


LIBRARY STRATEGIES





Detroit Lakes Public Library Community Needs Assessment Report

and associated recommendations

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LIBRARY BACKGROUND

Detroit Lakes Public Library (DLPL) is part of the Lake Agassiz Regional Library, a consolidated system responsible for library service across seven counties in northwest Minnesota. Within this expansive service area, DLPL is the only full-service library operating in Becker County.¹

DLPL is located at 1000 Washington Avenue, at the heart of a vibrant downtown sector. The facility has anchored the area for more than the century. DLPL's current incarnation maintains the original 1913 façade. The National Register of Historic Places added this cherished Carnegie to its listings in the 1970s – the first Becker County landmark to be so recognized.



A renovation and expansion in 1988 increased the Library's square footage from the original 4,142 square feet to 14,500 square feet. Key additions included new spaces for the adult and children's collections, a large meeting room, new restrooms, and needed staff spaces.

DLPL continues to be well used by its community – a community that has logged slow but steady growth since the early 1990s.² In total, the Library logged 140,998 visits in calendar year 2019.

According to State Library Services, DLPL's circulation over this period was just shy of 125,000. For context, that figure represents 17.9% of Lake Agassiz's aggregate tally, and puts Detroit Lakes second after only Moorhead (which reported a circulation of 184,698 in 2019, but pulls from a *significantly* larger service area).

Services are also well used. Over the same period, DLPL reported 12,553 computer use sessions, plus 5,110 separate uses of the on-site WiFi. Also in 2019, a total of 361 programs drew a cumulative attendance of 6,369.³

Architectural firm MSR Design conducted a facility-centric needs assessment for 2008. This report recommended significant infrastructure improvements, but did not catalyze immediate actions.

¹ LINK sites exist in Lake Park, Cormorant and Frazee augment this footprint, but these offer only a limited range of patron services.

² Minnesota Department of Administration - State Demographic Center

³ Minnesota Department of Education - State Library Services (2019 MNPLAR)

PROJECT BACKGROUND

In 2020, the City of Detroit Lakes allocated funds for Library leadership to commission a broad-based community needs assessment. DLPL then hired Library Strategies Consulting Group (LSCG) to spearhead this effort.

LSCG is housed within The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library, and the *only* library-specific consultant agency in the country that is itself based *within* a library organization. Community assessments are among the firm's core services, and the agency bring familiarity with the governance structures and operational challenges commonly found in Minnesota's libraries.

"Needs assessment" is a nebulous term that can mean different things to different clients and in different contexts. Critically, DLPL's assessment emphasizes a fresh appraisal of the brick-and-mortar facility on Washington Avenue – its strengths, shortcomings, and opportunities.

However, the consulting team and DLPL steering committee pursued a holistic approach that touched on nearly *every* aspect of Library operations – collection development, virtual offerings, programming, partnerships, marketing, outreach, etc. This broad-based approach reflects two realities:

1. Each of the above-named operational areas (and others, too) factor into space need considerations.
2. Patron needs and wants from their local Library are no longer confined to the institution's brick-and-mortar footprint. In today's service paradigm, meaningful changes can often be implemented with minimal or no changes to the building.

METHODOLOGY

Recommendations for any public library are on firm footing only if those actions position the organization to better serve its public. For this reason, Library Strategies proposed a multiphase, *stakeholder-driven* data gathering process.

Steps included the following:

Data Analysis. At point of departure, Library Strategies conducted a data audit of reports, statistics and other Detroit Lakes Library materials available for the period 2015-2020. Where applicable, this step also included a more cursory review of LARL and State Library Services materials.

On-Site Assessment. In early September, Melissa Brechon traveled to Detroit Lakes to see the facility, premises, and surrounding area firsthand. Her on-site appraisal included, but was not limited to: general section configurations and traffic flow, collection arrangements, fixtures and furniture, and the building's general state of repair. As part of this trip, Brechon also

interviewed key DLPL staff and stakeholders with background on the building's last expansion (in 1988).

Community Inputs. Early in the process, to hone areas of inquiry requiring the greatest attention, Library Strategies consultant Melissa Brechon spoke one-on-one with 23 residents. Each was identified by DLPL's steering committee as an individual well suited to speak to the needs of some subset of Becker County – or to the larger landscape in which DLPL operates. Due to the pandemic and attendant restrictions, these conversations took place over the phone or via Zoom. Most lasted between 30-45 minutes. (See Pg. 18 for a detailed report, including a full list of interview subjects.)

In the interest of securing inputs from the broadest possible swathe of library constituents, Library Strategies also crafted an online community questionnaire. Questions drew heavily from LSCG's own repertoire of "tried and true" questions, but also reflected Detroit Lakes- specific considerations identified by the steering committee. Rolled out over the month of November, this 18-question survey elicited 582 completed response sets, which is an impressive output for a community the size of Detroit Lakes. (See Pg. 23 for a review of feedback trends and key takeaways.)

Last, the LSCG team conducted virtual focus groups. As with the one-on-one interview phase, prospective participants were identified by DLPL's steering committee. Three sessions, each approx. 2 hours in length, took place the week of December 7-10. Focus group discussions centered around four key areas sketched out by the consultants based on project findings up to that point. (See Pg. 32 for an executive summary and list of participants, along with their community affiliations).

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

Engagement efforts of this type and scale invariably uncover community needs, wants and expectations that are beyond the means, or outside the mission, of the library. Realistically, no library system can be a panacea for all that its patrons require. At best, the library operates as and is seen to be a central player within a larger framework of public services and community-oriented organizations.

Library Strategies presents its findings, and offers measured recommendations, with these facts in mind. We avoid "pie in the sky" ideas in favor of steps that can reasonably be taken within DLPL's finite staffing and budget means (current and anticipated), but that are calculated to pay meaningful dividends.

TERMINOLOGY AND LAYOUT

Key findings and recommendations will be broken out into four needs areas.

- Facility
- Community
- Programs & Services
- Technology

Consider this scheme a construct through which to convey information, and not a rigid way of understanding operations. Each overlaps with, builds upon, and relies upon the others.

Library Strategies will endeavor to make the report which follows *comprehensible* to a “lay” audience, yet *specific and actionable* for the library staff charged with responding to the diverse and evolving needs of Detroit Lakes.

In order to achieve both, each of the four topical areas will include three sections.

1. Preface:

The purpose of this brief section is to contextualize the community’s needs, (along with DLPL’s current activities and performance,) against the backdrop of what is “normal” in today’s public libraries. It is intended principally for the benefit of readers who do not bring a background knowledge on this dynamic field.

2. Observations:

This section overviews the most salient findings from the consulting team’s research, on-site visits, and extensive community engagement. It is not intended to be a *comprehensive* overview, but rather as an introduction to those aspects of library operations around which recommendations focus.

