

# **Report from the Community Needs Assessment**

*Burnaby Public Library*

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*Key Findings Related to the Library's  
Strategic Directions*



# Key Findings Related to the Library's Strategic Directions

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This section of the report synthesizes the key findings from the research for the Community Needs Assessment related to the first four of the library's strategic directions – Children and Young Families, Teens and Young Adults, Diverse Communities of Interest, and Technology – all of which have direct service and operational implications for BPL. The fifth strategic direction – 'Burnaby First' – is primarily a governance issue and as such was not considered in relation to the findings from the Community Needs Assessment.

Also included in this section are other important themes that were revealed through the analysis of the information gathered through the Community Needs Assessment, namely awareness of the library and the physical space at the library.

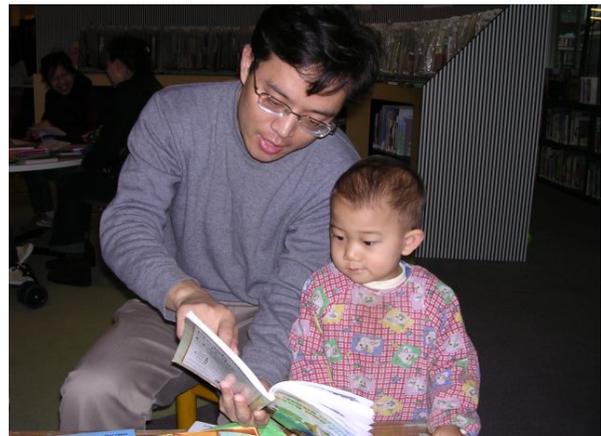
## Children and Young Families

The results of the Needs Assessment confirm that children and young families are seen as an important target audience for BPL. Survey respondents ranked children's collections third in response to a question about the "most important" library resource, and programs for children as the "most important" library program area. The study results indicate that while there are areas for improvement, people feel that the library is doing a good job in providing service to children and their families.

In terms of resources, the collection of children's books represents 15% of BPL's total collection and comprises 16% of total materials circulated. This suggests the collection is balanced with demand for these resources. Input received through the focus groups indicates the library should consider cataloguing children's titles and expanding the collection of resources for children available in languages other than English in order to make improvements in the area of children's resources.

Regarding services, the Needs Assessment revealed that days of operation and hours of operation were top priorities for survey respondents. Probed further in the focus groups, both proved to be of importance to families, who expressed a strong desire for the library to offer more weekend hours in particular. The information gathered through the focus groups indicated that families often do chores and errands on Saturdays, but that Sundays are ideal for children and families to go to the library. An additional service suggested in the focus groups was for the library to offer a family account to make it easier for families to keep track of their library activity by consolidating it all on to one card.

A high level of satisfaction with children's programs was evident in the results of the Needs Assessment. However, opportunities for improvement were also revealed. Families expressed they would like to have access to 'simultaneous programming' to provide programs of interest to different members of the family, all scheduled at the same time. An example would be to offer story time for young children and a homework club for older children at the same time as an adult book club. In addition, the library could improve its programs for children and families by offering these outside of regular hours to facilitate the participation of working families. Programming in languages other than English, as well as parent/child English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction and literacy programs were also of interest for families and children. These would provide the opportunity for the library to approach adult literacy indirectly through involving adults in literacy programs for children.



Regarding physical areas at the library, the study revealed that having access to a designated child-friendly area, where children are free to make noise without the concern that they will disturb others, would make the library a more comfortable and enjoyable place for children and families and for all library users. The Needs Assessment showed that some families with young children do not use the library because they are worried about keeping their children quiet.

## Teens and Young Adults

According to the results of the Needs Assessment, the teen and young adult population does not appear to be particularly well served by the library. The study indicated that in relation to library resources, services, programs and space, teen priorities are different than those of the general population. Based on the study results, the 'virtual' world is of greater importance to the teen population than to any other single group.

