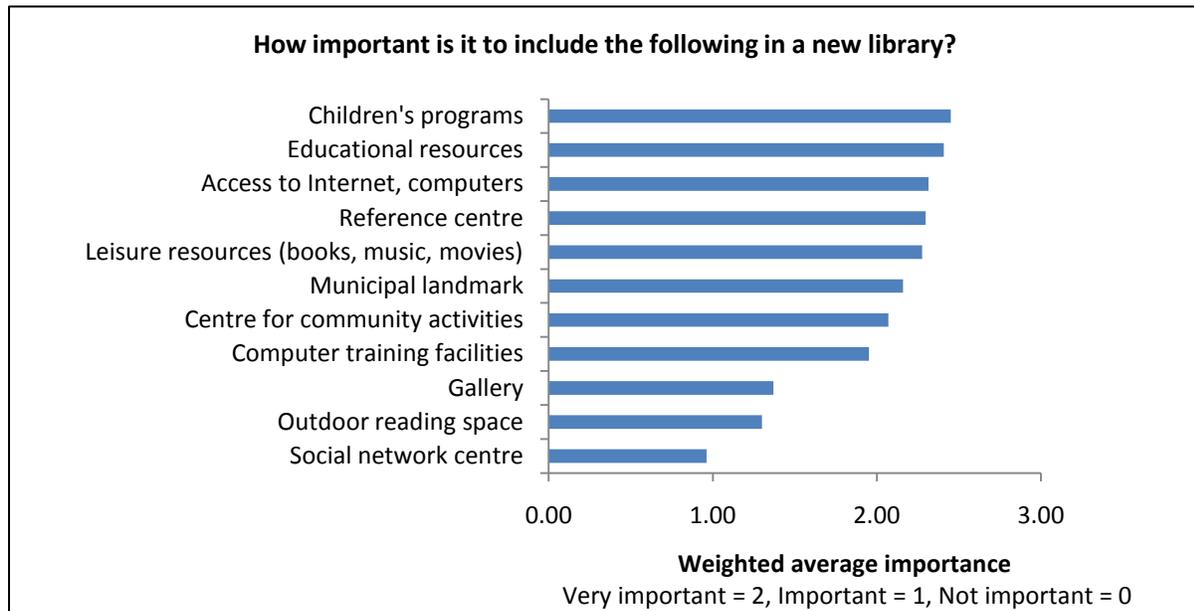
The only question common to both surveys was to find out the level of support for a new and expanded facility. After removing duplications (a person who answered both surveys), over three-quarters agree that the Library needs a new and larger facility. Twelve percent did not answer, which may indicate a level of uncertainty. Although there were too few non-users to be definitive, those who did respond were more evenly divided between *Yes*, *No*, *Did not answer*. This could have implications for future communications about a new library.

Support for a new expanded library

	All respondents		Non-users
	%	No.	No.
Yes	76%	222	5
No	12%	35	4
Did not answer	12%	36	6
Total	100%	293	15

Respondents suggested that the most important features to include in a new building are children’s programs, educational resources, Internet/computers, reference centre and leisure reading material. Possible non-traditional services, such as community centre, art gallery or outdoor reading space, had

low-moderate support with some saying there was no need to duplicate services provided elsewhere (in Meaford Hall, the parks and community centre). Social network centre with video gaming, Wii etc. was not popular.



Some comments about a new building:

A must. Hurry.

Our municipal leaders and community should work to make finding a larger, accessible building a priority. Though met with tight budget restraints, a healthy community will plan well for the future and ensure that its residents' needs are being met. It's been over 10 years that "talks" between the Library Board and municipal officials have taken place. I think it's time this issue be addressed in a more proactive, aggressive way.

I support it only if it does not create a property tax increase.

It needs to be easily accessible within town, well located, but it shouldn't take up prime property.

... I believe it is essential to the survival of the downtown that the Library stay downtown.

Libraries are not relevant to the future. They will go the way of "record stores". Who buys CDs any more – all downloaded online.

Libraries are essential resources for building community. New library should be by the coast guard beach to protect and showcase the waterfront. It will bring people to the harbour and create a destination for a boardwalk.

The town can't afford another building.

Keep the traditional library services, do not duplicate services provided by a community centre.

Let's get a new modern library in the downtown, Market Square is ideal.