(Note: For a detailed look at *residents’* observations and opinions, see the interview, community, and focus group summary reports towards the end of this report.)

3. Recommendations:

Even under favorable conditions, redesign or renovation of a building represents a multi-year undertaking. The same can be said for many other “major” strategic initiatives. However, some facility and operational changes can be implemented on a considerable shorter timetable. In other words, DLPL need not wait for movement on multi-year efforts before realizing some gains. With that in mind, consultant suggestions are split between short-term and long-term recommendations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Facility -

Detroit Lakes Public Library's venerable building on Washington Avenue is showing its age, and otherwise strained, in a number of ways. Restrooms are outdated, dilapidated, and rather small. The existing meeting rooms are too small, and too few, to meet demand. See Pg. 9 for a fuller appraisal.

Realistically, re-investments in DLPL's current square footage can only go so far towards addressing the community's evolving needs and wants for the space. However, there is no community interest in – nor any compelling need to – relocate DLPL.

Critically, the current building is effectively “landlocked” on its current plot. Taken together, all these conditions forestall a large-scale expansion on par with the 1988 addition in the foreseeable future – even *before* budgetary considerations are taken into account. However, library leadership can take certain steps now to position DLPL for speedy action at the indeterminable point in the future when additional land can be acquired.

In the meantime, DLPL can optimize its existing footprint through a variety of reconfiguration and cosmetic measures – each of which should be achievable without exorbitant cost or onerous permissions requirements.

- Community -

Over the past decade, public libraries have truly come into their own as a viable (and indeed, necessary) “third place” for community members.¹ Detroit Lakes Public Library offers an excellent case in point. Indeed, it is partly for this reason that the Library is experiencing facility strains unanticipated 30 years ago when the community last made a major capital investment in the Library's space.

At the same time, however, the Library's current activities do not always reflect the breadth of needs felt by different subsets of the community – nor do they necessarily cater to the most *acute* needs. See Pg. 12 for recommendations on priority populations and actionable strategies for achieving meaningful inroads with those groups.

Outreach and marketing around DLPL's existing portfolio warrant a special mention. In the words of one focus group member, “Unless you go *into* the Library, most of what is available is invisible to many community members.” As another phrased it, “The library is great, but it flies under the radar if you're not a self-described book lover.” These sentiments are broadly felt. Naturally, concerted outreach efforts require staffing bandwidth – and staff already juggle a varied and full workload. The recommendations provided factor in these limitations.

¹ Putnam, Robert D. “Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community” (Simon & Schuster, 2000)

- Programs & Services -

Collections notwithstanding, today's libraries serve their community (and foster a *sense* of community) through a dynamic suite of programs and services. Here, again, Detroit Lakes Public Library is no exception. By and large, the Library scores high marks on the breadth and appropriateness of its offerings. Patrons appreciate the education, entertainment, and education opportunities available to adults, and parents hold favorable opinions about what DLPL offers to children.

On its own, DLPL does not have staffing capacity, let alone the specialized expertise, to offer many new programs and services calculated to alleviate under-met community needs. However, the Library is well positioned to forge partnerships between – and to boost opportunities already available from – Becker County's business, nonprofit and education community. Consultant recommendations hinge around this idea, particularly as it relates to bolstering DLPL's existing education and workforce support and to showcasing the area's diverse cultural heritages.

In addition, DLPL should resolve early to continue virtual (or hybrid) programming after the pandemic has passed and the building's meeting rooms can again be used for their intended purpose. Virtual programs and classes are greatly appreciated, particularly by would-be attendees who cannot patronize those events in person due to drive time or other perceived access barriers.

- Technology -

Technology access and opportunities are integral to the modern library's value proposition. More so than any other topical area singled out by this report, shortcomings and potential improvements here must be understood within the context of DLPL's role inside the larger Lake Agassiz Regional Library system. Feedback concerning the library's online catalog, databases, e-book platforms and selection, etc. crop up repeatedly throughout the community engagement reports. However, consultants' recommendations de-emphasize these elements in favor of a discussion of action items which DLPL's own staff and leadership can take to better align the Library's tech offerings with community needs.

Key measures include the designation of a technology desk to channel existing (and invite further) patron questions about personal devices and software applications. DLPL might also explore and pilot a tech volunteer program, perhaps staffed with DLHS students seeking community service hours.

TOPIC 1: FACILITY

ISSUES STATEMENT:

While we live in the “Digital Age,” effective library service remains indelibly linked to the size and condition of the brick-and-mortar facilities out of which libraries operate. Public libraries across the country regularly report that their available square footage – once more than adequate for their needs – can no longer comfortably accommodate the dynamic array of activities taking place in these vital public spaces. Children’s areas and technology zones are two areas of special concern. Most critically, the emergence of the library as a nexus for community collaboration means that more and more residents are leaning on their local library for its meeting and study room amenities, meaning that these limited spaces are increasingly strained.

OBSERVATION:

Detroit Lakes Public Library’s facility at 1000 Washington Avenue dates back to 1913. A major expansion in 1988 more than doubled the original square footage. Staff and users acutely feel many of the above-named spatial strains – and those strains are sometimes heightened by the age of the infrastructure.

On the whole, DLPL’s layout is fairly standard for an historic Carnegie augmented by a later building expansion. The original Washington Avenue entryway is inaccessible, with the main doors now on Frazee Street. That entryway appears to be ADA accessible/compliant, though specific measurements were not taken. When entering, visitors are greeted by a meeting room on the right and public restrooms on the left. Staff maintain two public service desks on the main floor – one central to the floorplan, and the other adjacent to the children’s room.

Space on this floor is otherwise dominated by the adult collections, juvenile nonfiction, a computer/tech zone, and seating areas (presently limited due to COVID-19). Three small and semi-private study rooms are tucked into the corners, as is a fourth small space dedicated to computer usage. A lower-level meeting room is positioned under the original Carnegie.

The upper level, accessible by a lift and steps, is dominated by the juvenile and teen fiction collection, a large adult periodical area, and additional seating. A fireplace accents the south wall but is chiefly for ambiance.

At the time of consultant Melissa Brechon’s site visit, both meeting rooms were repurposed as short-term storage areas for reading tables and chairs (along with the bike mobile and donated books). Furnishings were removed to this area to accommodate and encourage social distancing upstairs.

(CONTINUED)

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Short Term:

DLPL can optimize its existing footprint through a variety of reconfiguration and cosmetic measures, each of which should be achievable without exorbitant cost or onerous permissions requirements. (In practice, some are prerequisites for longer-term actions, rather than standalone items in their own right.)

