

ENVISIONING WHAT'S NEXT

Worthington Libraries
and people's lives
after the coronavirus pandemic



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INTRODUCTION

In 2018, we surveyed and interviewed members of our community about how they use the library and, in 2020, we reported on our findings in *Standing out from the Crowd* (Reuter, 2020). With the results of our research, together with more than a decade of library usage statistics, our report painted a vivid picture of Worthington Libraries as a distinctive presence in the community and in people's lives, deeply valued as a place for recreation, escape, growth and connection.

In the intervening years, a global pandemic upended people's lives and disrupted the library's ability to serve the community. We saw library usage plummet when we closed our doors and creep back up, over time, as we reopened our buildings and conditions stabilized.

From our work with the City of Worthington Community Coronavirus Task Force (2020) at the height of the pandemic, we know that a larger share of Worthington residents supported restrictions on public safety and adopted safety precautions at higher rates than those nationally. In fact, many people in Worthington reported avoiding gathering indoors or entering places like restaurants, gyms, community centers and libraries even well after restrictions ended and these establishments re-opened (City of Worthington Community Coronavirus Task Force, 2021). While Worthington residents generally fared better than the nation as a whole when it came to personal finances (City of Worthington Community Coronavirus Task Force, 2020), many people reported serious mental health struggles, especially in families (City of Worthington Community Coronavirus Task Force, 2021).

Five years on, we know from our usage statistics that people's engagement with the library has changed. Use of some services—including e-books, email reference and curbside and drive-up pickup—has increased. But decreases in usage are much more prevalent, especially among metrics reflecting our core services—such as circulation, door counts and program attendance.

For the last several years we have been left to speculate about what's behind these changes in usage. Are people in our community meeting their needs elsewhere than the library? Are people's needs going unmet? Have people's needs fundamentally changed? Are these changes in library usage permanent, or will usage eventually return to pre-pandemic levels? What actions can we take to successfully influence people's engagement with the library? By repeating our 2018 survey—with some updates—and conducting focus groups, we have gained insights into these questions and more.

This report covers the findings of a 2023 research study compared with the prior 2018 research study, allowing us to envision what's next for the library and the people in our community.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research questions

In early 2023, we set out to replicate the *Standing out from the Crowd* research study (Reuter, 2020) and update the findings following the coronavirus pandemic. We formulated the following research questions:

- What is the nature of library use among Worthington Libraries patrons?
 - How have people’s activities at the library and in the community changed since 2018?
 - How has people’s awareness of, use of and interest in library services and materials changed since 2018?
 - Are there notable demographic differences in library use?
- How have people’s lives changed since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic?
 - What underlying causes may have contributed to changes in library usage since the pandemic?

Data collection

This study uses a mixed-method sequential explanatory design, collecting quantitative data from a structured survey followed by qualitative data from focus groups (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The survey was designed to gain insight into what sorts of activities a broad swath of our patrons is undertaking, while the focus groups allowed us to probe further on how people want to use the library. We viewed the findings of this research against the backdrop of prior library research as well as nearly two decades of annual usage statistics. Triangulating both data collection methods and data sources in this way ensures the credibility of these findings by allowing for cross-checking data and interpretations (Guba, 1981).

Survey

Survey questions

The survey repeated many of the questions from the *Standing out from the Crowd* research study (Reuter, 2020), including questions about library and community activities and use of, awareness of and interest in specific library materials and services.

The demographic questions used categories developed by the U.S. Census Bureau (2021b-o) to permit direct comparison of survey results to overall population data, with some modifications when it comes to race and ethnicity and gender as noted below.

Survey questions about the impact of the pandemic were adapted from prior research conducted by Gallup (Gallup, nd; McCarthy, 2022), allowing us to benchmark our findings in Worthington against national findings to see where we align and differ. (See Appendix A to view the full survey instrument.)

Survey procedures

The survey was made available using SurveyMonkey for four weeks, from March 28 – April 24, 2023. It was open to the public for the first two weeks, from March 28 – April 10. It was then modified slightly and opened to a survey panel from April 13-24.

In order to track the performance of a variety of communication channels in reaching survey respondents, we created 17 distinct survey collectors. Across these collectors, there were 2,356 total responses to the survey.

Table 1. Survey collector summary

Collector	Total responses	Incomplete responses	Disqualified responses	Qualified responses	Qualification rate
E-newsletter	515	90	2	423	82.1%
Catalog popup	320	64	12	244	76.3%
Website popup	248	44	2	202	81.5%
Library computer homepage	583	361	79	143	24.5%
Social media	171	28	1	142	83.0%
Hold slips	85	12	2	71	83.5%
Wireless authentication screen	240	162	22	56	23.3%
Catalog notifications	57	9	2	46	80.7%
Website homepage	44	14	2	28	63.6%
City of Worthington	13	1	0	12	92.3%
Dynata survey panel	77	43	27	7	9.1%
Room reservation emails	3	0	0	3	100.0%
Notary appointment emails	0	-	-	-	-
Program registration emails	0	-	-	-	-
Wireless printing emails	0	-	-	-	-
Worthington Alliance of Black Families & Educators	0	-	-	-	-
Worthington Schools	0	-	-	-	-
Total	2,356	828	151	1,377	58.4%

About a third—828—of those responses were not completed. Because respondents in online opt-in samples misrepresent themselves to qualify for survey incentives (Bell & Gift, 2023), or provide bogus, often overly favorable, responses (Kennedy et al., 2020), we reviewed the remaining 1,528 complete responses for quality and disqualified about one-tenth—151—for several reasons.

Table 2. Survey disqualification summary

Disqualification reason	Responses
Quality (straight-lining)	81
Legitimacy (survey panel)	23
Duplicate	17
Insincerity (race and/or gender)	15
Error (household size)	15

After the quality review was complete, we were left with 1,377 complete and qualified responses. The findings presented below are based on these qualified responses. As a result of branching logic, some questions and question options had smaller numbers of respondents, including: 811 respondents who are currently employed and 445 living in households with children of any age.

Survey respondents

The survey opened with a series of demographic questions. In order to determine if our survey is representative of the population of the Worthington school district, the respondent demographics are compared with census data from the 2021 American Community Survey 5-year estimates (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021b-o). While 1-year estimates provide the most *current* data, 5-year estimates provide the most *reliable* data, especially for smaller geographies, such as the Worthington school district (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020).

Worthington and library connection

In order to see if the length of time respondents have lived in Worthington has an impact on people's activities and attitudes, we analyzed the survey results by residency tenure. Because there were so few respondents who reported having lived in the Worthington school district for less one year, for the purposes of analysis, we combined those who answered "Less than 1 year" with those who answered "1-3 years." The categories we used are: "Pandemic resident" (Less than 4 years), "Pre-pandemic resident" (4-10 years) and "Long-time resident" (More than 10 years).

Table 3. Survey respondents by residency and tenure

Worthington school district connection	Survey responses
Residents	59.1%
Less than 1 year	1.6%
1-3 years	6.2%
4-10 years	13.2%
More than 10 years	38.1%
Non-residents/unsure	40.9%

Table 4. Survey respondents by preferred library

Worthington Libraries connection	Survey responses
Worthington Libraries users	92.4%
Old Worthington Library	43.8%
Northwest Library	33.9%
Worthington Park Library	14.7%
Other library users	3.7%
Non-library users	3.9%

Age

Table 5. Survey respondents by age

Age	2021 ACS	Survey responses
18-24	8.1%	3.1%
25-34	24.1%	11.9%
35-44	20.4%	18.1%
45-54	15.6%	16.3%
55-64	13.8%	17.2%
65+	18.0%	33.4%

Race and ethnicity

The racial categories used by the federal government have been a hot topic of late. The current census form uses separate questions for reporting race and ethnicity, following a standard from 1997 (Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, 2023). In the 2020 census, “Some other race” was the second-largest racial group after “White” (Jones et al., 2021) and researchers are concerned that the current method of grouping “obscures the racial identities of many Latinx people” and “does not produce the data needed to address racial inequities” (Wang, 2023).