The library's collection and circulation of teen resources is low, and the results of the Needs Assessment suggest that the teen materials that *are* available might not be the ones of greatest interest to teens – survey respondents indicated dissatisfaction with teen materials and focus group participants said the teen resources currently available at the library are not the ones they are most interested in. Teen focus group participants expressed an interest in having access to materials electronically and indicated a lack of awareness about the fact that the library's website currently provides this access. Among under-19 survey respondents, teen collections ranked second in response to a question about "most important" resources after print fiction. Under-19 respondents also expressed a strong interest in videos and DVDs; levels of dissatisfaction expressed by survey respondents generally regarding the library's collection of videos and DVDs were quite high. That said, however, the collection and circulation of teen collections expanded significantly between 2002-2005 – by 58% and 60% respectively.

Regarding services, teens expressed a stronger interest than the average respondent in services related to the 'virtual' world, including self-checkout, computers with Internet access, the library's website and wireless Internet access.

Among under-19 survey respondents, teen programs were identified as the top priority; at the same time, dissatisfaction with teen programs was also high. This suggests that there is an interest in teen programming, but that the teen programs currently offered by the library may not be of interest to this target group.

The Needs Assessment showed that the library is not seen as a 'cool' or fun place for teens. Non-users of the library who participated in the focus groups indicated that this is primarily because there is too much emphasis on having to be quiet at the library; it is not a place where teens feel comfortable. Providing designated spaces for teens – where they can talk without worrying about being told to be quiet – would help address this issue. In the library survey and in the focus groups, areas for group study were identified as a space priority by teens; group study areas received among the



highest ratings of dissatisfaction in the survey. Areas for socializing were of particular interest to teens in the focus groups; levels of dissatisfaction in relation to these areas were also among the highest observed in the survey. The need for quiet study areas was also recognized by teens in the survey and focus groups.

Overall, the results of the study suggest that there is work to be done in the area of teens and young adults if the library is to engage this group. Improving resources, services and programs for teens will also be important in keeping families with children as active users as children get older.

## Diverse Communities of Interest

The library's strategic area of 'diverse communities of interest' refers primarily to Burnaby's multicultural community. The results of the Needs Assessment strongly suggest that the library could make improvements in its service to this group.

*"The demographics in Burnaby have changed a lot in the past 20 years; the library has stayed the same. What the library offers should reflect the needs and demographics of the population in the community."*

*– Library non-user*

In light of the demographic analysis conducted as part of the Needs Assessment, the significance of the need to serve the multicultural community is clear. In Burnaby, 47% of the community are immigrants (as compared to 26% in BC overall) and many of these immigrants have recently come to Canada: 24% arrived between 1991 and 2001. In addition, 52% of Burnaby residents speak a language other than English as their mother tongue.

The study showed that there is dissatisfaction with the resources, services and programs to serve the multicultural community. Rates of dissatisfaction expressed by study participants in relation to ESL materials and library resources, services and programs in languages other than English were among the highest recorded. The Needs Assessment clearly suggests there is a desire for the library to provide access to improved and expanded resources, services and programs targeted to Burnaby's multicultural community.

Resources of interest to the multicultural community identified through the study included ESL materials for adults and children that are age and level appropriate; bilingual ESL resources; literacy materials for adults and children, including materials for those who do not have strong literacy skills in their first language; first-language resources, both original works and translated popular English titles; and materials to help newcomers learn about and adjust to living in Canada. Despite the fact that there is a balance between collection and circulation statistics, it was noted in the focus groups that many of the non-English resources in the library's collection are out of date, read through and limited in scope. Similar comments were made about the library's ESL materials, which were also described as being primarily for beginner levels.

Because Burnaby is so linguistically diverse, caution was expressed in the stakeholder interviews with regard to attempting to provide extensive collections in languages other than English. There was concern that the library could never equitably serve all language groups in the municipality, and agreement that it must be very careful in defining what it can provide.

Services of interest to the multicultural community included reference and information services, as well as library brochures and promotional materials available in languages other than English. A strong desire for the library to offer more Sunday hours was also expressed by members of the multicultural community.