- Obtain contractor estimates to renovate the public restrooms. Given the public and aged nature of the facility, appraisals should factor in ADA compliance needs and overall building airflow.
- Secure specialist estimates on the work and cost required to address the HVAC and other infrastructure needs of the smaller meeting room. This same appraisal can invite proposals for how best to update the kitchen on a tight budget. Note: These spaces are lower priority than the restrooms. However, depending on the community's contractor network, a single vendor may be able to submit competitive bids on all.
- Budget for the eventual installation of a drive-up book return, accessible from the parking lot or street. Investigate restrictions and other requirements with the City of Detroit Lakes.
- Remove the public service desk that currently dominates the center of the main floor. Redesign the remaining desk to serve the needs of both information and circulation.
- Designate and repaint several accent walls, adding color and a sense of "freshness."
- Explore rotating in new furniture and/or reupholstering existing pieces. This investment need not all be made at one time, if a proper replacement plan is put in place. However, economy of scale considerations may make larger but less frequent investments prudent.
- Designate and fully furnish a dedicated Teen/YA area. Prioritized acquisitions include comfortable furniture and at least two (non-loanable) internet-enabled devices.
- Request a comprehensive lighting study from Detroit Lakes Public Utilities. A specialist's evaluation should yield actionable insights about the merits (and relative costs) of transitioning away from fluorescent lighting.
- Invest in a new and prominent "Open/Closed" sign, to be installed in such a way that it can be easily seen by passing cars. In the interior, audit and replace at least some of the existing section wayfinding signage (*after* section rearrangements).
- Continue investments in remote delivery options, online/virtual services, etc. – both as a way of mitigating in-built facility limitations and in deference to emergent patron needs.

(CONTINUED)

Long Term:

There is no community interest in – nor any compelling need to – relocate DLPL. Its present location is strategic, and the building beloved. However, the current library is effectively “landlocked” on its current plot. Taken together, these conditions forestall a large-scale expansion on par with the 1988 addition in the immediate future – even before budgetary considerations are taken into account. However, library leadership (and allied community stakeholders) can take certain steps now to position DLPL for success at such time as expansion becomes viable.

- Establish a “Library Improvements Committee” to explore options and advance tasks related to improving the library’s existing footprint – *and* expanding it in the future, albeit on an as-yet-undeterminable timetable. Suggested membership includes at least two members of the library board; representation from Lake Agassiz Regional Library; key City staff as deemed appropriate; and liaisons from both the Becker County Friends of the Library and Detroit Lakes Library Fund Board. Charter for this body will include the following responsibilities:
 - Primary decision-making concerning, and oversight of, the implementation for “short-term” building improvements (ex., restroom remodeling bidding process). Note: Decisions must still be cleared through existing approval channels.
 - Champion ambitions for an open-air reading porch addition to the Washington Avenue exterior of the existing facility. Specifically, explore and pursue private funding possibilities (including but not limited to existing fundraising channels), and commission studies and renderings.
 - Relationship maintenance with business and property owners on the parcels immediately adjacent to DLPL. Committee should spearhead efforts to secure “right of first refusal” privileges, if and when such properties come up for sale.
 - Double as the nucleus of the task force responsible for liaising with architects and construction vendors, should a sale occur. (This group’s grounding in the process up until that point will prove advantageous.)

TOPIC 2: COMMUNITY

ISSUES STATEMENT:

Over the past decade, public libraries have truly come into their own as a viable (and indeed, necessary) “third place” for community members. Aside from their home and workplace, the local library is one of precious few places where a resident can still spend time without expectation of spending money. Consequently, it is the public resource most likely to promote a cohesive sense of community.

This reality pairs well with the institution’s historic role as a central information hub. Libraries are ideally situated to be a clearinghouse for information on community resources of value to residents. For at-risk and under-resourced groups, the local library goes a step further and operates as a *lifeline*.

OBSERVATION:

At first pass, Detroit Lakes may seem like a small and heterogenous place. While this may be true from a comparative standpoint, closer inspection reveals a community that is diverse enough (socio-economics, education, etc.) to have a host of varying needs, and large enough that a broad sense of social cohesion is by no means assured *without* embedded community institutions like DLPL.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Note: Several of the points articulated below could just as easily be classed under the forthcoming Programs & Services section, as programming and services are the primary mechanisms through which a library fosters a sense of community and assists the most in-need subsets of that community.

Short Term:

- Establish standing, sustainable methods for capturing community members’ feedback and ideas about how to improve the library (ex., an online form). Do not wait for periodic needs assessments or a strategic planning process to come along to ‘take the pulse’ of Detroit Lakes in this way.
- Explore and actively encourage a merger between the Friends of the Library and the Library Club. A merger would clear up significant community confusion about the roles of these organizations, while also bolstering their ability to aid the Library.
- Encourage and equip staff, trustees and Friends to be intentional ambassadors for the Library. (Talking points and other planning provisions should be included as part of the larger awareness campaign detailed under Programs & Services.)
- Strengthen existing, strategic relationships with key members of Detroit Lakes’ nonprofit network and business community (ex., Chamber of Commerce). Invite input on how DLPL can help *them* help the Detroit Lakes community.

Long Term:

- Reevaluate staffing levels, with an eye towards the eventual expansion of DLPL service hours (i.e., post-COVID). Increased evening and weekend hours are particularly desired.
- Once the COVID risks have abated and library programming picks up again in earnest, re-establish the DLPL events calendar (as opposed to the current model, where all LARL events are listed together in one central calendar).
- Prioritize pilot programs and outreach efforts that cater to the needs of the tribal population, homeschooling families, seniors (specifically, those homebound or in nursing homes), and new residents (perhaps targeting new residential developments).

TOPIC 3: PROGRAMS & SERVICES

ISSUES STATEMENT:

Not so long ago, “library services” and “library collections” were essentially one and the same, because the public institution had little outside of its extensive print collections to offer patrons. Today, however, most public libraries offer a broad array of services and programming opportunities. In broad strokes, programming includes education, entertainment, and education offerings geared towards a general or special audience. Services run a wide gamut, from printer and scanner access, to one-on-one homework or workforce assistance, to off-site material pick-up opportunities. While some can be argued to be “nice to have” (versus “necessary to have”), many others are now seen as mission critical by library staff and patrons alike.

OBSERVATIONS:

Considering its means, as well as the profile of the community it serves, Detroit Lakes Public Library does reasonably well where both programs and services are concerned. For this reason, this report pairs the two together. (This is not always the case.)

When asked about unmet or under-met community needs, stakeholders named a variety of problems that are beyond the DLPL’s means, at least without the active collaboration of community partners. That includes some needs that that libraries *anywhere* would be hard pressed to address.

In practice, of course, no library can provide *all services to all people*. Decisions will need to be made to guide the allocation of budget, staff, and other resources. The below recommendations are put forward with this balancing act in mind.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Short Term:

- Continue and redouble investments in virtual programming opportunities, with an eye toward their continuation post-pandemic. Virtual opportunities are an accessibility boon, and have the potential to alleviate some of the strains frequently felt during popular on-site events.
- Restrict event registration to programs where max room capacity is projected to be an issue, or where some minimum attendance is required to hold the class. Strive to make “walk-in” attendees welcome in all other cases.

