



Fayetteville
Public Library

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT 2022

Prepared by  Ivy Group

Introduction

In 2021, owing to the dedication of its staff and the support of its community, Fayetteville Public Library occupied an enviable position. 125 years after Julia Vaulx and Florida Read opened a two-room library in the basement of the county courthouse, FPL completed a 103,000 square foot expansion featuring a Center for Innovation, an array of educational labs, a teaching kitchen, and a multi-purpose event space. 123 years after early stakeholders navigated a devastating influenza pandemic, the Library had risen to the challenges of a new pandemic with innovative solutions and quality virtual programming and services. While in its first year the Library served 327 members, now it served more than 74 thousand card holders and hosted more than 100 programs for education and enrichment each month.

The Library also occupied an inflection point. Its leadership needed to answer key questions to ensure the sustainability of its progress. Now that the expansion was complete, how were patrons using the new library spaces, what were their opinions about them, and how had their expectations changed? Now that the

city had emerged from the height of the pandemic, had patron use patterns and attitudes undergone any lasting shifts? And given the high rate of demographic and economic change, how was Fayetteville changing, and how were residents' needs and aspirations evolving?

The city of Fayetteville's rapid pace of transformation shows few signs of slowing. With a population that has increased by 28% in the past decade and is projected to grow by 2% in each of the coming years, it faces opportunities and difficulties both. The economy's dynamism and entrepreneurial spirit, and the city's thriving philanthropic base, offer new synergies, partnerships, and possibilities, while the rising cost of living and increasing transportation and workforce development needs demand a realignment of certain core services.

In this context, the Library set out to learn more about Fayetteville's new residents and how the needs of existing residents were changing under new circumstances. It sought to discover how



it could best serve personal and economic development while also continuing to build community.

In September of 2021, the Library commissioned The Ivy Group as its partner in conducting a thorough community needs assessment. The assessment would help guide the Library's upcoming strategic planning process, with the ultimate goal of widening its patron base and increasing the quality and inclusivity of its services.

This report also signals a renewal of purpose. Matching the entrepreneurial spirit of its city, Fayetteville Public Library will continue to foster a culture and practice of forward-thinking: constantly looking ahead to serve the ever-changing needs of its community.

Needs Assessment Methodology

In the research phase completed during the summer of 2022, Ivy Group conducted comprehensive environmental analysis, peer benchmarking, market segmentation, and community and stakeholder engagement. Engagement included a community online survey, a staff survey and forum, stakeholder interviews, focus groups, and community forums.

Following the research phase, Ivy's consultants facilitated a working session in which Library leadership identified overarching themes in the research and teased out implications for the delivery and improvement of library services.

To prioritize the needs Fayetteville residents face and understand the Library's response to those needs, the consulting team engaged with both community leaders and members of the public. Surveys, individual conversations, and community meetings collected personal stories from individuals who reflect the demographic makeup of the city. Data analysis connected disparate threads which revealed the areas of highest need and provided a roadmap for the Library's response.

Data Analysis

Methodologies that rely on quantitative data offer a reliable snapshot of the issue under consideration, allowing measurements to be precisely compared, and ultimately transforming numbers into relationships.

Environmental Scan

The consulting team reviewed and analyzed data from the 2020 Census and the 2021 American Community Survey, Fayetteville Public Library budgets from 2017 to 2021, FPL's 2030 Master Plan, the Fayetteville First plan and its benchmarking, Fayetteville Public School reports, economic development data from the city of Fayetteville, the Northwest Arkansas Economic Development District 2019-2023 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, Washington Regional Medical Center's 2019 Community Health Needs Assessment and 2020 Implementation Plan, and other regional reports to create an environmental scan of forces shaping Fayetteville.

Benchmarking Study

The most current data from the Institute of Museum and Library Services available at the time of the report was used to evaluate library performance across a variety of measures. We compared FPL against four national peer libraries that share similar operating expenses and service area size, were home to R1 universities, and had populations with similar demographic indicators, as well as against a "composite library system" representing the average of all libraries in the United States serving a population between 50,000-99,999 that reported data to the 2019 IMLS's Public Libraries Survey. The results enable FPL to establish a baseline for measuring progress and identify areas of investigation for future consideration.