Programs, such as children's story times and workshops on how to use the library in first language, were highlighted as being of interest. Members of the multicultural community also expressed a strong interest in ESL programs.

Regarding library space, providing signage in the library that uses universally understood icons, rather than the English language, was suggested as a way to make the library more accessible and user-friendly for non-English speakers.



Among those who completed the survey in Mandarin, ESL resources and programs were listed as the top priorities in these categories. Members of the multicultural community who participated in the focus groups, however, expressed a preference for equal emphasis to be placed on ESL and first language in the provision of library resources and programs as well as services for the multicultural community. One way to accomplish this, suggested in the focus groups, is for the library to utilize the services of volunteers from the multicultural community who could help provide services and programs in first language. Participants of the focus groups also suggested the library could have a multicultural book donation drive to help develop the library's collection of resources in languages other than English. They felt many people would donate materials to the library brought from their home country. In addition, they suggested the library could explore the possibility of tapping in to the 'cultural promotion' budgets of various consulates for first-language book donations.

The public library is often the first access point for community and social services for newcomers to Canada. This underscores the need for the library to be as welcoming and inclusive as possible for the multicultural community in Burnaby. It is clear from the results of the Needs Assessment that the library needs to improve and expand its service to this group.

# Technology

The Community Needs Assessment revealed that while in-person visits to BPL have been steadily decreasing since 2002, BPL has seen considerable growth in virtual or Internet visits. This was demonstrated by the significant increase in website visits, which grew by 64% between 2002 and 2005. Such an increase is in keeping with trends showing the growing prevalence of online information and services, and with trends related to how younger people access information.

*“The library is a collection of knowledge and resources. Books are just one form. Electronic resources are also important.”*  
– Library user

At the same time, it was clear from the Needs Assessment that there is a significant lack of awareness about the scope of the services and resources available electronically through the library’s website. More than 40% of survey respondents indicated that they were not familiar enough with BPL’s various electronic resources or the links from the library’s website to rate their satisfaction with them; more than half of survey respondents could not offer an opinion in response to questions about their satisfaction with the website’s community information and resources and online help; and more than three quarters of survey respondents appeared to be unaware that the website offers online tutorials. Furthermore, frequent library users who participated in the focus groups indicated that they did not know they could access electronic resources through BPL until they completed the survey as part of the Needs Assessment. Some focus group participants said they do not use the library’s electronic resources because they do not know how to find what they need. In addition, non-users of the library suggested through the focus groups that they were not aware of the library’s e-resources.

Study participants expressed an interest in electronic resources and services. Focus group participants indicated that accessing resources in electronic format would be useful, particularly when having the most up-to-date information (as opposed to resources for pleasure reading) is important, such as with health or business information. Providing access to

more electronic resources was one of the most commonly suggested ways for BPL to improve its services in the telephone survey.

When asked about the three most important resources and the most important resource for BPL to offer, the percentage of respondents who selected electronic reference materials was almost equal to those who chose print reference materials. That said, however, levels of dissatisfaction were quite high in the survey with respect to BPL's electronic collections of magazines and journals and electronic databases. This despite the fact that BPL's collection of electronic resources is about average on a per capita basis when compared to other BC libraries of a similar size.

In response to a survey question about most important services, the library website ranked third. Focus group participants indicated they also think it is important and convenient to have access to services remotely via the library's website. They suggested they would like services to be expanded to include email notification of due dates and online payment of fines. Focus group participants also indicated an interest in the website being expanded to include more links from the library's homepage, such as links to book reviews and reading lists.

The growth in website visits, juxtaposed with the lack of awareness of what the library offers via its website and the interest in electronic resources and services, points to an exciting opportunity for BPL to increase virtual use. This opportunity suggests several potential actions for BPL.

First, it is clear from the study results that while use of the BPL website is growing, visitors to the site are not using it to its full potential because they are not aware of the scope of resources and services available through the website, nor how to access them. Addressing this may be a relatively simple exercise in communicating with library users already visiting the BPL website to raise their awareness and understanding of what is available.