- Spearhead creation of a “master list” of community speakers and potential programming partners, with particular attention to collaborators able to (1) augment DLPL’s education and workforce support and (2) showcase the County’s different cultural heritages. This process will take time, and likely involve a series of conversations and referrals. Once created, this should be a “living” document that is reviewed and updated periodically by staff, and leaned on heavily whenever new programming is considered. This project could be packaged as a long-term, volunteer-led effort.

Long Term:

- Adopt a comprehensive marketing plan, including an actionable roadmap for tailoring messaging and reaching subsets of the community that stand to gain most from DLPL’s current slate of programs and services.
- Either as part of that plan or as a standalone effort, DLPL should pursue an awareness campaign to introduce or re-introduce DLPL to the community’s many non-users.
- Prioritize pilot programs and outreach efforts that cater to the needs of the tribal population, homeschooling families, seniors, and new residents.
- Establish a teen advisory committee to give input on YA collection, space allocation and programming (ex. gaming, writing club, life skill classes, teen tech volunteer program).
- Consider arranging and hosting annual fairs around specific topics of broad community interest (ex. health and wellness, education).

TOPIC 4: TECHNOLOGY

ISSUES STATEMENT:

Technology access and opportunities are integral to the modern library's value proposition. The library field's attitude towards and significant investments in consumer tech are predicated on three facts.

1. The technology landscape is rapidly and constantly evolving. Without outside assistance, many people simply cannot commit the personal time or resources required to stay abreast of these changes.
2. Households enjoy differing levels of internet connectivity – an unfortunate characteristic of the still entrenched "Digital Divide."
3. Technology has some role to play, be it direct or indirect, in a library's response to just about every existing or emergent community need.

OBSERVATION:

The Detroit Lakes Public Library's most visible technology asset is its traditional computer lab. Patrons currently have 16 public terminals at their disposal. In 2019 alone, these saw 12,553 use sessions. Moreover, patrons tapped the facility's complimentary WiFi over a recorded 5,110 use sessions. Online offerings – including loanable e-books, streaming audiobooks, and database access – are another chief technology resource.

More so than any other topical area singled out by this report, shortcomings and improvements here must be understood within the context of DLPL's role inside the larger Lake Agassiz Regional Library system. Responsibility for many of the tech needs identified by this community needs assessment fall under the purview of LARL – not its branches. Several of the recommendations that follow are classed as "long term" under the assumption that region-wide changes will necessarily take somewhat longer to adopt.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Short Term:

- In the event that ever-changing COVID conditions require further restrictions to library services, access to public computers should be safeguarded to the fullest extent possible. This may mean implementing additional sanitation protocols and the redeployment of staff attention.
- Allocate several computers to be used expressly by teens. Position these close to teen/YA collection shelving, as the cornerstone of a dedicated teen space.
- Place one or more computers in the children's area, with signage or other materials that promote the databases and other library-funded online resources that are geared towards children and their caregivers.

- Designate and label a technology help desk, where patrons can direct troubleshooting questions. This need not be a standalone fixture, but must be well marked. This move will more visibly position the library as a go-to tech resource, and route the majority of tech questions (which staff are fielding regardless) to just one section of the library.⁴
- Explore interest in a pilot tech volunteer program, perhaps staffed with DLHS students seeking community service hours.
- Pursue dialogue and partnerships with community organizations that share DLPL's dedication to digital literacy. Conditions may emerge to cross-promote existing tech classes or one-on-one assistance opportunities.

Long Term:

- When planning regionwide staff training, prioritize learning (preferably hands-on exercises) that allow all frontline staff to become comfortable with prevalent and emerging consumer tech devices/applications.
- Develop standard technology expectations for all staff, and provision for remedial training if frontline staff members fall short of this baseline.
- Ensure that private funders, including the Becker County Friends of the Library and Detroit Lakes Library Fund, appreciate the central role of technology in today's libraries and the resulting budget implications for DLPL. Ideally, these sources will provide financial support towards any significant tech investments that the Library pursues in the future.
- Redesign LARL's web presence so that the hours, amenities, and other details about each branch and LINK site are easier to find.

⁴ *Public Libraries*, November/December 2020: "Providing Patron Tech Help in a Pandemic: In person and virtual models" by Nick Tanzi. Pg. 15-18.

LIBRARY STRATEGIES





Detroit Lakes Public Library Stakeholder Interviews | Summary Report

As an integral, early step in Detroit Lakes Public Library’s needs assessment, senior Library Strategies consultant Melissa Brechon conducted one-on-one interviews with 23 community members. DLPL’s steering committee identified participants with guidance from LSCG.

Interviewees varied in profession, age, length of residency in Detroit Lakes, and library usage habits. Critically, however, each brought some perspective, expertise or other knowledge that sheds light on the current and forecasted needs of Detroit Lakes residents. (See the end of this section for the full list of interview subjects.)

Due to pandemic restrictions, Brechon conducted one-on-one interviews via Zoom or over the phone. While each conversation played out differently, information shared is easiest to consolidate and present under four pillars: Facility, Community, Programs & Services, and Technology.

Notes:

- These four categories are not mutually exclusive, and many comments bridged two or more categories.
 - Comments are arranged here with an eye toward best narrative flow. Bullet ordering does not reflect relative priority or time-sensitiveness.
 - Opinions expressed by interview subjects do not necessarily reflect the opinions or ultimate recommendations of Library Strategies.
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Facility

- Nearly *everyone* interviewed thinks about and touts the Library as the “heart” of Detroit Lakes. Residents appreciate the Library not just for what it does and what the institution stands for, but for the building itself. The historic Carnegie is downtown’s centerpiece, and the late 1980s addition is architecturally tasteful.
- Unprompted, interviewees repeatedly used certain words when trying to encapsulate their perceptions of the Library: *valuable, important, visible, amazing, and welcoming*.
- Once one is inside the Library, the facility looks “tired” and “is showing its age.” New furniture, fresh paint or other infusions of color, and other such touch-ups could do much to reinvigorate the Library’s interior character.
- The building’s bathroom emerged as a major flashpoint for discontent. General aesthetics and cleanliness notwithstanding, the restrooms are small, outdated, and likely not ADA compliant.
- DLPL is, in some ways, a victim of its own popularity. When the COVID-19 pandemic is not part of the equation, the Library is a popular location for gatherings – be they public programs or small group projects. Unfortunately, the Library’s large meeting room is

insufficient in size for its most popular programs, and the study rooms too few to accommodate demand.

- The children's zone and teen sections, such as they are, are also crunched for space.
- Parking is limited, which can be a problem when one visits during peak hours. Wintertime conditions exacerbate this problem.
- Interior lighting leaves something to be desired. In particular, the adult collection area gets too dark in the evening hours.
- Patrons are keen to see the installation of a drive-up book return. Prominent exterior signage listing hours of operation would also be appreciated.
- There is broad interest in optimizing the parcel's existing green space with a reading porch or study patio of some sort.