Yes, but not in the square. How about behind Canada Trust in the vacant plaza?

Undecided.

Our patrons

Demographics

The typical respondent is female, over 50 years of age, resides in urban Meaford, and has lived here an average of 18 years.

- About two-thirds of respondents were over 50 years of age
- Over three-quarters were female
- Over half lived in the former town of Meaford; a little under one-third in former St. Vincent; 4% to 7% in former Sydenham
- Over 90% were permanent residents
- While a majority were long-term residents of Meaford and the average length of residency was 18 years, there were still a significant number of relative newcomers.
 - Less than 10 years: 36%
 - 10-19 years: 30%
 - More than 20 years: 33%

Frequency of use

Patrons are frequent users of the Library. Thirty eight percent visit at least once a week (compared to 50% in 2004) while 93% visit at least once a month (compared to 96% in 2004). It may be worth exploring why the frequency of visits has declined, e.g. increased use of the online catalogue from home. Note that since the surveys were carried out over 3-4 weeks, less frequent visitors may be underrepresented.

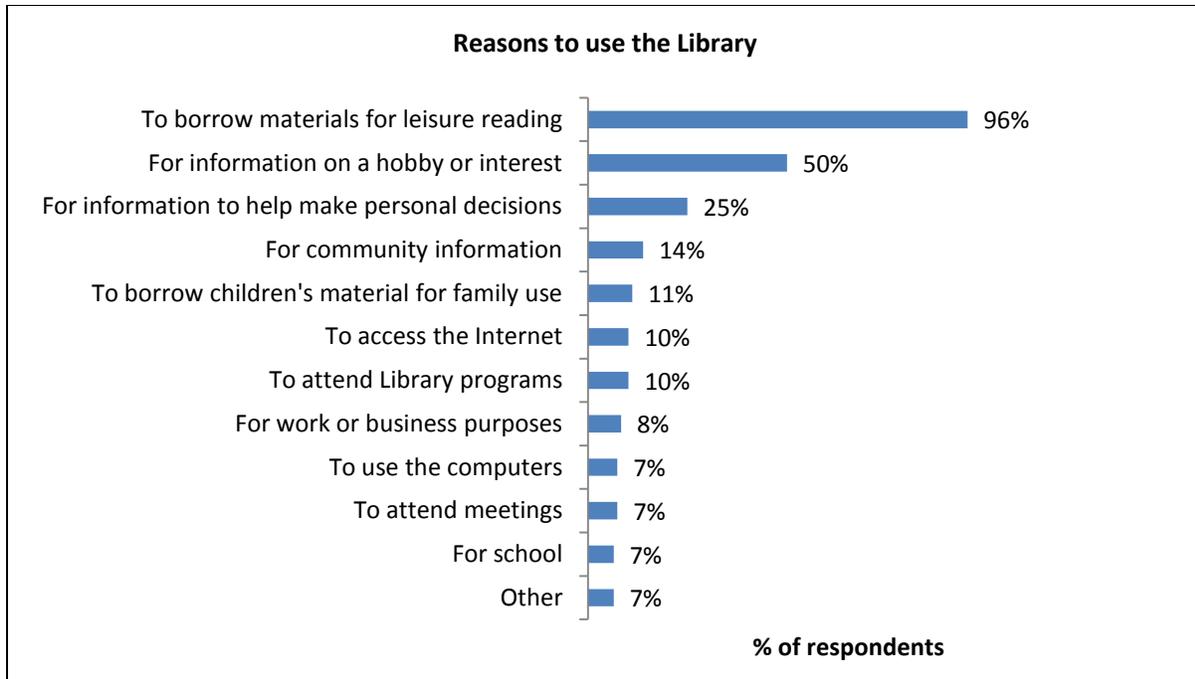
Library visits combined with other activities

A visit to the Library is frequently combined with other activities such as shopping or banking, confirming the economic and practical benefits of a downtown location.

- Combined with shopping: 88%
- With banking: 66%
- With the Post Office: 60%

Reasons for using the Library

As was the case in 2004, by far the most popular reason for visiting the Library is for leisure activities. Ninety six percent visit to borrow materials for leisure reading, and 50% for information on a hobby or interest.



Barriers to using the Library

The majority (64%) do not encounter any difficulties or barriers in using the Library. The most frequently cited barriers are lack of parking (22%), not having the material available (13%), and not enough study or reading space (12%).