Earlier this year, the Biden administration proposed combining the race and ethnicity questions on the decennial census and American Community Survey, adding categories for “Hispanic or Latino” as well as “Middle Eastern or North African” to the group of five races currently in use (Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, 2023).

We pre-emptively adopted these guidelines and included all seven race and ethnicity categories in our question. While our categories cannot be precisely benchmarked against U.S. Census data, using these categories allows us to more accurately recognize the racial identities of the people in our community and potentially address any racial inequities we uncover.

Table 6. Survey respondents by race

Race	2021 ACS	Survey responses
White alone	79.5%	87.7%
Black alone	8.1%	3.3%
American Indian alone	0.2%	0.0%
Asian alone	6.9%	4.5%
Pacific Islander alone	0.0%	0.0%
Some other race alone	0.9%	
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish alone		1.5%
Middle Eastern or North African alone		0.9%
Two or more races	4.5%	2.2%

Table 7. Survey respondents by ethnicity

Hispanic origin	2021 ACS	Survey responses
Hispanic or Latino	4.1%	1.5%

Gender identity

While some sources, especially in healthcare, recommend use of multiple, detailed categories for sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) data (e.g., National LGBTQIA+ Health Education Center, 2022), guidance from the federal government is nascent at best (White House, n.d.). The American Community Survey question is “intend[ed] to capture current sex” and presents only binary male and female categories (U.S. Census Bureau, nd). The Household Pulse Survey, introduced in April 2020 to collect data on the “effects of coronavirus and other emergent issues,” began asking SOGI-related questions in July 2021, including sex assigned at birth (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022, 2023).

Our question starts from a place of recognizing gender identity, as opposed to sex. In order to strike a balance between respecting the lived gender identities of survey respondents and safeguarding respondent privacy, our gender question offered simply a third option to self-describe. When quoted below, survey respondents will be identified using the gender they supplied to describe themselves.

Table 8. Survey respondents by gender

Gender	2021 ACS	Survey responses
Female	51.7%	76.5%
Male	48.3%	22.7%
Prefer to self-describe		0.8%
Nonbinary		0.5%
Genderfluid		0.1%
Others		0.1%

Educational attainment

Table 9. Survey respondents by educational attainment

Educational attainment	2021 ACS	Survey responses
High school graduate or less	18.5%	4.9%
Some college or associate's degree	25.4%	13.4%
Bachelor's degree or higher	56.1%	81.6%

Household size and makeup

Table 10. Survey respondents by household size and makeup

Household size and makeup	2021 ACS	Survey responses
Average household size	2.53	2.58
Households with children under 18	34.7%	32.0%
Households with children 5 and under only	25.9%	21.3%
Households with children 5 and under and age 6-17	23.7%	17.0%
Households with children age 6-17 only	50.4%	61.7%
Households with adults age 60+	30.7%	48.9%

Language(s) spoken in household

Respondents to the survey reported speaking 30 unique non-English languages, about half as many spoken in the Worthington Schools for the 2022-2023 school year (Worthington Schools, n.d.). Although the census collects data on 42 non-English languages and language groups, the most recent year for which data is available at that level of detail for the Worthington school district is 2015 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015, 2021a). In order to benchmark against more recent data, we instead use the four-group language classification (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021a).

Table 11. Survey respondents by languages spoken in household

Language spoken in household	2021 ACS	Survey responses
English only	87.0%	90.3%
Spanish	3.6%	2.8%
Other Indo-European languages	3.0%	3.9%
French		1.1%
Hindi		0.9%
German		0.8%
Telugu		0.8%
Tamil		0.7%
Italian		0.2%
Bengali		0.1%
Greek		0.1%
Gujarati		0.1%
Malayalam		0.1%
Marathi		0.1%
Oriya		0.1%
Portuguese		0.1%
Russian		0.1%
Asian and Pacific Island languages	3.9%	1.9%
Chinese		1.1%
Korean		0.4%
Japanese		0.3%
Vietnamese		0.3%
Bisaya		0.1%
Tagalog		0.1%
Thai		0.1%
Turkish		0.1%
All other languages	2.5%	1.0%
Arabic		0.9%
Creole		0.2%
Berber		0.1%
Igbo		0.1%
Krio		0.1%
Somali		0.1%
Twi		0.1%

Household income

Census data on household income breaks down annual income into 10 ranges (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021g). To simplify the survey, and because we do not require that level of specificity, our

question collapsed incomes into three categories, using Keeter’s (2020) definition: “Middle income is defined here as two-thirds to double the median annual income for all panelists. Lower income is below that range; upper income falls above it.”

The median household annual income in the Worthington school district in 2021 was \$77,995 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021g). Middle income for the Worthington school district therefore is calculated as \$51,997 to \$155,900; the lower bound aligns most closely to the \$50,000 to \$74,999 income range and the upper bound aligns most closely to the \$100,000 to \$149,999 income range. Therefore, in this report, “middle income” is defined as \$50,000 to \$149,999; “low income” is below \$50,000 and “upper income” is above \$150,000.

Table 12. Survey respondents by household income

Household income	2021 ACS	Survey responses
Low income (<\$50K)	22.3%	17.1%
Middle income (\$50-150K)	52.7%	55.8%
Upper income (>\$150K)	25.1%	27.0%

Household type

Using responses to the question about number of people of various ages living in their household, we designated several household types. Two-parent families are households with any number of children and exactly two adults, age 18-59. Single-parent families are defined as households with any number of children and just one adult, age 18-59. Couples are defined as households with no children and exactly two adults. Singles are defined as households with no children and exactly one adult.

Table 13. Survey respondents by household type

Household type	2021 ACS	Survey responses
Two-parent families	26.8%	28.3%
Single-parent families	6.6%	3.4%
Couples	32.8%	33.4%
Singles	25.7%	22.1%
Other		12.8%

Because we did not include detailed questions about household makeup, we acknowledge that these definitions may not capture actual household circumstances perfectly.

Workplace

Because the pandemic brought enormous changes to the labor market and the nature of work (e.g., Parker, Horowitz & Minkin, 2022), and because those in Worthington were able to telework at much higher rates than those nationally (City of Worthington Community Coronavirus Task

Force, 2020, 2021), we wanted to determine whether place of employment influences people's activities at the library and in the community. Those respondents who answered "I am not currently employed (including retired or in school)" were labelled "not working." Those who answered "In person, at my place of employment" only, were labelled "in-person only." Those who answered "Remotely, from home" and/or "Remotely, somewhere other than home" only were labelled "remote only." Those who answered "In person" and one or more of the "Remotely" answers were labelled "hybrid."

Table 14. Survey respondents by workplace

Workplace	Survey responses
In person, at my place of employment	42%
Not working (including retired or in school)	41%
Remotely, from home	24%
Remotely, somewhere other than home	3%

COVID stance

Because we know people in Worthington took a variety of safety precautions due to prevalence of COVID-19 (City of Worthington Community Coronavirus Task Force, 2020, 2021), we wanted to determine whether level of worry related to COVID-19 influences people's activities at the library and in the community. Those respondents who said they were "very worried" or "somewhat worried" have been labelled "COVID cautious." Those who said they were "not too worried" or "not worried at all" have been labelled "COVID comfortable."

Table 15. Survey respondents by COVID stance

COVID stance	Survey responses
COVID cautious	31%
Very worried	3%
Somewhat worried	28%
COVID comfortable	69%
Not too worried	46%
Not worried at all	23%

Responses to each question of the survey were analyzed by each of the subgroups outlined above to identify notable demographic differences in responses.

Focus groups

We worked with Grindle Marketing to conduct focus groups to gain greater insights into people's attitudes toward the library and possible future initiatives. (See Appendix D for Grindle Marketing's full report on the focus groups.)

Focus group questions

Based on preliminary analysis of the survey, we identified three major areas we wanted Grindle Marketing to probe further on in the focus groups:

- Library hours
In addition to being open longer on Sundays, would people use the Library later on Friday and Saturday evenings? Do we need to open at 9am during the week?
- Library building usage
What do people like/enjoy about the Library? What's lacking in our space? What amenities would make the Library more appealing? (More meeting spaces? Access to technology? Coffee? Space to craft? Play spaces?)
- Library funding
What is the community tolerance for funding large-scale capital improvements to make the libraries more modern, flexible and better positioned to serve the community in the future?