Community

- No one interviewed seriously questioned the value of or "return on taxpayer investment" from the Library. However, stakeholders are adamant that the Library must constantly market its offerings and communicate its role as a pillar of the community. Shifting demographics and changing media consumption habits are key reasons why.
- In particular, staff must drive home that the Library remains relevant in the Digital Age, and that the internet can never be a wholesale replacement for the role DLPL serves in its community.
- Outdated perceptions about the role of libraries (ex., "repository for books") remain deeply entrenched with some. DLPL should consider launching a wide-ranging, concerted public awareness campaign.
- At the same time, "community" is not a monolith. Some subsets of residents are more readily seen in the Library than others. Paradoxically, these are not always the subsets that have greatest need of the Library's free resources. As a way of bridging these perceived gaps, Library leaders should be in regular contact with Becker County's network of community service organizations. Tribal leaders and early childhood program heads/educators are two other key constituencies.
- COVID-19 and staff furloughs required temporary cutbacks to regular hours of operation. If DLPL is truly to be a welcoming community hub, leadership should prioritize the reestablishment of weekday evening hours – which are sorely missed. (UPDATE: Since the community engagement phase of this project, DLPL has *already* provisioned for the timely restoration of those lost hours.)

Programs and Services

- Every person in the community should see personal value in at least one library service and have an interest in at least one of DLPL's programs. If this is not the case, it is almost certainly a sign of insufficient marketing and outreach.
- Over the immediate term, the Library should focus on acute needs caused or heightened by COVID-19. Unemployed and under-employed individuals are in urgent

need of help, and these needs can trump less pressing enrichment/entertainment desires.

- In the coming years, new services and pilot programs should revolve around the following growing, changing, and/or in-need groups: new residents, low-income families, homeschooling families, and seniors.
- Programs and services should all provide a value that justifies the cost. If cost considerations, changing community interests/needs, or both indicate that a long-standing offering is no longer particularly valuable, the Library should not be afraid to sunset those programs.
- DLPL should consider hosting more of its adult programming on weekends, when 9-5 workers are available to attend.
- Make it a priority to engage with young people and keep abreast of what they desire from their Library. Teens' needs and wants are not always obvious to adults.

Technology

- Residents lean on staff to assist with consumer tech questions. Staff may not always like or feel comfortable fielding such queries, but the need is acute and will remain so. Staff should be enabled with trainings on popular devices and software, so that the Library can "lean in" to this growing community need.
- One-on-one technology troubleshooting is a time intensive endeavor, and staff may be hard pressed to fully fill the need (especially when factoring in other workloads). It would be wonderful if the Library could enlist the aid of student volunteers to provide assistance at scheduled dates and times.
- Interviewees question the allocation of computers within the Library. There are too many terminals devoted strictly to OPAC use, and teens would benefit from and appreciate computer workstations dedicated to teen use.
- Some interviewees suggested a loanable laptops and tablets program. In this model, devices cannot leave the premises, but are available behind the desk for patrons to use throughout the building (and outdoors, if the patio idea comes to fruition).
- The website is difficult to navigate, and many of the valuable research resources available there are effectively "hidden" to those who do not know precisely what they are looking for.

(CONTINUED)

Interviewees:

1. Bergstrom, Jacob | UM Freshman
2. Branden, Karen | MSUM Professor
3. Buboltz, Karen | MState Interim Assc. Dean of Academic & Student Affairs
4. Erickson, Amy | ISD 22 School Board Chairman
5. Fish, Amy | Director, DL Adult Basic Education/ESL
6. Grimsley, Ben & Bienvenida | Lake Agassiz Board, County Commissioner
7. Haspel, Danell | DLPL Staff
8. Imholte, Bruce | Library Board President + City Council member
9. Johnston, Carrie | Director, Chamber of Commerce
10. Jones, Paula | DLPL Staff
11. Kelcey Klemm | City Administrator, City of Detroit Lakes
12. Kuoppala, Liz | Exec. Dir., Mahube-Otwa Community Action Partnership
13. Leff, Jack | DLPS Student
14. Mark Kuether | Pastor, Congregational Church
15. Marks Erickson, Jamie | City Council + past editor of local newspaper
16. Oja, Sally | Long-time Library Friend and booster
17. Oldenburger, Derek | Retired Physician
18. Pihfer, Karen | Coordinator, Becker County Energize (Essentia Health)
19. Rethwisch, Fran | DLPS ECFE/School Readiness Coordinator
20. Roy, Alan & Henny | Tribal Secretary + Treasurer
21. Skinner, Tami | Pgm. Director, Boys & Girls Club
22. Stearns, Amy | Executive Director, Holmes Theater

LIBRARY STRATEGIES

The logo for Library Strategies features a stylized teal icon of an open book with three pages visible, positioned to the right of the text.The background of the report cover is a grayscale photograph of a library. It shows tall bookshelves filled with books, and in the foreground, two young children are sitting on a checkered floor, engrossed in reading books. A teal semi-transparent banner is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the title text.

Detroit Lakes Public Library Community Survey | Summary Report

BACKGROUND

In Fall 2020, the Detroit Lakes Public Library committed to a broad-based community needs assessment. As part of this study, Library Strategies Consulting Group (LSCG) conducted a community survey within the Library's service area. This questionnaire aimed to capture satisfaction with and perceptions of the public institution as it exists today – and to pinpoint unmet or undermet needs.

Data shared for – and trends uncovered by – this survey influenced topics probed in the focus group phase of community engagement activities (week of December 7). Survey input also directly informs many of the LSCG consulting team's short- and long-term recommendations for Detroit Lakes Public Library.

In total, 582 residents participated in the 18-question questionnaire. This outpaced consultants' "stretch goal" hope for 400 completed response sets. That turnout is especially impressive when considered against the size of the community. According to the 2019 Minnesota Public Library Annual Report (MPLAR), the DLPL's legal service area is 15,429. Becker County is, in total, home to just 34,545. From a *per capita* perspective, community engagement with DLPL's online questionnaire sets a new high record for Library Strategies!

High response rates notwithstanding, the broad distribution strategies employed preclude a truly "scientific" analysis of data. Nevertheless, such a large respondent pool allows us to extrapolate trends and perceptions with reasonable accuracy.

Note: Respondents were ensured anonymity, to encourage candor and a high response rate. However, questions and answer sets – including anonymous free-form responses to qualitative questions – are attached in full.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The following areas of concern or other takeaways emerged repeatedly, usually across more than one question:

- Survey takers readily acknowledge that the library (particularly the original Carnegie portion) is an architectural gem. This historic character, coupled with the strategic downtown location, positions DLPL's brick-and-mortar facility as a community locus and point for civic pride.
- The bathrooms are outdated, dilapidated, and rather small. Nothing short of a wholesale remodel will adequately address this shortcoming.