Some comments from those who did encounter barriers to using the Library:

Weekend hours. Restricted hours.

Difficult to get up front steps.

Impossible to move through aisles if another person is browsing in the same area.

Co-ordinating our errands with the hours of operation.

Can't reach the books on the bottom shelf at floor level.

Don't have the material, too few books.

Library operations

Opening hours

Eighty four percent said that the Library's hours were convenient, which is an increase over 66% in the 2004 survey. This may reflect increase in Library hours in 2006 from 33 to 37 per week.

Despite this, longer opening hours were high on the list of what respondents would change about the Library, or how they suggest service could be improved. For some who work during the day, limited

evening and weekend hours is a barrier. On the other hand, the most preferred additional hours in the patron survey was to be open on Mondays.

Preferred opening hours compared to actual Library hours

	<i>Mon</i>	<i>Tue</i>	<i>Wed</i>	<i>Thur</i>	<i>Fri</i>	<i>Sat</i>	<i>Sun</i>
Morning	40%	66%	61%	67%	66%	73%	13%
Afternoon	47%	72%	73%	73%	75%	66%	28%
Evening	16%	39%	23%	47%	27%	9%	5%

 Current Library hours

Patron satisfaction

Patrons reported a high level of satisfaction with the collection and service by staff. Although most who used public computers/technology and programs rated them as satisfactory, a significant proportion either did not use computers or had not heard of the programs.

	Satisfied	Comments/Suggestions for improvement
Collection	86% (up from 75% in 2004)	More space for more books. More current titles. Shorter waiting time for reserves. More of specified categories of books. More books on CD. More movies. Use Kindles and e-books.
Public computers and technology	89%	More, faster, up-to-date and user friendly computers. Although 89% of the 73 respondents who used computers were satisfied, an additional 32 patrons either skipped the question or said they never used computers.
Staff	98%	More office space for staff. More staff on duty.
Programs	90% But low awareness and attendance	Advertise more. More readings. More current, intense and varied adult programs. Choice of book clubs. Survey what users want. Bigger space on ground floor; comfortable chairs.

More comments about the collection...

Increase facility size to increase capacity.

What you have is excellent, just need more.

Shorter waiting time for reserved list.

[More]Christian fiction ...biographies and autobiographies...reference books...recipe books...bestsellers.

...the computers and technology ...

More computers, longer time

Computers seem very old and slow

Don't use computers

Search engine isn't user friendly

...the programs...

Improve space to have more... A bigger space on the ground floor ... Comfortable chairs

I don't have any information about adult classes – what are adult classes?

Would like more author readings.

Adult programs are too basic.

Not aware of any programs. Advertise them.

Evening /weekend programs for people who work during the day.

More varied programs, guest speakers, perhaps college satellite operation.

Advertise events and workshops better.

...and the staff

Your staff is well informed (visitor)

The staff is terrific, helpful, considerate and courteous.

Staff always provide great service.

More staff on duty at times appears warranted.

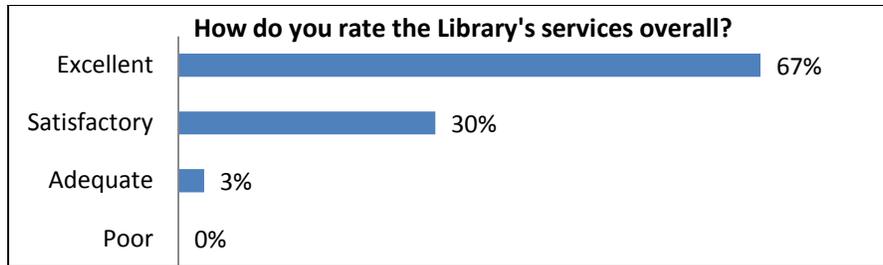
You are all amazing. That's one of the reasons I use the library so much.

Over three-quarters of the respondents order books from other libraries through Interlibrary Loan. Library statistics show that in 2009 our patrons requested 1,345 items through Interlibrary Loan. In a testament to the quality of our collection, other libraries borrowed 1,371 items from our collection.

Only 37% accessed the online catalogue from home. The most common reason given for not using it was lack of awareness.