Focus group procedures

Focus groups were conducted at Old Worthington Library in the Owl Meeting Room by Grindle Marketing. Two focus groups each were conducted on the evenings of July 10 and July 13, 2023, from 6:00-7:30pm and 8:00-9:30pm.

Video equipment was used to stream the focus groups via Zoom. Some members of the Board of Trustees and library administration and management gathered in the library director's office to view the focus groups, while others viewed the focus groups remotely. Grindle Marketing staff also viewed the focus groups remotely for note-taking purposes.

At the start of the focus groups, participants were asked to introduce themselves, sharing where they live, which library they use and basic details about their households. Following introductions, participants were asked to reflect on a series of prompts:

1. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear Worthington Libraries?
2. Why do you typically visit the library? What's the typical reason?
3. What are some of the resources you access?
4. Nearly every time I visit a Worthington library, I...
5. I wish the Worthington Libraries had...
6. I would switch to another library if Worthington Libraries stopped offering...
7. Worthington Libraries would be more appealing to me if they offered...
8. What times do you typically come to the library?
9. If the library opened on Sunday morning, would you come at that time?
10. If the library opened Friday and Saturday evenings, would you come at that time?

11. What are your thoughts about modernizing and updating the buildings to keep up with what's happening elsewhere in the community?

At the conclusion of the focus groups, participants were paid \$75.

Focus group participants

The survey identified 652 respondents who opted in to participate in focus groups. We limited this group to 392 who reported that they are residents of the Worthington school district.

Because we wanted to gauge differences between people with differing levels of library engagement, we calculated an engagement score for each survey respondent. We assigned scores based on the timescale answers to the 20 library activity questions. For each respondent, each response of "In the last week" was assigned 5 points, "In the last month" 4 points, "In the last six months" 3 points, "In the last year" 2 points, "More than 1 year ago" 1 point and "Never" and "Not sure" 0 points. With 20 total library activities, possible total scores could range from 0 to 100. After calculating a total score for each respondent, the actual range was 0 to 100. Using Excel, the mean score was calculated to be 52 with a standard deviation of 16.

Respondents scoring one standard deviation above (> 68) and below (< 36) the mean were designated as high library engagement and low library engagement, respectively. Those within one standard deviation of the mean (≤ 68 and ≥ 36) were initially designated as average library engagement. This resulted in 63 high library engagement candidates, but just 31 low library engagement candidates. In order to bring in more candidates on the lower engagement side, the list was expanded to include those who scored between 36 and 40, resulting in an additional 36 candidates designated as having low average library engagement. In all, this narrowed the group further to 130.

Members of library administration then vetted the list and identified nine individuals with strong associations with the library, such as former library staff members or current and former members of the Friends Board of Directors. These individuals were disqualified from participating in the focus groups. We shared a final list of 121 individuals with Grindle Marketing to recruit and schedule the participants.

According to Grindle Marketing Communications (2023), "Library engagement was the only criterion used to screen participants in the sessions" (p. 1). A total of 41 people participated in four focus group sessions, 21 people in two low-engagement sessions and 20 people in two high-engagement sessions. Because focus group participants were recruited from among survey respondents, we have full demographic details for each participant.

Residency tenure

Table 16. Focus group participants by residency tenure

Worthington school district residency tenure	Low engagement	High engagement	Total
Less than 1 year	1	-	1
1-3 years	-	5	5
4-10 years	2	6	8
More than 10 years	18	9	27

Primary library

Table 17. Focus group participants by preferred library

Library	Low engagement	High engagement	Total
Old Worthington Library	9	8	17
Northwest Library	5	8	13
Worthington Park Library	4	4	8
Non-user	3	-	3

Age

Table 18. Focus group participants by age

Age	Low engagement	High engagement	Total
18-24	1	-	1
25-34	-	5	5
35-44	1	6	7
45-54	3	6	9
55-64	10	-	10
65+	6	3	9

Race

Table 19. Focus group participants by race

Race	Low engagement	High engagement	Total
White alone	20	17	37
Black alone	-	1	1
American Indian alone	-	-	-
Asian alone	1	-	1
Some other race alone	-	-	-
Two or more races	-	2	2

Gender identity

Table 20. Focus group participants by gender

Gender	Low engagement	High engagement	Total
Female	15	16	31
Male	6	4	10
Prefer to self-describe	-	-	-

Educational attainment

Table 21. Focus group participants by educational attainment

Educational attainment	Low engagement	High engagement	Total
High school graduate or less	-	-	-
Some college or associate's degree	1	1	2
Bachelor's degree or higher	20	19	39

Household size and makeup

Table 22. Focus group participants by household size and makeup

Household size and makeup	Low engagement	High engagement	Total
Average household size	2.05	3.40	2.71
Households with children under 18	3	14	17
Households with adults 60+	13	6	19

Language(s) spoken in household

Table 23. Focus group participants by languages spoken in household

Language spoken in household	Low engagement	High engagement	Total
English only	19	17	36
Spanish	1	1	2
Other Indo-European languages	-	1	1
Asian and Pacific Island languages	1	1	2
All other languages	-	-	-

Household income

Table 24. Focus group participants by household income

Income level	Low engagement	High engagement	Total
Low income	4	4	8
Middle income	11	13	24
High income	6	3	9

Workplace

Table 25. Focus group participants by workplace

Workplace	Low engagement	High engagement	Total
Not working	11	6	17
In person only	4	8	12
Remote only	4	5	9
Hybrid	2	1	3

COVID stance

Table 26. Focus group participants by COVID stance

COVID stance	Low engagement	High engagement	Total
Cautious	5	8	13
Comfortable	16	12	28

Data analysis

Survey analysis

Immediately upon conclusion of the survey, we exported the complete survey results from SurveyMonkey in XLS format for further analysis. For the first series of activity questions, library staff used Microsoft Excel to calculate the percentage of respondents who said they had completed each activity in the specified timeframes.

We then further calculated the percentages of respondents who said they had completed each activity in the specified timeframes by demographic subgroups (residency, preferred library, gender, age, race, language spoken, educational attainment, income level, household type, workplace and COVID stance). We produced diverging bar charts color coded by timeframe to visualize differences in rates of usage across the different groupings.

Using the procedure developed to calculate engagement scores for focus group recruitment, average engagement scores were calculated per demographic subgroup, including overall engagement as well as separate engagement scores for library and community activities and in-person and online activities. We produced a heatmap to visualize differences in average engagement scores across the different groupings.

For the series of library services questions, library staff used Excel to calculate the percentage of respondents who indicated awareness of, interest in and usage of each service. We likewise calculated the percentages by demographic groupings. We used conditional formatting in data tables to produce heatmaps to visualize differences in response rates for different services and among different groups.

For the remaining questions, we produced bar charts, diverging bar charts and heatmaps to visualize the survey results.

Finally, we combined the data from our previous survey with the current data to produce several charts examining the 2018-2023 differences. We produced diverging bar charts, calculating the change from 2018 to 2023. We also used small multiple charts to plot each data series in line charts to visualize shifting patterns over time (cf. Bell, 2018).

Open-ended questions

Respondents who reported that their library use was not back to normal were asked an open-ended follow-up question to understand what about their library use had changed and what it would take—if anything—for their library usage to return to pre-pandemic patterns.

We received a total of 237 responses to the open-ended questions. After analysis, 24 responses that lacked substantive feedback were discarded, resulting in 213 qualified responses. These qualified responses were first analyzed inductively and a coding scheme of changes in library use was developed. Qualified responses were next analyzed for mentions of library activities, library services and other key themes. The number of times each code was mentioned by a respondent was tallied in order to identify the themes, activities and services that were most prominent. (See Appendix C for full details on the open-ended question coding schemes and tallies.)

Comments from the open-ended survey will be interspersed throughout this report to provide context and color to the findings of this research.

Focus group analysis

Grindle Marketing Communications shared its *Library User Focus Group Report* 10 days after the focus groups concluded. The report shares several “Core Topic Takeaways” with extensive quotes from participants to “help illustrate insights” (p. 1). Library staff observing the focus groups in real-time also took notes. Insights and quotes from both the report and staff notes will also be included throughout this report.