Market Segmentation Study

Claritas' MyBestSegments lifestyle systems define every household in the U.S. by distinct types, called "segments," to provide a comprehensive picture of who lives where and what they are like. By identifying key demographics, lifestyle characteristics, consumer behavior, and media preferences, the Library can

determine not only whom to target but also what to say and how to reach them. These insights can guide decision-making for services, collections, and programs and inform more effective marketing strategies.

Stakeholder Engagement

Those closest to an organization offer unique insight in their assessment of its strengths and opportunities.

Staff Forum

Consultants led three sessions with FPL staff in April 2022. Together, the team identified areas of need, discussed community needs and priorities, and explored FPL responses to those needs.

Staff Survey

During the summer of 2022, consultants surveyed FPL staff via an online platform. The survey explored staff perceptions of the Library's facility, offerings, customer service, community reputation, and work culture. 60 staff members participated in the anonymous survey (57% of the workforce at that time), and 60% shared anecdotal evidence through open end feedback.

Community Leader Interviews

Members of FPL's administration interviewed 10 leaders of diverse backgrounds, including representatives from the University of Arkansas, social service agencies, philanthropic funds, and health care providers. They identified local and regional challenges as well as opportunities for enhancing library services and partnerships.

Community Engagement

Direct engagement with community members ensures that the assessment process is transparent and inclusive. The qualitative information gathered gives context to the hard data, explaining the "why" behind relationships and uncovering hidden needs.

Focus Groups

In April 2022, consultants conducted six in-person focus groups at the Library. The one-hour sessions were conducted with parents, new residents, young professionals, educators, teens, and speakers of world languages. Times and locations were chosen to accommodate attendees' schedules in order to best represent the breadth and diversity of the community. A Spanish/English translator attended the world languages session.

Community Forums

Consultants facilitated two community forums in order to provide individuals without the opportunity to participate in the needs assessment via other methods a chance to share their thoughts on FPL's current and future offerings. 25 individuals attended the April 16, 2022 event held in the Library's Walker Room, and one resident participated in the virtual forum held on April 20, 2022.

Online Survey

For seven weeks (June 2 to July 17, 2022), community input was solicited through an online survey platform. The survey identified the needs and preferences of the community with respect to the role of a public library, probed reasons why households do and do not currently use library services, and solicited ideas to develop Library offerings that better match community needs. The survey was made available in both English and Spanish. 691 eligible individuals participated, three using the Spanish-language version, and 66% took the opportunity to expand on how the Library might become a better resource for them through open end feedback. Residents over the age of 65 (30.6%) and women (72.6%) were over-represented in the survey respondents compared to Fayetteville residents (8.7%, 50.7%) as counted in the 2020 Census.

FINDINGS:

Community Needs



The community needs research and analysis is organized into four impact areas:

- Foundational needs—those needs which impact residents' ability to access library services, and which might be addressed by library services and partnerships, including transportation, housing, employment, internet access, childcare, and food security
- Enrichment—opportunities for recreation and enrichment, including chances to pursue valued hobbies and meet new people

- Lifelong learning—offerings and partnerships which support education across the age spectrum, spanning from early childhood literacy through an array of workforce services and tech training for adults and seniors
- Connection—capacities for serving as a gathering place which fosters social and professional connections, with special attention paid to meeting and activity spaces, marketing and communications, and building signage

Foundational Needs

Foundational needs are those that affect basic requirements for daily living. The research revealed many ways that FPL can help the community thrive; but first, the Library must provide residents with the tools to build a better future.

There are seven needs shared throughout Fayetteville: Transportation, Housing, Employment and Living Wage, Internet Access, Food Security, Healthcare, and Childcare.

**“FPL is a lifeline for me.”
— focus group participant**

Research Highlights

Transportation:

- Focus group participants noted that a lack of public transportation options, especially for one car households, prevents them from visiting the Library, particularly during the winter months.
- Community forum participants identified bicycle lending, scooter pickup, and ridesharing programs as initiatives FPL could implement to address transportation issues.
- Attainable housing development and enhanced public transportation are strategic priorities in the Fayetteville First strategic plan.