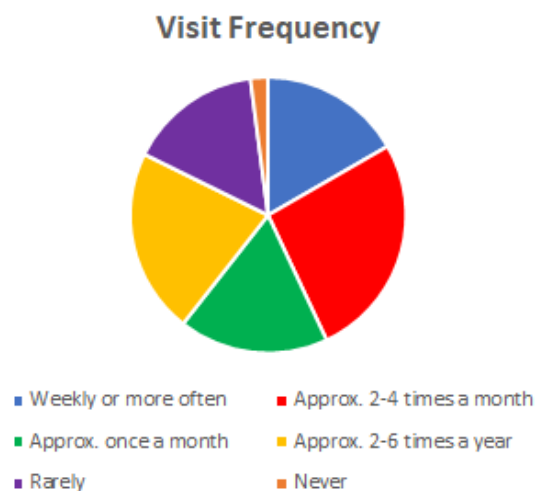
- Respondents also point to DLPL’s study rooms as an area of concern. These semi-private spaces are valued – but few in number. In practice, they are in such high demand that patrons can never feel assured of access to one.
- Capacity is also an acute issue with DLPL’s primary meeting room. Author talks and other popular events sometimes require patrons to stand – and/or staff to turn away would-be attendees who arrive once the room is at its maximum capacity.
- While what is already ‘on offer’ is appreciated, many residents want DLPL to not just sustain but to redouble its current adult programming efforts. Specific suggestions include both education (ex. professional development, tech skills) and entertainment (ex., author readings, book clubs).
- In the coming years, patrons expect that they (and their families) will use streaming and downloadable “e-resources” at a greater rate than they do presently. As it stands today, however, users are often underwhelmed by the variety and availability of titles on offer. Some also find the browsing and loan interfaces in use to be unintuitive and frustrating.

LIBRARY USAGE + DEMOGRAPHICS

Sixty percent of respondents self-report visiting DLPL at least once a month. Conversely, just under 18 percent reported that they “Never” or “Rarely” visit.

Respondents aged 60+ are somewhat overrepresented in the data set, at just under 57 percent. In contrast, Millennials and Gen Z survey takers collectively make up only 12 percent.

The data also skews female, with men accounting for just over 15 percent of respondents. Seventy percent come from households with no children. Twenty percent represent homes where *more than one* minor is present.



Cumulatively, communities of color make up just over 6 percent of the survey sample set. Within this bloc, Native/Indigenous voices are the plurality. On the whole, this is not out of line with the racial/ethnic makeup of Becker County.

****Sources:** Library Strategies Survey [Questions 13-18]

“Data USA” API

U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts

QUESTION-BY-QUESTION BREAKDOWNS

Note: Question-by-question breakdowns are in some cases reordered, and in others joined together, for best flow and minimal redundancy.

If you rarely or never visit the library, why not? [Q2]

When asked why they do not visit the Library, nonusers and sporadic users cited finding what they need online as the most common reason why. Interestingly, older patrons are nearly as likely as younger ones to make this claim (ex., 60% in the 50-59 age bracket).

Secondarily, 24% voice a preference for purchasing their own materials; 20% assert that they simply have no need for anything the Library offers; and about 18% claim that DLPL is too far away for them to visit more regularly.

Twenty-eight percent utilize the Library – but *only* for its online resources.

In the open-ended portion of this question, more than a dozen respondents cite COVID-19 fears or access restrictions as a contributing factor. In addition, a number of seasonal residents cite their living arrangements as a prime reason they do not patronize DLPL.

In the last two years, for what reasons have you visited the library? [Q3]

A preponderance of survey respondents visit the Library for traditional, transactional reasons. Seventy-eight percent check out physical materials. While the holds shelves are well used (63%), browsing the stacks is a popular practice as well.

Also high among the ~20 offerings listed on the survey, patrons report using the Library to: attend an adult program or event (29.2%), attend a book sale (28.6%), and hold or attend a meeting (28%). (Note: A cross-analysis within SurveyMonkey finds no statistically significant difference in these habits between generational cohorts.)

Forty-eight respondents took the opportunity to expand the provided list with free-form answers. Ten of these report relying on the Library to print, scan, fax or shred documents.

How satisfied are you with the following aspects of Library operations? [Q4]

“Opt outs” and neutral opinions notwithstanding, survey takers are generally positive about most of the 15 considerations listed.

With a sample set this size, Library Strategies is most interested in operational areas that meet or pass the 5% threshold for dissatisfaction. The state of DLPL’s restrooms is the only element that fails this test outright (8.2% somewhat dissatisfied + 2.5% very dissatisfied). Hours of operation / open hours come close to the 5% threshold (3.77% somewhat dissatisfied + .42% very dissatisfied), as does parking (3.33% somewhat dissatisfied + .83% very dissatisfied).

Each of these three will be explored in greater detail as part of subsequent questions.

How satisfied are you with various aspects of Library collections/resources? [Q5]

Patrons are, in the main, content with the Library’s current slate of resources. “Opt outs” notwithstanding, a majority of survey respondents report being satisfied with (or simply personally indifferent towards) each of the 15 elements listed.

Notably, however, digital and downloadable audiobooks surpass the 5% benchmark for discontent (3.9% somewhat dissatisfied +1.1% very dissatisfied). Patron satisfaction with audiobooks available on *physical* media also comes close (3.8% somewhat dissatisfied + .65% very dissatisfied). Open-ended comments further contextualize this pain point. Patrons are underwhelmed by the variety and availability of titles on offer, and also find the browsing and loan interfaces in use to be unintuitive and frustrating.

Fifty-five survey takers volunteered additional information as part of the free-form portion of this question. Most such comments simply elaborate on the Likert scale rankings. However, two areas not explicitly addressed by Q6 also come to the fore. First, vision impaired patrons report limited availability of large print books (with some genres better represented than others in the current collection). Second, a number of teens and parents of tweens/teens report that the collection intended for this demographic is modest in size and not particularly varied in its content.

How satisfied are you with the Library's programs, events, and outreach? [Q6]

Here again, the majority of patrons have a positive opinion about the programs and priorities put forward by the survey – or else report not having a basis on which to meaningfully evaluate.

Significantly, however, “promotion and marketing” outstrips the 5% yardstick for dissatisfaction (5.8% somewhat dissatisfied + 1.1% very dissatisfied). This figure is compounded by the percentile of survey takers who selected “Don’t Know | N/A” – 57%. (Although the “Don’t Know” column is *usually* of limited utility in analysis, it is telling here given the nature of marketing.)

Free-form comments on this question underscore and elaborate on this point. Representative examples include:

Direct:

- “I think outreach/advertising could get more people to come to and think about the library more often. I feel like it’s forgotten about by a lot of community members.”
- “Need more frequent updates on what’s new, and more reminders on programs.”