Prior research

This study replicates the *Standing out from the Crowd* research study, with key research questions focused on how behaviors and attitudes of people in Worthington may have changed in the last five years. For the questions about library and community activities and use of, awareness of and interest in specific library materials and services, we present the corresponding results from 2018 and 2023 and calculate the difference.

Usage statistics

As we did in *Standing Out from the Crowd*, we present historical usage statistics to provide additional context for various library activities. Statistics are available for different time periods for different activities. For instance, downloadable materials only became available in large numbers around 2010. And we gained the capability to track different types of circulation only after our change to a new Integrated Library System in 2013. Statistics will be tracked back as far as 2006, or back to the furthest date available, as indicated. A sparkline is included to visualize the overall trend over time. We also calculate the pandemic change, typically the difference in annual usage from 2019 to 2022; exceptions will be indicated.

Limitations of the study

Despite deploying the survey across a wide variety of channels, offering incentives and working with a survey panel provider, we fell short of our goal to reach a representatively diverse sample of Worthington school district residents.

Those who are older, female, White, college-educated and English-speaking are over-represented among the survey respondents. The survey respondents do not represent the population of the Worthington school district in some key aspects, namely age, gender, race, educational attainment level and language. When reviewing the total responses, we can have confidence that the results represent those groups in the majority, but the perspectives of those in groups who responded in lower numbers may not be adequately represented.

Breaking down the responses by demographic subgroup ought to offer more reliable insights for those subgroups. However, low response rates among some demographic subgroups mean the margin of error is higher for those subgroups and results may not be reliable; any subgroup with a margin of error higher than $\pm 8\%$ is of particular concern. Therefore, findings reported for these subgroups are suggestive only: 18-24-year-olds; people who are Black, Asian, Hispanic or Middle Eastern or North African; multiracial people; speakers of languages other than English; people with

a high-school education; and single-parent families. In the data charts below, these groups will be marked with a flag (⚠) as a reminder to take caution when interpreting the results.

Table 27. Survey margins of error by subgroup

Subgroup	2021 population (N)	Survey responses (n)	Margin of error (confidence level = 95%)
Worthington connection			
Worthington school district residents (age 18+)	51,669	814	±3%
Worthington school district households	27,366		
Age			
18-24 ⚠	4,174	42	±15%
25-34	12,475	164	±8%
35-44	10,537	249	±6%
45-54	8,033	225	±6%
55-64	7,143	237	±6%
65+	9,307	460	±4%
Gender			
Female (age 18+)	26,705	1,053	±3%
Male (age 18+)	24,964	313	±6%
Race			
White only (age 18+)	41,053	1,207	±3%
Black only (age 18+) ⚠	4,201	45	±15%
Asian only (age 18+) ⚠	3,570	62	±12%
Some other race only (age 18+) ⚠	454	33	±16%
Two or more races (age 18+) ⚠	2,303	30	±18%
Hispanic origin			
Hispanic or Latino (age 18+) ⚠	2,128	21	±21%
Educational attainment			
High school graduate or less ⚠	9,574	68	±12%
Some college or associate's degree	13,105	185	±7%
Bachelor's degree or higher	28,990	1,124	±3%
Language spoken in household			
English only	55,804	1,244	±3%
Spanish ⚠	2,293	39	±16%
Other Indo-European languages ⚠	1,951	54	±13%
Asian and Pacific Island languages ⚠	2,520	26	±19%
Other languages ⚠	1,592	14	±26%

Subgroup	2021 population (N)	Survey responses (n)	Margin of error (confidence level = 95%)
Household income			
Low income (<\$50K)	6,103	236	±6%
Middle income (\$50-150K)	14,422	769	±3%
Upper income (>\$150K)	6,869	372	±5%
Household type			
Two-parent families	7,346	390	±5%
Single-parent families [Ⓜ]	1,797	47	±14%
Couples	8,979	460	±4%
Singles	7,029	304	±5%

The recruiting strategy for the focus groups considered only library engagement levels and did not attempt to represent overall community demographics. Focus group participants were similarly lacking in diversity when it comes to age, race, language, educational attainment and income.

Because of Worthington’s relative demographic uniformity, representing the perspectives of smaller subgroups in survey research will always be a challenge. At the response rates we typically observe with library surveys, even if we were to achieve a representative sample of the overall population of the school district, the number of responses for most subgroups still would not be high enough to support reliable findings.

In order to address this limitation, future research could include focused surveys of subpopulations of interest. Such surveys would require an additional pre-screening step to identify people who are members of the groups from random addresses or phone numbers. However:

The smaller the group is, the more screening interviews will be necessary to identify members of the group... On top of that, not everyone who is invited to take a survey actually responds to it, so the number of addresses or phone numbers needed to identify a single member of the group grows even larger, as do data collection costs (Brown, 2023).

More cost-effective methods might involve organization lists and network sampling, i.e., identifying organizations and individuals who are members of the subpopulations of interest and asking them to help recruit respondents. We might also evaluate whether a local survey panel, such as the American Population Panel at the Ohio State University, would help us reach respondents outside of our own network.

FINDINGS

Library and community activities

The bulk of the current survey repeated questions from the previous survey about how frequently people undertook a variety of matched activities at the library and elsewhere in the community. The findings around library and community activities will be presented in order of prominence, with the library activities that were undertaken by the most people discussed first. Where available, related usage statistics will be shared for additional context. To convey the perspectives of our patrons in their own words, we will include direct quotes from the open-ended survey questions and focus groups with attribution by race, gender, age range and preferred library.

Borrowing

When we look at the top library activities (Appendix B, Figure 3), the top five services have to do with borrowing: checked out items; used the library catalog; picked up reserved items; managed library account; and, browsed the shelves. The vast majority (>85%) of respondents undertook each of these activities in the last year. In fact, more than half (>55%) did so in the last week (Appendix B, Figure 3). Across the board, larger shares of people undertook these activities at the library than at their counterparts elsewhere in the community.



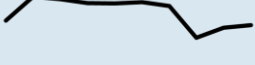
Table 28. Survey respondents undertaking borrowing activities in the last year at the library and elsewhere, 2018-2023

Activity	Library			Elsewhere		
	2018	▼2023	Δ	2018	2023	Δ
Checked out items	97%	93%	-4%	25%	14%	-11%
Browsed online	95%	89%	-6%	87%	87%	0%
Picked up items	94%	89%	-6%	65%	78%	+13%
Account management	90%	86%	-3%	85%	92%	+7%
Browsed in person	93%	86%	-7%	81%	71%	-10%

As we have put it repeatedly: borrowing is our brand. Not even a global pandemic changed that.

Although annual first-time circulation is down by more than one-third (-36%) from 2019 to 2022, when comparing the differences in the 2018 and 2023 survey responses to the borrowing questions (Appendix B, Figure 18), borrowing activities fall in middle of the pack, with only modest decreases of just 3-7%.

Table 29. Library circulation statistics, 2013-2022

Statistic	Sparkline, 2013-2022	Pandemic change (2019-2022)
Browse circulation		-42%
Hold circulation		-24%
Total first-time circulation		-36%

When focus group participants talked about the typical reason they visit the library, most of them mentioned the collection, some practically in awe of the breadth of material available to them, using words like “incredible” and “amazing.”

There's 23 [sic] other libraries. So, when I go online to get a book, I'm not just looking at this place. I'm looking at 23 [sic] libraries' worth of books.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 65+, WPK

The availability is incredible. You don't wait, and the variety of things is just amazing.

— Focus group participant, White male, age 55-64, OWL

They have a lot of material here, and if they don't have it, somebody else does... And then having the SearchOhio and the OhioLINK and all of that available - I just returned a book I got from Kent State.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 25-34, OWL

If you can't find it, they'll find it for you. I once got an interlibrary loan from Utah.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 25-34, NWL

The most amazing thing is I'm sitting with book club today at lunch, and I got on to reserve the book I needed and can see when it's going to be ready. And I did that right from my phone, ready to go. And that's not even on the app; I just searched on Google.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 55-64, OWL

When elaborating on their typical visits to the library, focus group participants described picking up reserved books, often as their first stop. Browsing the “Get Lucky” shelves was frequently a next step.