Housing:

- According to Census data, the population of Fayetteville has increased 28% between 2010 and 2020.
- Community leaders reported that rising housing prices are pushing residents further from downtown Fayetteville. They noted that they and the people they serve are less likely to use FPL's services the further they live from the building.

FINDINGS: **Community Needs**

- 50% of renters in Fayetteville spend more than 30% of their income on housing, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago's Peer City Identification tool.

Employment and Living Wage:

- According to Census data, 22% of Fayetteville residents live in poverty.
- The living wage for a single person in the Fayetteville area is \$15.45/hr, and \$23.83/hr for two working adults with two children, according to the MIT

Living Wage Calculator. The average wage in Fayetteville is \$23.86.

- Fayetteville's unemployment rate in September 2022 was 2.5%, lower than the national rate of 3.3%.
- The Fayetteville First plan prioritizes retention of University of Arkansas graduates.

Internet Access:

- According to Census data, 14% of households do not have broadband internet access.

- Fayetteville's three largest market segments rely on pre-paid mobile services, suggesting economic pressures affect internet access.

Food Security:

- In 2020, Feeding America found that the food insecurity rate in Washington County is 13.5%.

Healthcare:

- 9% of residents under 65 do not have access to health care, and 9% of the population is disabled, according to latest Census data.
- The 2019 Community Health Needs Assessment reported 4 poor mental health days in the last 30 days for Washington County residents.
- 70% of community survey respondents identified healthcare as a "very important" issue for their household.

Childcare:

- Focus group and community forum participants pointed to a lack of childcare as a reason they don't take advantage of the full range of FPL's on-site programs and services.



FINDINGS: **Community Needs**

Enrichment

Through community engagement sessions, Fayetteville residents identified a growing demand for recreation and enrichment opportunities, especially ones that support their hobbies and provide the possibility to meet new people. Overall, respondents were satisfied with FPL's recreation and enrichment programs, but saw long wait lists as a symptom that the Library is struggling to meet the demands of a fast-growing community.

Research Highlights

Residents of all ages are seeking recreational opportunities.

- Community forum participants requested more enrichment, educational, and technology workshops.
- Social service leaders identified the need for enrichment programs for adults and teens.



- The Fayetteville First plan focuses on enhancing the arts and cultural environment.

Traditional library services are important to residents—and they want even more of these enrichment offerings.

- Surveyed users cited materials check out (82%) and resources for hobbies and enrichment (67%) as the primary reasons for using the Library.
- Peer benchmarking showed that FPL ranks 1st in the peer set in total

circulation of all material types.

- Surveyed users ranked print materials as the most important resource for FPL to expand or enhance.
- Survey respondents, including users and non-users, ranked “a source for books and other media” as the top role for FPL to play in the community.
- Focus group participants noted that popular programs reach capacity within hours of registration opening.
- The most common feedback on the online survey was for more instances of popular programs that fill up quickly, especially outside of traditional business hours.

Additional staffing is needed to support demand for public-facing library services.

- 54% of staff surveyed “strongly disagree” that the Library is adequately staffed.
- Peer benchmarking found that FPL offers the most programs per capita of the peer set.

Lifelong Learning

The Library is seen as a trusted source of information, charged with serving all residents, from early literacy support to K-12 partnerships, job readiness, and English language learning. The business community also views the Library as an important resource for workforce development, primarily through the new Center for Innovation. Rapidly changing demographic and economic indicators require a nimble, flexible approach to educational offerings.

Research Highlights

Access to reliable information and educational resources are an integral part of FPL's identity.

- 81% of residents surveyed indicated that it is very important that the Library be a source for accurate information.
- Community forum participants described the Library as a “place of learning.”
- The Library ranked 2nd in the peer set for reference transactions, indicating that FPL is a trusted source of information.

Early childhood education remains a core concern for Fayetteville's growing young family cohort.

- 76% of community survey respondents think elementary school children are “very important” to serve.
- In the focus groups and community forums, parents of young children shared that they felt isolated by the pandemic and appreciated the socialization opportunities provided by the Library for both them and their children.
- The largest lifestage groups in Fayetteville are Younger Years and Family life, indicating a growing demand for early childhood literacy and elementary school resources.
- Fayetteville Public Schools predict a 29% increase in enrollment between 2020 and 2031.

