

## COMMUNITY FORUM DISCUSSIONS

### Key Findings With Service Suggestions

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This report summarizes findings from eight community forum discussions conducted for the Fort Worth Public Library by Dubberly Associates, Inc. The discussions were held between September 4 and September 12, 2002. Sixty-three residents participated in the sessions.

Participants in the community forums were fairly active library users and quite knowledgeable about the library system overall. Most participants regularly use more than one library in the system and are willing to go to the library that has the resources they need. Participants were aware of the differences in facilities, services, and strength of collections in the different branches.

#### 1. THE 24/7 LIBRARY

##### FINDING

Participants at all community forums were very pleased at the increased number of library hours being provided, especially Sunday hours. They placed a very high priority on maintaining and expanding service hours throughout the system. Parents, teens and seniors also expressed a need for quick and easy access to library service through their home computers. The concept of a 24/7 library that could be accessed at times and places convenient to them had a very strong general appeal. Not all participants were aware of the online services currently provided by the library.

Participants expressed a need for online access to the library's collection to determine availability status, reserve materials online, use research data bases, ask reference questions, learn how to conduct research on a particular topic, be notified when materials are available, and receive announcements about special programs and services.

### **SERVICE SUGGESTIONS**

To address these needs, the Library should further develop, expand and publicize the 24/7 library concept. Ways to increase the convenience and accessibility of library services online should be explored. A targeted proactive marketing plan to reach different segments of the community might be undertaken, such as promotion of online research data base services to high school students.

## **2. COMPUTER LITERACY AND TRAINING**

### **FINDING**

Participants want the library to continue expanding access to computers and the Internet. They also expressed interest in the Library providing training on computer use and software applications. Guidance is needed on finding and evaluating information. There was a general understanding and desire for the library to play a strong role in teaching adults and children how to conduct research on the Internet.

Participants expressed concern that computer classes for adults are too limited and that competition for computer time at the branches is fierce. Participants expressed strong support for the library's role in making computers available to community members with no other access.

### **SERVICE SUGGESTIONS**

To address these needs, the Library should develop and coordinate a system-wide computer literacy program for the public. This program would be implemented after assessing specific community needs, identifying partners and collaborators, and developing pertinent program goals and objectives. A targeted marketing plan should be developed to inform the public about available services.

### **3. OUTREACH**

#### **FINDING**

Participants at several forums expressed the need for the library to reach out to provide services and materials in the community at community centers, senior centers, day care centers, and at other locations. Participants at the Tri-Ethnic Center forum lauded the success of the library's outreach worker in reaching out to the children in the community. The library's outreach efforts are showing success and should be expanded. There was general recognition that two working-parent families, long work hours and lack of transportation and economic means often prevent parents from taking children to the library for story hours and other services. It was noted that children often need to be exposed to books, reading and learning in an environment that is close, safe and comfortable before making the transition to using a branch library.

#### **SERVICE SUGGESTIONS**

To address these needs, the Library should develop more collaborative programs with other community service providers and agencies to get library materials into the community. This would bring library services closer to the community.

### **4. FAMILY PROGRAMMING**

#### **FINDING**

Participants expressed strong support for the library's programs and services for children, but they also expressed the need for the library to expand its services to meet the needs of the whole family. Community members appreciate the city's family-friendly environment and want to see that reflected even more in the library. More emphasis was suggested on library programs for pre-teens and teens, especially efforts that promote the love of reading and offer an alternative to sitting in front of the computer. It was suggested that more interactive programs and activities involving the whole family are needed.

### **SERVICE SUGGESTIONS**

To address these needs, the Library System should develop service programs and policies that support family participation. In particular, the Library should expand its efforts to involve teens and pre-teens in reviewing current library services and developing new programs and services to meet their needs. Teens should be encouraged to share their skills and talents with other members of the community, through activities such as teaching computer classes, mentoring senior citizens in learning to use computers and tutoring children.

## **5. EMBRACING DIVERSITY**

### **FINDING**

Participants are especially proud of the community's diversity and expressed a desire to have that reflected in the library's collections, services and programs. Mention was made at several forums of the need to continue the ESL and GED classes that have been discontinued by the school district. Community members expressed the need for more materials in other languages, including Spanish, Vietnamese and Cambodian. The library's web page should provide information in other languages. Programs that promote the understanding of other cultures are needed.

### **SERVICE SUGGESTIONS**

To address these needs, the Library should develop a process for reaching out and learning about the needs of the diverse segments of the community. The process should actively involve members of the target communities in determining the needs and developing the appropriate services and programs.

Limited English-speaking community members may not understand the basics of how a public library operates and what services it can provide. A needs assessment process that involves community members will help the library learn about the community and will also inform the community about the library. The Library should develop an ongoing cultural awareness and diversity training program for all library staff.

## **6. EXPANDED AND NEW FACILITIES**

### **FINDING**

Participants were very concerned about the uneven distribution of library facilities and the condition of existing facilities. Forum participants were keenly aware of the lack of library services in the rapidly growing areas of the city and complained about having to drive long distances to get to the library. District 4, District 6 and District 7 were specifically mentioned as lacking facilities or needing facilities that are more centrally located. Numerous concerns were voiced about lack of parking at various branches and at central. Some participants strongly supported locating libraries within community centers.

### **SERVICE SUGGESTIONS**

To address these needs, the Library should continue to review and revise its facilities plan to respond to the city's growth and population projections, as well as to address the service needs expressed by the community. Community forums, focus groups and other needs assessment techniques should be organized to solicit further community input for the planning of library facilities.

## **7. ENHANCED CUSTOMER SERVICE**

### **FINDING**

Participants are especially proud of the friendly and welcoming environment of their community and want to see that friendliness always reflected in their city services. Many participants mentioned the friendly and personal service they receive from library staff and, with a few exceptions, generally gave the library staff a grade of A+. Participants want library staff to be more proactive in offering information about services or other resources that could be helpful to the customer. Several participants mentioned that the library's cooperative lending programs and interlibrary loan services are not promoted.

### **SERVICE SUGGESTIONS**

To address these needs, the library's mission and vision statements should reflect the community's pride and desire to maintain its friendly, welcoming and helpful attitude. The Library System should provide ongoing customer service training for all library staff to support the community's vision of a friendly and welcoming city. This customer service training should provide skills needed to serve diverse communities and to take a proactive role in meeting customer needs.