The first thing I do is I walk over to the holds section, grab the 3 to 6 things that I have there. And then I start making the rounds. I hit the Get Lucky next, then I work my way over to the new audiobooks and look at everything there. Then I go get the books coming out next month, go reserve them, take the things with me over to the

computer and I type them all in. I work around the entire place. I have a pattern.

— Focus group participant, Black female, age 65+, NWL

I wouldn't use the library as much as I do if the reserve system weren't there. It's convenient, you can pop in.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 45-54, WPK

When I come to the library, it's to pick up reserves or drop them off once I complete them.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 65+, WPK

Most of my interactions in the last ten years have been, "Let's reserve something and pick it up."

— Focus group participant, White female, age 55-64, OWL

Besides the reserve system, that there's such a good collection of books.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 55-64, NWL

I pick up my reserves, the Get Lucky is one of my favorites

— Focus group participant, Asian female, age 18-24, NWL

I get my reserves and go straight to the Get Lucky section and then wander through the stacks.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 35-44, NWL

Always have to check the Get Lucky shelf.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 25-34, WPK

Even survey respondents who acknowledge limiting their use of the library still mention reserving books.

I go in to pick up reserved books and leave right away.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 25-34, WPK

I tend to use the drive up pickup and return lane and reserve items online

— Survey respondent, Asian female, age 35-44, NWL

I still reserve books online and pick them up at the drive through window.

— Survey respondent, White male, age 65+, NWL

I mainly order books online and pick them up at the library

— Survey respondent, White female, age 55-64, OWL

In summary, although first-time circulation is down following the pandemic, both reserving and picking up books as well as browsing for books in person are still central to the library experience for most people. People are in awe of the range of items available and the ease with which they can access them.

Facility use


As in our previous research, people count on the library as a destination. While the top five library activities among survey participants were related to borrowing, the next two activities—planned a visit and stayed 30 minutes—are about facility use (Appendix B, Figure 3). Even with the disruption of the pandemic, the overwhelming majority of survey respondents (81%) have spent time at the library in the last year.

Table 30. Survey respondents undertaking facility use activities in the last year at the library and elsewhere, 2018-2023

Activity	Library			Elsewhere		
	2018	▼2023	Δ	2018	2023	Δ
Planned a visit	82%	83%	+1%	98%	97%	0%
Stayed 30 minutes	87%	81%	-6%	88%	84%	-4%

Nevertheless, a smaller share of respondents reported spending time at the library in 2023 than in 2018 (-6%), also reflected in our usage statistics. Door counts are down by one-third from 2019 to 2022.

Table 31. Library door count statistics, 2013-2022

Statistic	Sparkline, 2006-2022	Pandemic change (2019-2022)
Door counts ¹		-33%

When we compare the response to the question about spending 30 minutes at the library, we see a similar difference (-4%) in the respondents reporting spending time elsewhere, such as at a restaurant or coffee shop.

In the focus groups, when people talked about visiting the library they often described moving through the space to browse the collection: “wandering” and “perusing” or “making the rounds.” Some describe their library use as habitual.

I get my reserves and go straight to the Get Lucky section and then wander through the stacks.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 35-44, NWL

I go to straight to reserves and then on downstairs to pick up my print jobs and then wander around.

— Focus group participant, White male, age 65+, OWL

¹ The 2019 door counts have been adjusted down by 47.8% when calculating the pandemic change to account for differences in after new door count technology was introduced in June 2020; the sparkline includes original, unadjusted door count data for 2006-2020.

I return books then peruse new books and staff recommendations and then check out.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 65+, WPK

I start making the rounds... I work around the entire place. I have a pattern.

— Focus group participant, Black female, age 65+, NWL

When describing the library space, people praise the aesthetic experience, painting a picture of a comfortable, relaxed, welcoming and even homelike atmosphere, free from commercial pressure.

I like that this feels cozy, that there's brick... that is the aesthetic that I want from the library.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 25-34, WPK

Old fashioned library feel, but with newer updates. It's comfortable; it's welcoming. It's a second home.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 65+, OWL

The space at the Park location makes it feel like a second home. My oldest daughter asked to live there. She's like, "Mommy, I will bring my pillow. This is my home now."

— Focus group participant, White female, age 25-34, WPK

It's a nice pace; no one's in a hurry. No one's being rude. It's just like welcoming and nice to kids. It's just got a good vibe about it.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 35-44, OWL

Sometimes I'll just want to escape from the home or the rat race or life in general. And I'll come in, and I won't have anything in mind... I'll browse a section of interest and pick up a book and go off into a cubbyhole or a couch or just hide and read.

— Focus group participant, White male, age 55-64, NWL

It's relaxation for me, it's a quiet, serene place to go to get lost in whatever you're doing; you can relax and forget the outside world that's so crazy sometimes; it's a place for refuge—peace is the word.

— Focus group participant, White male, age 55-64, NWL

The library is one of the few places that brings me comfort, familiarity

— Survey respondent, White female, age 65+, OWL

A nice, quiet, peaceful place for me to come and ponder and think and explore

— Focus group participant, White male, age 65+, non-user

The physical building... [the pandemic] got me thinking, "What if they decide to just do online reserves and book locker pickup?" I started to panic. I was like, "Oh, no, I need the building. I need to walk in and sit by the fireplace in the fall."

— Focus group participant, White female, age 35-44, NWL

It's really nice to go there and have a quiet place and not worry about having to buy another coffee.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 65+, NWL

There's not a lot of places that you can go for free with no expectations to do something or buy something.

— Focus group participant, White male, age 25-34, OWL

At the same time, people appreciate the sense of connection and community—"alone together" as we put it in 2020—they find at the library, especially coming out of the social isolation of the pandemic.

I come to read, but it's also to physically be around people. I live alone, so just to be around people, especially during a pandemic, is very difficult. So, coming to a place where there's people, it's not necessarily that I have to interact with them, but it's just nice to know that they're around.

— Focus group participant, White male, age 45-54, NWL

It's a change of scenery. I'm retired, and I get tired of my walls at home. So, it's an opportunity for me to change my environment, see some different sights. I enjoy seeing the kids running around in the library... it's always rejuvenating to watch them.

— Focus group participant, White male, age 65+, non-user

To go to a community where people don't look at you and go, "What's wrong with you?" because you like reading, you like academia, you like books, you like having a resource to things that help enrich your brain... Having that shared mindset is what I appreciate the most.

— Focus group participant, multiracial female, age 45-54, WPK

It's just wonderful, and it's welcoming to everyone. And it's nice to walk in with kids, and they see different people, and they see that everybody's being kind to one another. It's a wonderful place for children to be."

— Focus group participant, White female, age 35-44, non-user

I miss the sense of community the library used to offer. Most of this is due to friends / colleagues no longer using the library... could we have ... other consistent social groups that participants could enroll in?

— Survey respondent, multiracial female, age 25-34, WPK

People also highlight the value of our library's outdoor spaces, which they came to appreciate during the pandemic.

Love and appreciate the programs in the NW library backyard even though our closest library is Old Worthington. Would like to see some outdoor spaces at OWL utilized, such as the amphitheater, picnic tables out back, and area near the statue.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 45-54, OWL

[A sensory garden] could open up lots of doors... I think [the outdoor space] could be utilized better. Any time I see dead space, I just get like, "Why is it just sitting there?" Just make reasons to use it, but also dress it up with more attention.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 35-44, OWL

I wish that this library [Old Worthington] used their outdoor space for children's programming. They built that new sculpture garden but don't seem to use it a lot.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 35-44, WPK

However, survey respondents asked about how their library use changed frequently acknowledge spending less time in the library.

I ... used to "hang out" in the library more than I do now; I tend not to go there unless I have a specific purpose now.

— Survey respondent, White male, age 55-64, OWL

I don't spend as much time in the library. I go in to pick up reserved books and leave right away. I don't spend as much time browsing.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 25-34, WPK

I tend to use pick-up services instead of going and looking in person as often.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 18-24, OWL

Spend less time browsing in-person than before; less likely to attend library events than before.