Resources to develop a spectrum of job readiness skills benefit workers, as well as the City's many startups and established corporations.



- Community leaders identified the need for job readiness programs.
- 72% of staff surveyed recommended increasing services to people developing workforce readiness skills.
- Focus group participants requested a range of workforce development services, especially certification programs in conjunction with classes at the Center for Innovation.
- The Fayetteville First plan focuses on workforce attraction, development, and retention. It specifically calls for workforce training, startup support, maker space, robotics training, and collaborative spaces.

FINDINGS: **Community Needs**

English language learners identified resources that would have the most impact on their language acquisition.

- Participants in the World Languages focus group felt left out of FPL's collection and expressed interest in materials for teens and adults including dictionaries and textbooks.
- Community leaders identified a need for more materials and offerings in languages other than English, Spanish, and Marshallese, and homework help in multiple languages.
- The three largest market segments in Fayetteville are likely to speak Spanish.

Connection

The combined effects of the pandemic and rapid population increase have underlined the needs for a community cultural center that is truly free and open to the public. Residents and leaders unanimously noted the difficulty in making social and professional connections. The Library, as a convenor, can facilitate the discussions, displays, events, and programs that will knit together the disparate threads of

the city. Promoting the newly expanded building as a welcoming third space will cement the Library's position as a leader in Fayetteville's arts and culture ecosystem.

Research Highlights

Fayetteville needs a cultural hub that is free and open to the public.

- Community leaders interviewed by the FPL administration identified free and welcoming gathering space as a top priority.
- Community leaders noted the lack of free space for meetings in the city.
- The majority of survey respondents rated "social relationships and community connections" as very important to their household and "a community gathering place" as a very important role for FPL.

The Library can facilitate interactions to cultivate a cohesive sense of community.

- The Fayetteville First plan identifies programs that appeal to millennials as part of workforce recruitment and retention strategies.

- Young professionals in the focus groups requested more volunteer opportunities at FPL.
- Focus group participants asked for more programs that facilitate social connections to combat the isolating effects of the pandemic and rapid growth.
- The world languages focus group recommended a World Language Center to facilitate cultural understanding and welcome the city's many newcomers.

Small improvements can make the newly renovated building more welcoming.

- FPL is well used, ranking 2nd in visits per capita in the benchmarking study.
- Staff courtesy and customer service ranked 1st in user satisfaction measures in the online survey, indicating an appreciation for one-to-one contact.
- Focus group participants described the newly renovated building as intimidating and difficult to navigate, with a lack of wayfinding markers.
- 82% of staff reported that Library signage "needs improvement."
- 17% of surveyed users were "dissatisfied" with the ease of navigating the facility.

The Library facilitates "community convening and conversation." – community leader

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Reimagining Sustainability

In 2019, ALA adopted sustainability as one of its Core Values of Librarianship.

“To thrive and evolve into the future, ALA must adopt the ‘triple bottom line’ mindset of sustainability: We must embody practices that are environmentally sound, economically feasible, and socially equitable.” - ALA President Patty Wong’s 2021 inaugural speech

Fayetteville and its library have long demonstrated a commitment to sustainability, from clean energy initiatives to transit plans and workforce and housing programs. Traditional sustainable strategies strive to make a positive impact on society and the environment while ensuring profit for stakeholders. The impact can be measured not just by revenue, but by the “triple bottom line” of profit, people, and the planet.

To meet the needs laid out in this report in a way that sustainably supports funding, end-users, stakeholders, and staff, we have redefined the three Ps of the triple bottom line: partnerships, people, and place.

Partnerships FPL can increase capacity to meet increasing demands for more programs and services by leveraging the time, space, and resources of collaborators.



People Focusing on the needs of residents will let the Library preserve the quality of life in Fayetteville by serving the most vulnerable, supporting the city’s economic development, and serving as a cultural hub.

Place As stewards of place, the Library will not only preserve environmental resources, but chart a smart growth policy that makes the most of the new building expansion while meeting residents where they are.

As the first registered LEED Green Building in Arkansas, Fayetteville Public Library has already achieved success on “place.” A green roof, native landscaping, bees, and solar panels—along with the accompanying programming—speak to the library’s commitment to environmental sustainability. By applying this three-pronged sustainability approach, the organization will reimagine how sustainability can be implemented in public libraries across the country to promote equitable and environmentally friendly economic development.