Almost all respondents (94%) ask staff for assistance in answering questions or locating information, and almost all (98%) are satisfied with the service they receive. Many provided unsolicited comments that “the staff is outstanding” or “amazing”. Suggestions for improvement focused on the need for more staff space, or more staff. One respondent said, “Sometimes don't like to bother them, they are so busy.”

Overall, 67% of patrons rated the Library's services overall as excellent, 30% as satisfactory.



Some comments about Library services in general:

Great work under somewhat difficult circumstances.

Why can't we all use the Owen Sound library?

I love the community feel about our current library.

Great work with limited funds.

I absolutely love the library, the staff and its programs, especially the children's programs.

There is a need for more space between tables for college students to study when they are home.

I would like to see more hours but I realize you are limited by your funding. You're so wonderful with what you have!

It's OK as it is.

More information available to the public on the Library and what it is doing.

Thank you! Keep up the good work!

Importance and performance of selected services

To gain an understanding of where the Library should be focusing its resources, the patron survey asked respondents to rate each of a selection of library services, first for its importance and secondly for how well the Library provides that service. Comparing the two helps identify where the biggest gaps are, and therefore where to focus scarce resources for improving patron satisfaction.

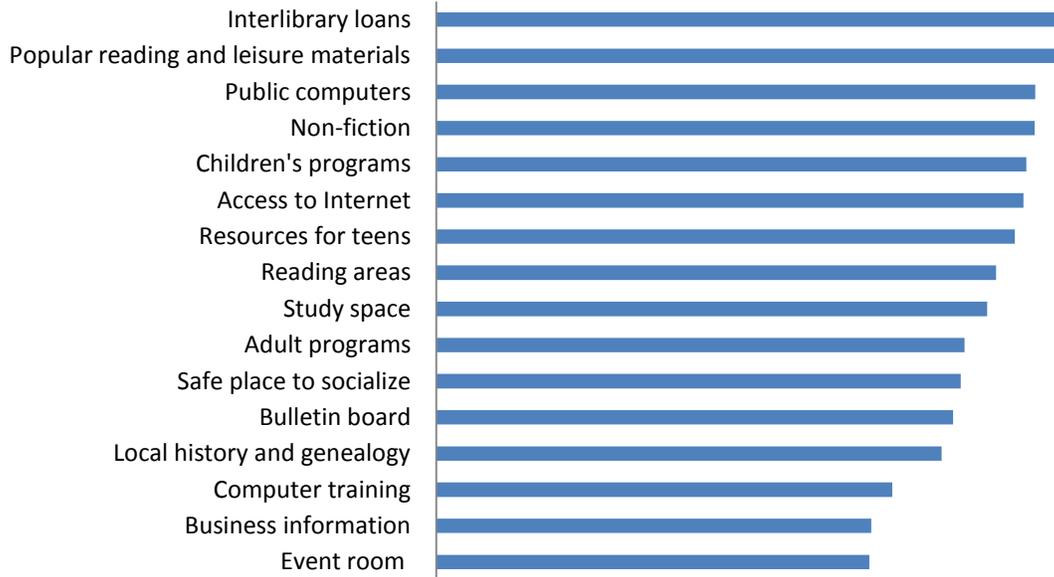
Importance:

- The most important services that the Library should provide are *popular reading and leisure materials* and *Interlibrary loans*. This is consistent with 96% who say they visit the Library to borrow materials for leisure reading.
- Least important are the *event room* and *business information* (this is relative to other services, it does not necessarily mean they are unimportant).

Performance:

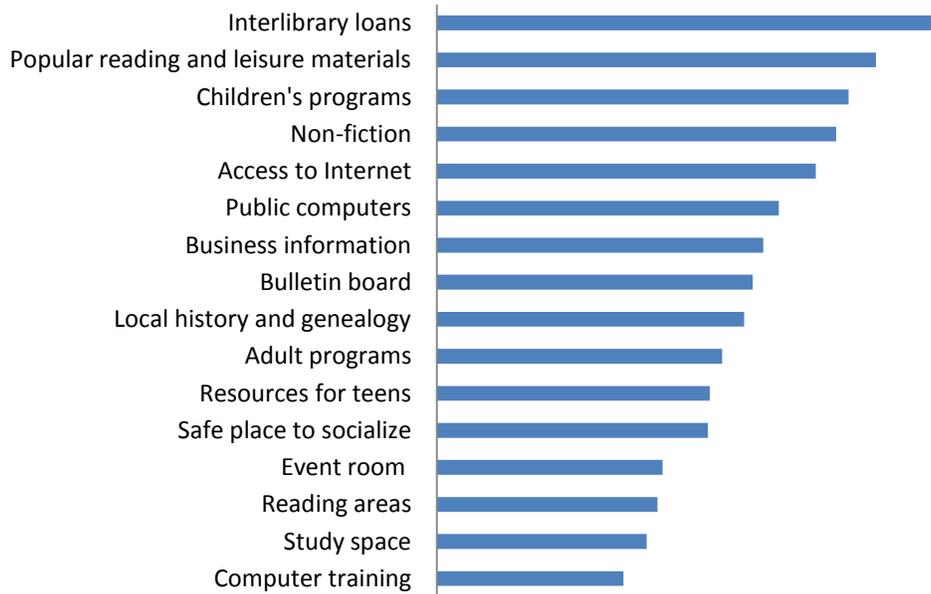
- The services that the Library provides best are *Interlibrary loans* and *popular reading and leisure materials*.
- Least well provided services are *computer training*, *study space*, *reading areas* and *event room*.

How IMPORTANT is it that the Library provide these services?



Weighted average importance

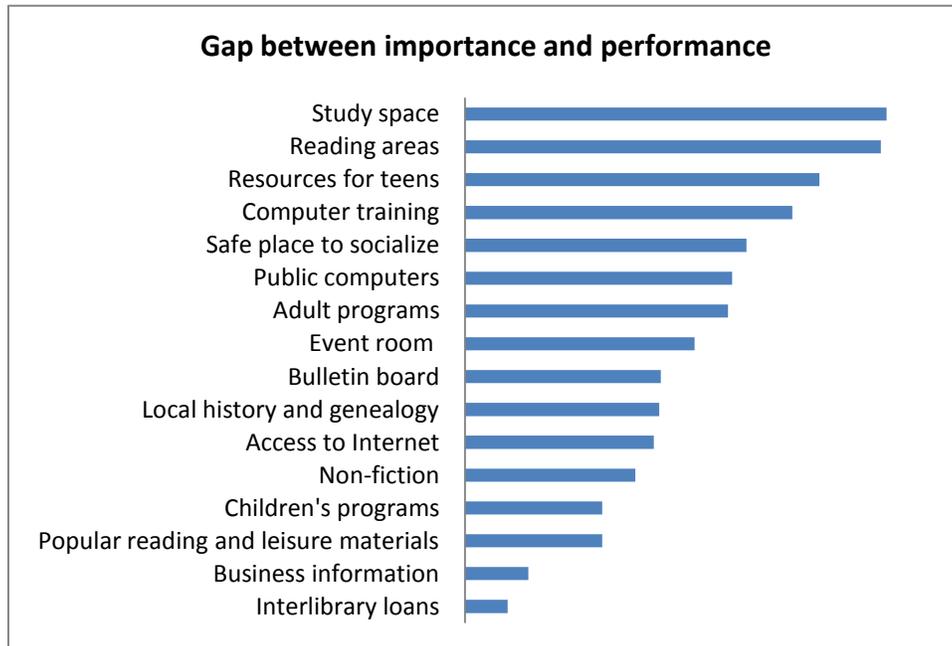
How WELL does the Library provide these services?



Weighted average performance

Importance vs. performance:

- The biggest gaps between what services are important to patrons and how well the Library provides those services (i.e. most potential for improvement) are in *study space* and *reading areas*, followed by *resources for teens* and *computer training*.
- The best match between the level of importance and performance (i.e. least need for change) are *Interlibrary loans* and *business information*.



Conclusions and implications

It is clear that, among respondents, the Library is a highly valued community resource with 95% saying it is important to have comprehensive library services in Meaford and 99% viewing it as an essential community resource.

Over two-thirds rate the services the Library provides as 'Excellent' with a further 30% saying they are 'Satisfactory'. The Library's strengths are the staff (98% satisfaction) and the collection (86%, an improvement over 75% in the 2004 survey). Interlibrary Loan is popular, and the large number of requests for books from our Library by other libraries demonstrates the quality of Meaford's collection.

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