Indirect:

- “I would attend more functions, speakers, activities if I knew about them.”
- “The only reason I said dissatisfied for one question is because I don’t ever hear of any events happening at the library.”
- “I didn’t know you had home delivery, per the above question.”

Which library services are currently important to you and your family? [Q7] Which services do you expect to be important to you or your family in five years? [Q8]

It is valuable to pair and contrast these questions. While the first is straightforward, the second probes patrons’ aspirations and reasonable guesses about their family’s evolving needs as they will look in half a decade. As a rule of thumb, Library Strategies flags any +/- ≥10% difference for attention.

Differences, where they exist for DLPL, revolve primarily around digital access. At present, some 40.1% of respondents report value in ebooks, and 31.6% in digital/downloadable audiobooks. In Q8, those rates jump meaningfully – to 54.2% and 51%, respectively. In other words, in the coming years, patrons expect that they (and their families) will use streaming and downloadable “e-resources” at a greater rate than they do presently.

In addition, patrons expect that the need for emerging technologies from their library (ex., rentable mobile hotspots) is likely to increase – even when by definition it is impossible to know what exactly those technology tools and applications will look like in five years' time. This discrepancy (a rise from 14.4% to 26%) is typical across most polled libraries.

Last, interest in programmatic offerings geared towards adult audiences is also expected to grow (from 41% to 51.4%). In contrast, the expected appeal of events/programs geared towards younger audience appears to remain close to static.

In contrast, interest in *none* of the areas probed is forecasted to “slacken” appreciably over the next five years. (None decrease by $\geq 10\%$.)

Think of the library's physical space. Are the size, location, and spatial layout well suited to your needs and use habits? [Q9]

Without specific prompting, survey takers readily acknowledge that the library (particularly the original Carnegie portion) is an architectural gem. This historic character, coupled with the strategic downtown location, positions DLPL's brick-and-mortar facility as a community locus and point for civic pride.

The building is not without its faults, though. First and foremost, as already indicated by Q4, the restrooms are in major need of attention. Nothing short of a wholesale remodel will adequately address this shortcoming.

In addition, a significant proportion of respondents point to DLPL's private study rooms as an area of concern. Uses for these semi-private spaces are myriad, and their presence is appreciated. In point of fact, however, these are in such high demand that patrons can never feel assured of access to one.

Capacity is also an acute issue with DLPL's primary meeting room. Author talks and other popular events sometimes require patrons to stand – and/or staff to turn away would-be attendees who arrive once the room is at its maximum capacity.

Patrons (parents and non-parents alike) also point to the children's section as another problematic area. Some judge the existing footprint too small, and long for a larger area with additional furnishings and in which *all* the building's children's materials are consolidated.

Turning attention again to the exterior, a number of survey takers express a desire for a patio, porch or other creative optimization of DLPL's existing greenspace assets.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the high levels of traffic typically seen (downtown in general and the library in particular), parking is reported by many to be a perennial pain point. This is particularly true when events are in progress. ADA-conscious respondents are keen to see the assignment of one additional handicap parking spot.

What programs, events, services or other resources would you like the Library to add in the future? [Q10]

Answers to this open-ended question run the gamut. However, adult programming emerges as the clear, dominant theme. While what is already ‘on offer’ is appreciated, many residents want DLPL to not just sustain but to redouble these efforts. Specific suggestions include both education (ex. professional development, tech skills) and entertainment (ex., author readings, book clubs).

As a means to this end, some suggest exploring programmatic offerings co-sponsored by or otherwise involving community partner organizations (ex., DLCCC / Historic Holmes Theatre, Becker County Museum). Respondents are also eager to see virtual programming, even after the COVID-19 pandemic subsides and in-person events can resume at DLPL. Programming of this sort allows DLPL to approach out-of-town entertainers and educators that might otherwise be out of budgetary reach, and is an accessibility boon for patrons who lean on the LINK sites because they cannot travel to downtown Detroit Lakes with any regularity.

What about DLPL would you like to make sure is kept or maintained into the future? [Q12] How could your satisfaction with library services or resources be increased? [Q11]

Survey takers express a desire for extended building hours. Additional weekday evening hours would be particularly advantageous for would-be visitors who cannot stop by during the standard workday. Expanded weekend hours would be a boon to several groups, but particularly young families.

A noteworthy number of respondents take this opportunity to praise and advocate on behalf of the “LINK” sites operated by LARL outside of the Detroit Lakes city limits. By design, these do not offer the full suite of amenities available at DLPL. However, expanded hours and “pilot” services/event opportunities would appeal to those in these most rural parts of Becker County.

Last, survey takers take this opportunity to reiterate collection-related frustrations that first emerged in Q6. In short, the selection of e-resources on offer can be frustrating, with some genres (ex., multi-installment mystery series) and media (ex., audiobooks) representing particular pain points.

LIBRARY STRATEGIES

The logo for Library Strategies, featuring a stylized teal book icon with three pages fanning out.A grayscale photograph of a library interior. The background is filled with tall bookshelves packed with books. In the foreground, two young children are sitting on a checkered floor, engrossed in reading books. The child on the left is a boy with short dark hair, wearing a dark jacket, holding a book open. The child on the right is a girl with curly hair, wearing a light-colored shirt, also holding a book. Several other books are scattered on the floor around them.

Detroit Lakes Public Library Focus Groups | Summary Report

Purpose and Methodology. Over the week of December 7-11, 2020, Library Strategies consultants Melissa Brechon and David Katz conducted a series of focus groups with a cross-section of Becker County residents.

Detroit Lakes Public Library's project steering committee identified a list of prospective participants. The consulting team, in concert with Director Greta Guck, then winnowed this master list of approx. 55 candidates to a number of invitees appropriate to the x3 focus group slots. Ultimately, 23 community members participated in one of these 2-hour focus groups. (See the bottom of this section for a list of who took part in focus groups.)

Areas explored, and questions asked, were informed by one-on-one interviews conducted by Melissa Brechon prior to the focus group phase, and by the findings of the community survey that closed in late November.

Specifically, the consulting team scoped four areas to probe with each round table.

- Brick-and-mortar facility (strengths, shortcomings, opportunities)
- Programs and services (current offerings, emerging trends)
- Technology (current needs and use patterns, future needs and wants)
- Community (partnerships, outreach, and beyond)

Participants agreed to provide candid feedback, on the condition that specific comments not be attributed to them specifically. More to the point, only insights shared by (and/or seconded by) *multiple* people merit attention in this write-up. (Focus groups were scheduled to take a cumulative 6 hours; a list of all insights provided would be quite cumbersome, and less useful than a distillation of recurring points.)