— Survey respondent, White male, age 35-44, OWL

In summary, just as we found in 2018, the library is valued as a comfortable and welcoming place to relax. After a time of isolation, some people appreciate finding community among other library visitors. Others are still wary about lingering at the library due to continued concerns about illness.

Research and recommendations

Only about half (55%) of respondents said they researched a topic at the library in the last year, which was down by 13%—the largest decrease among library activities in the survey—from 2018 to 2023. Two-thirds of respondents said they talked to a librarian, a decrease of 9% from 2018 to 2023. 61% of respondents said they looked for reading recommendations at the library, a decrease of 10% from 2018.




Table 32. Survey respondents undertaking research and recommendation activities in the last year at the library and elsewhere, 2018-2023

Activity	Library			Elsewhere		
	2018	▼2023	Δ	2018	2023	Δ
In-person reference	76%	67%	-9%	91%	94%	+3%
Reading recommendations	71%	61%	-10%	86%	90%	+4%
Researched a topic	68%	55%	-13%	99%	99%	0%
Online reference	24%	27%	+4%	50%	52%	+2%

In contrast, virtually everyone searches online about an interest (99%), gets information from family, friends and neighbors (94%) and looks for reading recommendations online (90%), with the latter two showing modest increases (3-4%) from 2018 to 2023.

Usage statistics show that reference transactions had been on the decline for more than 10 years prior to the pandemic. In the survey, just one library reference service saw an increase. The share of people who contacted the library for help by email did grow a modest amount, with a 4% increase in people who said they had undertaken this activity in the last year. Indeed, annual email reference transactions more than doubled (107%) from 2019 to 2022, with a distinct peak at the height of the pandemic. Telephone reference calls also doubled (115%) in the same period.

Table 33. Library reference statistics, 2006-2022

Statistic	Sparkline, 2006-2022	Pandemic change (2019-2022)
Reference transactions		-39%
Telephone reference calls		+115%
Email reference transactions		+107%

Email and telephone reference never came up in the focus groups or in response to the open-ended survey question, but several focus group participants spoke of how highly they value library staff.

If I came in and there weren't librarians, if there weren't people to talk to. For me to come in and speak to someone one-on-one, that's important.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 35-44, non-user

It's a great staff. They... give you lots of different recommendations, and they're very friendly, and they're very resourceful.

— Focus group participant, Black female, age 65+, NWL

I was thinking about AI and how it's taking away a lot of jobs... So, librarians are where I went as well because it's nice to have that in-person resource that you can have a conversation with instead of answering a question based off of previous intelligence.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 35-44, NWL

I'm comfortable doing most searches, but when I'm stuck, I'm stuck. [The librarians] come up with an alternative.

— Focus group participant, White male, age 65+, OWL

The librarians are great for helping find books.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 35-44, NWL

However, when asked how they would feel about visiting the library with lower levels of staffing, people shared that reference service isn't necessarily essential.

In that context, I don't think I'd need the reference librarians and things like that.

— Focus group participant, White male, age 45-54, NWL

I don't ask librarians much very often. I don't know that I would even notice if they weren't as staffed.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 45-54, OWL

In summary, just as we saw in 2018, library staff are perceived as reliably helpful, but in-person reference and reader's advisory are limited and have declined steeply since the pandemic. Remote options for reference, while still limited, have seen small, but so far sustained increases in usage.

Programs and events



Just as we found in 2018, respondents search for and attend programs at higher rates elsewhere than at the library. While the share of respondents who said they had searched for or attended programs elsewhere in the last year was virtually unchanged from 2018 to 2023 (-1%), there was a drop in both when it comes to the library. Those who said they had attended a program at the library in the last year dropped by 9%, and those who searched for programs by 5%.

Table 34. Survey respondents undertaking program and event activities in the last year at the library and elsewhere, 2018-2023

Activity	Library			Elsewhere		
	2018	▼2023	Δ	2018	2023	Δ
Searched for programs	75%	70%	-5%	96%	95%	-1%
Attended program	50%	40%	-9%	78%	77%	-1%

Our usage statistics bear this pattern out. Although the number of programs the library offers is down by about half (51%) from 2019 to 2022, program attendance is down by nearly two-thirds (62%).

Table 35. Library program statistics, 2006-2022

Statistic	Sparkline, 2006-2022	Pandemic change (2019-2022)
Number of programs offered		-51%
Program attendance		-62%

Put another way, on average, fewer people attended each program in 2022 than in 2019: average attendance per program was 36 in 2019 and 27 in 2022.

Table 36. Average annual attendees per program, 2019-2022

Statistic	2019	2022
Total programs offered	1,884	929
Total program attendance	67,216	25,449
Average attendees per program	36	27

When asked why they typically visit the library, only one focus group participant mentioned programs.

A lot of times, a preplanned activity at the library will drive my daughter and me to go. And, of course, there's tons of those. Like a story reading, or sometimes they'll have animals in... So that type of stuff will drive us to go.

— Focus group participant, White male, age 45-54, WPK

Several survey respondents acknowledged that they avoid library programs, due to crowds.

I no longer attend crowded indoor events held in the library meeting rooms.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 35-44, WPK

I don't have the tolerance for large groups, like busy library programs, that I used to.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 35-44, OWL

less likely to attend library events than before.

— Survey respondent, White male, age 35-44, OWL

Programs were mainly a topic of brainstorming among focus group participants, when asked what they wish the library offered.

More teen programming. After school, they're sometimes discouraged from coming.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 45-54, OWL

Crafts dabbler classes. Not a huge, seven-week quilt class, but like, "Here's a basic cross-stitch thing, and this is how you do this."

— Focus group participant, White female, age 25-34, OWL

Book clubs are a huge missed opportunity. You have this incredible library system with very bookish people; you have new book releases, and you're in tune with what's being published... book people are craving other book people.... Even if it becomes community-centered, there has to be a way for the library to facilitate book people getting together to do book clubs.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 35-44, NWL

However, people sometimes revealed their lack of awareness about library programs.

Before everything shut down, they were doing a cookbook club [at Northwest]. You'd get a cookbook, you could try it, and when you met, everybody brought their favorite recipe from that book... It got scrapped after the first one.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 25-34, NWL

In actuality, with the exception of a five-month period when the library was closed at the start of the pandemic, Let's Dish: A Cookbook Club has been offered every month since it debuted in 2018. In fact, it was one of the library's very first programs to return, adapted for an online format in August 2020. Through the remainder of 2020 and the entirety of 2021, Let's Dish was offered monthly online or outdoors. By the time of the focus groups, Let's Dish had been offered in person for more than a year; new dates are already planned through 2024.

In summary, as in 2018, programs and events are not central to most people's library use. Library programs and events are just one of many other options in the community for activities. The enthusiasm people express when discussing library programs does not always line up with their behavior. As with facility use, some people remain wary of spending time among gatherings of people, such as library programs and events.

Technology and office services

The share of respondents who reported using a library computer in the last year dropped by 10% from 2018 to 2023.








Table 37. Survey respondents undertaking technology and office service activities in the last year at the library and elsewhere, 2018-2023

Activity	Library			Elsewhere		
	2018	▼2023	Δ	2018	2023	Δ
Used wireless	50%	48%	-2%	79%	72%	-7%
Used computers	53%	44%	-10%	4%	4%	0%
Used copier/printer/fax/scanner	33%	39%	+6%	41%	36%	-5%

Usage statistics show that computer sessions had been on the decline for more than 10 years prior to the pandemic. Comparing 2019 to 2022, computer sessions are down by more than half (-57%). Census data suggest that Worthington residents don't need to rely on the library for computer and internet access, with 98% of households owning at least one computing device and 96% with an internet subscription (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021p). What's more, Worthington

Schools became a 1:1 technology district in 2021, with every student issued a Chromebook (Bowers, 2021), further reducing the reliance on the library for computer access.