Second, the Needs Assessment revealed trends in information access that suggest that people who do not visit the library regularly would be more likely to do so virtually. In this regard, the library user survey clearly shows that infrequent users are more likely to be virtual visitors. The statistics that show rising web use and falling in-person visits at BPL are also indicative of this trend. In response, the library should be developing a stronger online presence, which could convert infrequent users to more regular users and attract those in the community who would not visit the library in person but who may be more inclined to visit through the library's website.

In addition, the library should consider initiating a public awareness campaign to raise awareness generally in the community about the library's website and the scope of services and resources available virtually. The results of the study indicate that the issue seems to be lack of awareness, which highlights the need for BPL to promote and market the scope of electronic resources and services available through its website. It also signals an opportunity for new programs that teach people how to access and use electronic resources.

It is worth noting that pursuing opportunities created by technology does not preclude the interest in and the need to provide physical library resources or in-person services and programs. In fact, the input gathered in the study showed that it is important for the library to offer both physical and virtual access.

Yet, the library's capability to provide information and services to people will grow exponentially, and at a much lower operational cost than doing so solely in person, if technology is harnessed as a mode of delivery. Exploiting technology as an enabler will provide the opportunity for the library to enhance its service and expand and further its reach in the community. In essence, the 'virtual library' is always open, since technology facilitates the capacity for the library to provide access 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

## Awareness

*“For me the library is out of sight out of mind.”*

*– Library non-user*

The Needs Assessment strongly indicated that there is a considerable lack of awareness of what the library offers, among library users and non-users alike, as well as in the community in general. This was true on all fronts – in relation to library resources, services and programs – and with almost all populations, although less so with regard to what is available for young children. The issue of awareness is significant since, logically, a lack of awareness equates to a lack of use.

Demographic information collected for the study revealed that close to half of Burnaby’s population (48%) was new to the community within the past five years. This trend is expected to continue and accelerate and is hugely significant in relation to the need to create awareness of what the library offers. The library must be constantly in awareness-building mode in order to attract the many newcomers moving to Burnaby – both from other parts of Canada and from abroad.

The lack of awareness about the scope of the BPL website and the library’s electronic resources was evident in the library survey through the high number of respondents who were not familiar enough with the electronic resources or links from the library’s website in order to rate their satisfaction with them, and who selected ‘I don’t know’ in response to questions about their satisfaction with aspects of the website. Even avid library users who participated in the focus groups indicated they did not know the library provides access to electronic resources through its website.

*“I would have to say that that the library has very little profile in the community”*

*– Library non- user*

In the focus groups, participants suggested that the library should provide resources, services and programs that are already offered, revealing a lack of awareness of what the library currently provides. Many were unaware that the library provides computer instruction and job-finding programs.

The Needs Assessment revealed that there is a desire for the library to provide more information about what it provides and how its resources, services and programs can be accessed. In the telephone survey, providing more advertising and communications about what the library offers was suggested as a way for the library to improve its services in the community. In the focus groups, participants also strongly indicated they would like to receive more information from the library.

It was suggested through the study that the library should pursue multiple channels and methods for providing information, including local English-language and multicultural media, flyers, the library's website, service providers and community facilities, among others. In addition, the library should ensure that information is provided in multiple languages that are reflective of the demographics of the community.