Presentation Notes. Listed below are points that cropped up repeatedly – usually across more than one focus group. Comments are listed under the area where the discussion occurred, but some naturally straddle multiple categories. (Ex.: Tech troubleshooting came up most under “Technology,” but is in practice also a “Programs & Services” consideration.)

Quotation marks indicate phrases pulled directly from a participant. However, in most cases it is the consultants' language that is used (to better condense closely related comments into one clear bullet point).

Disclaimers: Attendee comments captured here represent shared opinions, but not necessarily *universal* ones – even within their focus group. Moreover, prevailing opinions expressed by focus group members may not always reflect the opinions or recommendations of Library Strategies.

1. Goal Area: Facility

Prompt - “The Detroit Lakes community will benefit from an inviting environment for reading, reflection, research and recreation.”

- Residents are overwhelmingly supportive of the building’s strategic location and “curb appeal.” The well preserved Carnegie façade and tastefully designed addition make the Detroit Lakes Public Library “the architectural centerpiece” of downtown. Attempts to renovate or expand the existing Library that do *not* preserve its historic character would meet with strong opposition.
- Parking is a “craps shoot.” When an event draws additional people to the Library, spots are at a premium.
- Regular users desire automatic doors at all entryways. This would be particularly advantageous for individuals with ADA needs and for parents of young children.
- Study rooms leave a lot to be desired. Demand is habitually so high that many patrons do not bother even checking on availability. (If a reservation system is in place, the particulars are not well understood.) Existing spaces are also “semi-private, at best.” Some users voiced hesitations over holding job interviews or other “official-feeling” meetings in the study rooms for this reason – even though, in theory, a public and central location like the library could be a good option for such appointments.
- DLPL’s large meeting room is too small to accommodate the audiences that higher profile programming seems to draw. A would-be attendee who is turned away at the door for capacity reasons is liable to avoid future library events.
- Ambient noise from the nearby children’s section can be heard during programs. Parents are interested in “a more closed off” children’s section, which mitigates the above noise factor but also makes it easier to monitor children. They are keen to see children’s collections consolidated in this area, as well.
- Facility’s open layout lends itself to “bustle” – a feeling of constant activity. This is not strictly a bad thing, but limits the zones where those seeking quiet read/study can do so without fear of ambient noise. In particular, the central placement of the computer lab leads to noise that bleeds into other areas of the Library.
- Teens / YA should have their own dedicated footprint within the Library, akin to the children’s area. Children’s materials should be consolidated into one area.

2. Goal Area: Programs & Services

Prompt - “Detroit Lakes Public Library will offer an adaptive suite of programs and services reflective of the community’s diverse and changing needs.”

- “Self-care” is a growing need – or arguably, a long standing need that is only recently getting the attention it has long merited. DLPL could lean into this trend, as other libraries (even in the area) are doing. This includes both active, ongoing activities (like meditation and yoga sessions) and “passive, one-off” programs (like occasional classes on mindfulness techniques).
- For a community its size, Detroit Lakes is blessed with a number of civic organizations capable of coordinating programming. Foremost among these may be the Becker County Museum and DL Community & Cultural Center. Consequently, DLPL does not need to “reinvent the wheel,” nor should it, in cases where partnerships can augment the Library’s existing programming slate. Further avenues for exploration include M State and the Detroit Lakes office of the USDA.
- Library-hosted events should be posted on community calendars as a matter of course. This includes the Chamber of Commerce, and perhaps the Detroit Lakes School District and White Earth reservation where appropriate.
- DLPL’s online programming calendar is “a fake out.” It redirects to the LARL home page – and the calendar presented there invariably skews towards Moorhead happenings.
- As a clearinghouse for information, DLPL could reciprocate and cross-list relevant partner programs on its own calendar (LARL posting restrictions notwithstanding).
- Parents crave reasons to bring their children to the library – to instill “the library habit” – beyond simply picking up or dropping off books. DLPL certainly offers some children’s programs, but is not thought of as a “gold standard” even within Lake Agassiz Regional Library. “Outside-the-box ideas,” like space camp or other interactive STEM events, would be well received.

3. Goal Area: Technology

Prompt - “The library will be innovative and anticipate changes in technology that affect library services.”

- Hoopla is a tremendous resource for streaming needs and more, but few people know about it.
- Residents can attain a DLPL library card online – another service that “appears hidden,” albeit probably unintentionally so.
- Broadband access (plus cost) remains a problem for much of the County. While the Library’s on-site amenities are somewhat helpful in this regard, *getting there* brings cost tails in the form of gas or public transit ticket. For these reasons, the mobile hotspot program should be continued, and additional devices purchased when practicable.
- Thinking again about geography, ebooks are wonderful access boon in principle. In practice, however, LARL’s online offerings leave a lot to be desired. Selections are scant in some genres, and waitlists long for many new releases. Compounding matters, the browsing and check-out interface is confusing (and can be a big detractor) to those who are not tech fluent.
- Residents with low tech fluency lean on the Library for technology assistance. DLPL, in turn, should acknowledge this need and redouble what it offers in this arena. Seniors are the obvious demographic. However, the Library’s youngest patrons are another audience to consider. Example: Students may receive a Chromecast from the school system, but this does not necessarily mean they are equipped with the skills to be successful users of that device (especially if they are from an under-resourced family that doesn’t have web-enabled devices at home).
- Databases are difficult to locate on the Library’s website.

4. Goal Area: Community

Prompt - “Detroit Lakes residents will benefit from a library that works as an active part of the community.”

- Outreach and marketing are crucial. You cannot serve a community if you’re not in constant dialogue with it. This special, consultant-led community assessment is fantastic in that regard, but some *ongoing mechanisms* are what will ensure success.
- Greta Guck has made obvious gains “in the outreach department” over her tenure as director. She is visibly the face of the library. She should do more of the same, even if it means rolling existing administrative duties into other roles.
- Returning to a key theme from Programs & Services, the DL community is home to a number of robust civic and educational organizations. Library leadership should maintain an active dialogue with each, so as to always have an eye out for potential collaboration or cross-promotion opportunities.
- If the County has any “interagency meeting of its nonprofits,” (as several focus group attendees believed to be the case,) the Library should “absolutely have a seat at that table.”
- DLPL would be wise to ruminate on what the community’s needs will be post COVID. Case in point: A year-long pandemic can cause collective traumas and disrupted communications patterns. What can a central public resource like the Library do to help residents adapt to “the new normal”?
- DLPL should prepare for continued patron interest in virtual programming post programming, and make provisions for “hybrid” programming. In this latter paradigm, events would be simulcast online in real-time and recorded for viewing after the fact.. Equal-access programming could also do much to foster a feeling of community connectedness.
- The bookmobile is sorely missed by many, and the book van/bike concepts are not seen as fully satisfactory substitutes.
- Under-resourced groups with particular need of the Library’s collections include seniors in assisted living facilities, inmates at Becker County Jail, and the White Earth reservation.

(END)