Table 38. Library technology and office service statistics, 2007-2022

Statistic	Sparkline, 2007-2022	Pandemic change (2019-2022)
Wireless sessions		-18%
Computer sessions		-57%
Scan jobs		-16%
Fax jobs		-50%
Wireless print jobs		+348%
Library print jobs		+22%
Total print jobs		+37%

When asked what amenities they use at the library, focus group participants mentioned wireless and computers only in passing.

Usually use the Wi-Fi, and sometimes use the computers, but I usually have my own.

— Focus group participant, White male, age 45-54, NWL

Computers came up in the open-ended survey responses as something that felt risky to do after the pandemic.

I used to use the computers for your online database... I am cautious about touching surfaces [and] the keyboards.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 65+, NWL

In contrast, the share of people who used a copier, printer, scanner or fax at the library is up 6% from 2018 to 2023. Comparing usage statistics from 2019 to 2022, print jobs increased by 37%, driven largely by wireless printing. A relatively niche service before the pandemic, wireless printing was one of a few services we were able to offer even with our doors closed. Further, since we weren't able to accept contact-free payment, we began offering wireless printing free of charge at the height of the pandemic. Post-pandemic, we extended free printing indefinitely. As a result, from 2019 to 2022, wireless printing grew more than fourfold (348%)!

Looking outside the library, in 2018, a larger share of people had used office services elsewhere than the library (41% vs. 33%), but in this survey that trend reversed (36% vs. 39%).

Office services came up with focus group participants as well as survey respondents.

Free printing is a godsend. We queue it up over wireless and walk over. Please don't ever change any of this!

— Focus group participant, White female, age 35-44, NWL

Finances are tighter, so I take advantage of culture passes and free printing.

— Survey respondent, Asian female, age 25-34, WPK

I've used a scanner for a project.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 45-54, OWL

I copy and scan to PDF. There's the ability to fax documents.

— Focus group participant, White male, age 65+, OWL

In summary, already on the decline in 2018, people are relying even less on the library for computer and internet access today. Of our office services, printing has shown explosive growth, driven largely by its affordability now that we no longer charge.

Digital and online services



Compared to five years ago, the share of people who said they downloaded digital media at the library in the last year is up 5%.

Table 39. Survey respondents undertaking digital and online services activities in the last year at the library and elsewhere, 2018-2023

Activity	Library			Elsewhere		
	2018	▼2023	Δ	2018	2023	Δ
Downloaded media	52%	57%	+5%	76%	88%	+11%
Used subscription resource	49%	48%	-1%	70%	73%	+3%


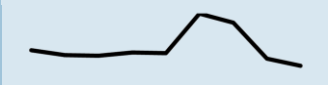

Although digital circulation had plateaued—and even dipped—just prior to the pandemic, it increased by one-third (32%) from 2019 to 2022.

Table 40. Library digital and online services statistics, 2009-2022

Statistic	Sparkline, 2009-2022	Pandemic change (2019-2022)
Digital circulation		+32%
Database clicks		+11%

With the decrease in circulation of physical materials and the increase in digital circulation, it's useful to drill down on the relationship among circulation types during this time period. If we look at circulation by type—browse (i.e., items pulled in person from the shelves), hold (i.e., items requested online from the catalog) and digital—we see a distinct difference before and after the pandemic. In the years prior to the pandemic (2015-2019), digital circulation hovered just below a quarter of all circulation (20-24%). During the height of the pandemic in 2020 when the library closed, it grew to nearly half (48%) of all circulation. After the library re-opened in 2021, digital circulation dropped to about one-third (36%) of all circulation. However, in 2022, the share of digital circulation began to climb once again, up to 39%. That growth is on track to continue in 2023, at 41% of total circulation for the first nine months of the year.

Table 41. Circulation proportion by type, 2015-2023 YTD

Year	Browse circulation % of total circulation	Hold circulation % of total circulation	Digital circulation % of total circulation
2015-2023 YTD			
2015	56%	25%	20%
2016	53%	24%	23%
2017	53%	24%	24%
2018	55%	24%	20%
2019	53%	24%	23%
2020	20%	32%	48%
2021	34%	30%	36%
2022	38%	23%	39%
2023 YTD	37%	21%	41%

Hold circulation, like digital circulation, represented about a quarter of all circulation prior to the pandemic (24-25%, 2015-2019). After a jump to nearly one-third of all circulation at the height of the pandemic (30-32%, 2020-2021), it has returned to just below its earlier levels (21-23%) in the last 18 months (2022-2023 YTD).

What this illustrates is that the increases in digital circulation have cut into the share of browse circulation. Previously accounting for more than half (53-56%, 2015-2019) of all circulation, browse circulation dropped to 20% of all circulation when the library closed in 2020 and has been hovering at just over one-third (34-38%) ever since (2021-2023 YTD).

Responses to the open-ended survey questions back up this shift from browsing for books in the library to borrowing e-books, which are appreciated by some for their convenience.

I actually use the library more online than in-person now, as I read almost exclusively on my Kindle.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 25-34, non-user

I have shifted to using the Libby app to use audiobooks more often instead of going to the library for physical books.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 35-44, OWL

Read more ebooks now because got back into reading. Use libby app to check out. See this as positive change.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 45-54, NWL

I've become more used to online books via Libby

— Survey respondent, White male, age 65+, OWL

Before the pandemic I would come inside the library and walk the aisles looking for books. Now... I usually peruse the stacks online.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 65+, NWL

I check out a lot of audio books and electronic books thru the libby app. It's incredibly convenient.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 35-44, OWL

we are grateful for all the online options, which make life easier and more convenient.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 45-54, OWL

Nevertheless, focus group participants went out of their way to express their continued appreciation for print books.

I think every book person has a fear of paper books going by the wayside, and I especially get nervous that with libraries and budgets that, it's easier to purchase e-copies...I do read on my Kindle, but I would be disappointed to walk into a library space and not have a plethora of paper books available.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 35-44, NWL

[The library at Worthington Kilbourne] cut their physical books down by two-thirds. Because the kids are all so focused on online... If [the Worthington Libraries] stopped having books, forget that.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 55-64, OWL

While library e-book usage has grown in the last five years, there was an even larger increase among survey respondents who reported using non-library, subscription-based streaming services (+11% vs. +5%). And while more than half (57%) of the respondents downloaded media via the library in the last year, the vast majority (88%) did so elsewhere.

Subscription resource use, both at the library and elsewhere, is virtually unchanged since 2013. Both survey respondents and focus group participants occasionally mentioned using subscription resources, including *Consumer Reports*, newspaper articles and genealogy research.

I've become familiar with their databases - you can get to Consumer Reports... they have Coursera and a bunch of other online stuff that you can do.

— Focus group participant, White male, age 65+, OWL

I really like Consumer Reports online. It's one of the first resources I use when I'm buying something.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 55-64, OWL

I use the databases, sometimes use the printing if I find an article I need for my research.

— Focus group participant, White male, age 45-54, NWL

I use electronic resources more. Found access to Columbus Dispatch.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 65+, OWL

I don't use the library very much. Mostly for the genealogy web site.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 65+, non-user

I used to sit and read, browse, research genealogy and use the computers for your online database.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 65+, NWL

In summary, library e-books found an audience during the pandemic, achieving primacy at the height of the pandemic and sustaining usage in the years since. People especially appreciate the convenience of accessing e-books. E-book circulation has partially supplanted browsing in-person for books at the library, though people continue to want access to print materials. Use of subscription resources has remained steady.

Children's services

The share of people who brought children to the library in the last year was down just 4%, just slightly better than the share of people who spent 30 minutes, which was down 6%. Just as we saw in 2018, a larger share of respondents reported taking the children to a playground, park, museum, play café or other location (52%).

Table 42. Survey respondents undertaking children's services activities in the last year at the library and elsewhere, 2018-2023

Activity	Library			Elsewhere		
	2018	2023	Δ	2018	2023	Δ
Brought children	41%	37%	-4%	56%	52%	-4%

More than a quarter of respondents (28%) said they never brought children to the library (Appendix B, Figure 3)—twice as many as those who have never brought children to other activities in the community (14%) (Appendix B, Figure 4).

When they talk about bringing their children to the library, focus group participants describe killing time, burning off energy and playing with technology and toys.