*"The library should be there for people who are not proactive in using the library and make them more aware of what is available through the library."*

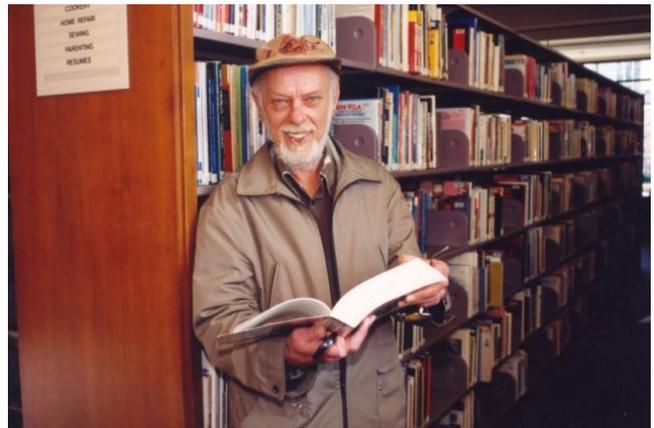
*– Library non-user*

## Physical Space and Library Atmosphere

The physical space at the library emerged as an issue through the Needs Assessment. One of the highest areas of dissatisfaction observed in the survey was in relation to physical characteristics of the library, and issues related to physical space were raised in all of the focus groups and in the stakeholder interviews.

One of the main concerns related to physical space was connected to noise levels. Some focus group participants expressed frustration that the library is noisy, while others indicated they do not feel comfortable in the library because of the need to be quiet all the time. Probed further, this situation was rooted in a perceived incompatibility of library users, uses and space. It was suggested that to address this issue, the library should consider providing designated and separated spaces for specific library uses/users.

There was clear agreement in the study about the importance of quiet areas at the library. Eighty percent of survey respondents identified quiet areas among their top three priorities for physical space and half indicated these as “most important”. In the focus groups, many participants highlighted the importance of having access to quiet areas to read, study or use computers and expressed frustration that they find current noise levels in the library make it difficult to concentrate.



*“The chairs are often full.  
Many times there is nowhere  
to sit but on the floor! – that’s  
one reason why I don’t go to  
the library”*

*– Library non-user*

At the same time, the need for ‘noisy’ areas in the library – i.e. areas where noise is permitted – was also revealed. Areas for children ranked second in response to a survey question about most important physical characteristics at the library. Focus group participants spoke of the need for an area for children where they are not expected to be quiet and where parents do not have to worry about them disturbing others in the library. Audiovisual and group study areas emerged among the most important priorities by survey respondents. Levels of dissatisfaction in relation to areas for group study and socializing were among the highest observed in the survey. In the focus groups, participants also stressed the need for group study areas, particularly for high school students. They also suggested the library should provide audiovisual space, an area where cell phones can be used, and computer areas where groups can work together.

Through the focus group input, the Needs Assessment revealed an issue related to overcrowding in the library. Some participants indicated that lack of available seating is the reason they do not visit the library more often.

*“The library needs to be  
livened up a little. It looks  
dreary now. They need to do  
something to make it look more  
cheerful.”*

*– Library user*

Regarding the atmosphere at the library, comments received in the focus groups suggest the library is seen as institutional and unwelcoming. This was mentioned primarily in relation to the Metrotown Branch. Contributing factors in this regard that were identified include the dull paint colours, tinted windows, physical barriers created by the entry and exit gates, the overbearing desks at the library entrance, and the Commissionaires who may appear to some library users like ‘guards’. It was noted that in this context, entering the library is intimidating for some. Similar comments were heard regarding the Kingsway Branch.

The fact that space is used inefficiently at the Metrotown Branch was highlighted in the focus groups, particularly in relation to the wide foyer. It was noted that the library processing functions located at the Metrotown Branch also take up a lot of space that could be used more efficiently and effectively for public service.

The desire for the library to function as a welcoming community gathering/meeting space was highlighted in all of the focus groups and in the stakeholder interviews.

The input gathered through the study provides a clear idea of how the library could use space differently and more efficiently to create a more welcoming and comfortable atmosphere.



## Looking Forward

The aim of the Community Needs Assessment conducted for Burnaby Public Library was to gather information to enable the library to better understand community needs and therefore continue to serve the people of Burnaby.

The results presented in this report provide information to help guide the future development of the library, both in relation to the library's strategic directions specifically and regarding the operational aspects of the library more broadly – library resources, services, programs, space and the virtual library. Equipped with this information, BPL is well positioned to plan for the future and continue meeting community needs.