The recommendations will lead to positive outcomes across all four areas of need. The library’s work to address these interconnected needs are grouped by FPL’s new model of the sustainability triple bottom line: partnerships, people, and place.

RECOMMENDATIONS: **Reimagining Sustainability**

PARTNERSHIPS

- Embed with community institutions to establish a free wireless network that covers the entire city.
- Provide free space for people and agencies to meet, gather, and collaborate.
- Invite social work partnerships to help residents navigate foundational needs such as housing, healthcare, and employment.
- Reinvest in Fayetteville by prioritizing local vendors.

“FPL opens doors for community members experiencing poverty.”
— focus group participant

PEOPLE

- Explore the feasibility of “free and open to the public” policies, with fine free lending, free meeting room reservations, and childcare solutions.
- Through bookmobile visits and partnership with nonprofits who serve individuals who speak world languages, develop ongoing feedback solicitations to support collection and program development.
- Build on recent inclusion and belonging

initiatives to diversify the FPL workforce and public offerings to better reflect the changing community.

- Continue to work with business partners to build a training to employment pipeline using the Center for Innovation resources and programs.
- Address the local housing burden by hosting affordable housing workshops with partners and bringing library services to areas with limited public transportation options.
- Recruit and retain FPL staff by raising salaries to competitive wages and evaluating benefit offerings with those of the peer benchmark set.
- Improve the organizational health of the library by aligning management expectations with frontline staff capacity through auditing library programs, holding listening sessions, and creating a staff recommendation portal, and by hiring more staff.

PLACE

- Create a welcoming atmosphere in the building by conducting a sign audit with input from the World Languages feedback participants.

“I think any extra money in the budget needs to go to reducing or removing late fines and fees.” — community survey respondent

- Establish regular Bookmobile routes based on market segmentation research, ArcGIS demographic mapping, and input from community leaders and members.
- Institute a physical presence on the west side of the city with a Wi-Fi enabled, walk-in kiosk.
- Extend physical location services to the digital branch (faylib.org) such as through online text/chat reference and virtual appointments for the “Book a Librarian” service.
- Bring FPL into the community through outreach initiatives, such as pop-up programs and deposit collections supported by a bookmobile and dedicated staff.
- Serve services and shift workers with after-hours lobby access, device lockers, and internet access.
- Support local emergency preparedness by serving as an official heating and cooling center.
- Contribute to the city’s sustainable transportation network with bike rentals, e-car charging stations, better bus stop visibility, and access via walking trails.

Communication Opportunities

FPL Should Step Up Marketing Efforts to Increase Non-User Awareness of Services

Across community engagements, stakeholders expressed appreciation and awe for all FPL contributes to the Fayetteville community. At the same time, they felt that the community is unaware of what the Library offers and that it needs a strong marketing push to get the word out, especially as newcomers move in. FPL will need to overcome the stereotypes and misconceptions of traditional library service, particularly with non-users who cited “It doesn’t occur to me to go there” as one of the top reasons for not visiting the library in the survey.

Communications Should Welcome All

Stakeholders have favorable impressions of staff. However, residents may perceive the new building as “very nice, it’s probably expensive, I can’t afford it.” Therefore, promotions should emphasize FPL’s exceptional customer service and inclusive values. Community feedback showed a preference for digital communications, especially via email and text messages.

Patrons Prefer Custom Communications That are Targeted to Their Personal Preferences and Interests

With so much going on, FPL’s numerous and varied offerings can overwhelm even the most ardent library patrons. While patrons encourage FPL to increase its offerings, they sometimes have trouble navigating the current services and aren’t aware of existing relevant services. Current users look to technology to help FPL communicate with them in a timely, relevant manner, with suggestions for text messages, a library app, and narrowing the targeting in the emails they receive.



Acknowledgements



Many people gave of their time to support this process. We are grateful especially to our staff members who listened to the research and gave ideas and recommendations, as well as the community members who participated in surveys and input sessions. Additional thanks to the Fayetteville Public Library Board of Trustees and Fayetteville Public Library Foundation.