If I've got an hour to kill with the kids, we'll just stop by the library.

— Focus group participant, White male, age 25-34, OWL

The kids run straight to the kids' section, and we're in there for quite a while.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 35-44, OWL

I have a six-year-old, and she is wild, and she likes to run and jump. I'm by Northwest, they have a little story garden, and she literally runs circles around it, and I count, and we do that for a very long time.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 35-44, NWL

[The kids] say hi to the librarians and to the little mouse that they have in the kids' area. It's corralled in, so I don't have to worry about them going different directions. The big one sits at an iPad; the little one sits with Magna-Tiles until she gets bored.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 25-34, WPK

My kids will run off to the kids' area, and I get them set up on the iPads, and that's like my mini vacation: walking to pick up my reserves without my kids and then walking back to them.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 45-54, OWL

We usually go to the kids' area first. They love the toys, even if they're the same toys they have at home. There's something special about the library toys. My older one is starting to feel more independent, so he'll go check out the other areas by himself and browse the stacks.

— Focus group participant, White male, age 25-34, OWL

People also mentioned library programs, predominantly for very young children.

When my kids were little, I loved the library programming for them, but I feel like they're in this weird space where they're not tweens, but they're not babies, and there's not a lot of opportunities for them. We've gone to Upper Arlington... but I haven't seen that kind of programming here in the Worthington Libraries.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 35-44, NWL

It kind of caps off for kids at age 12. There are some things for older kids, but not very often. And it's usually very specific, like an art contest. Now that my daughter is 13, there's not that much left.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 35-44, NWL

In summary, spending time in the library space is a major reason people bring children to the library. However, the library is just one of many options in the community for family activities. As we heard in 2018, people feel children age out of library offerings as they become teenagers.

Library services and materials

During the course of the pandemic, we introduced—or re-introduced—several new library services: curbside pickup at Old Worthington Library and Worthington Park Library; a mobile app for contact-free checkout; Library Goods personalized book selections; free printing; reservable study rooms; Culture Passes; and, interpretation services. We asked a series of questions to determine which of these services, among others, people had used, heard of or were interested in trying.

Use

On average, 21% of survey respondents had used any given service.

Table 43. Use of library services and materials, 2018-2023

Service or material	Used, 2018	▼Used, 2023	Δ
Curbside pickup / drive-up window ²	33%	62%	+29%
Mobile app for smartphone or tablet	26%	39%	+13%
Summer reading program	-	38%	-
Free printing	-	36%	-
Email newsletter	29%	31%	+2%
Storytimes	-	29%	-
Study rooms ³	27%	24%	-3%
Meeting rooms ³	27%	16%	-11%
Activity kits for families and adults	7%	15%	+8%
After-hours pickup lockers	12%	14%	+2%
Educational kits for children	8%	14%	+6%
Library Goods ⁴	7%	14%	+7%
Notary service	5%	12%	+7%
Culture passes	-	11%	-
Materials in different languages	9%	8%	-1%
Resume and job search help	3%	7%	+4%

² Curbside pickup was only introduced during the pandemic in 2020. The 2018 survey included “Drive-up window” alone as a service.

³ The 2018 survey included a combined service for “Meeting / study rooms.” Because we introduced reservable study rooms in 2022, the 2023 survey presented these as separate services.

⁴ Library Goods was only introduced during the pandemic in 2020, but the 2018 survey included “Personalized book recommendations” as a service, which is used here for purposes of comparison.


Service or material	Used, 2018	▼Used, 2023	Δ
School and homework help	4%	5%	+1%
Interpretation services	-	0%	-

Curbside/drive-up pickup

Far and away the most used service was curbside pickup / drive-up window, with nearly two-thirds of respondents (62%) saying they had used the service. The drive-up window at Northwest Library was the top-used service in 2018, with one-third of respondents saying they used it. Five years on, with pickup service extended to all three locations, that number has nearly doubled.

Our statistics show an enormous peak in usage in 2020 and 2021; while usage did decline in 2022, curbside and drive-up pickups were still up by nearly half (47%).

Table 44. Curbside / drive-up pickup statistics, 2009-2022

Statistic	Sparkline, 2009-2022	Pandemic change (2019-2022)
Curbside / drive-up pickup statistics		+47%

Of course, at the height of the pandemic, for the many months our doors were closed, drive-up and curbside pickup were the only options for library service and many people have become accustomed to using the service, due in large part to its convenience.

I love curbside pickup! During pandemic I started to reserve books online and use curbside pickup, rather than browsing the shelves. I actually use the library MORE due to this way of using the library.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 55-64, OWL

I used curbside pickup a lot during the pandemic, and I'm glad they still have a couple of options for that.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 35-44, WPK

The pickup window at Hard Road is so convenient, I seldom take time to park and walk inside any more.

— Survey respondent, White male, age 65+, NWL

I like the convenience of dropping off/picking up reserves in my car!

— Survey respondent, White female, age 55-64, NWL

Mobile app

At a distant second, the mobile app was used by more than one-third (39%) of survey respondents. This too was a jump from the quarter (26%) of respondents who said they used it in 2018.

We are indeed seeing a much higher rate of adoption of the mobile app than five years ago. The mobile app we had at the time of the previous study was discontinued shortly after the survey and before the interviews. We launched a new mobile app in 2020, in part, to offer patrons a contact-free option for checking out. If we compare items checked out via the mobile app's self-checkout feature, circulation increased more than eightfold (711%) in 2022 over 2017!

Table 45. Mobile app circulation statistics, 2015-2022

Statistic	Sparkline, 2015-2022	Pandemic change (2017-2022)
Mobile app circulation		+711%

Both survey respondents and focus group participants mentioned using the app.

I also use the app on a daily basis to check availability of materials. Please keep improving it.

— Survey respondent, White male, age 65+, NWL

I also almost exclusively use the app to check out books--this is not a bad thing, though!

— Survey respondent, White female, age 35-44, OWL

I use the app for most things now but whenever I talk to my friends they never know how much you can do on the app.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 35-44, OWL

[When I visit] I sit on my phone on my Worthington app and see what's there to pinpoint things.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 35-44, NWL

[On a typical visit] I always find a book I want and use the check-out feature on the app. I belly up to a table and spread out.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 45-54, OWL

[My favorite thing about the library is] the app. I'm on it all the time.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 25-34, NWL

Free printing

More than a third (36%) of respondents reported using free printing, also introduced during the pandemic. As noted above, people value the service for its convenience and affordability.

Free printing is a godsend. We queue it up over wireless and walk over. Please don't ever change any of this!

— Focus group participant, White female, age 35-44, NWL

Finances are tighter, so I take advantage of ... free printing.

— Survey respondent, Asian female, age 25-34, WPK



Study rooms and meeting rooms

In 2018, more than one-quarter of respondents (27%) used either meeting rooms or study rooms. Five years later, nearly one-quarter (24%) of respondents reported using study rooms and 16% reported using meeting rooms.

Prior to the pandemic, only two of our study rooms were available to be reserved and only for the purposes of tutoring. In March 2022, we introduced reservable study rooms—13 rooms in all—and usage skyrocketed nearly fivefold (393%)!

Meeting rooms remained closed to the public until the summer of 2022. Despite adding a third reservable meeting room at Worthington Park Library, reservations are down by 63% when comparing 2022 to 2019.

Table 46. Room reservation statistics, 2009-2022

Statistic	Sparkline, 2009-2022	Pandemic change (2019-2022)
Study room reservations		+393%
Meeting room reservations		-63%

Some focus group participants recognized the value of meeting space in the library.

[With another conference room], you can have multiple things going on because Northwest has one room for things going on. And it's sometimes if you want to do something else, the library is booked up or impossible to get into.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 25-34, NWL

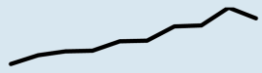
I'd like more rooms like this that the community groups can use. It's hard to find that. And it's a pain in the butt to get this room. Maybe [more of] those little private areas for one person or impromptu meetups. Those are really nice.

— Focus group participant, Multiracial female, age 45-54, OWL

After-hours pickup lockers

Although survey respondents' reported use of the after-hours pickup lockers has not changed much since 2018 (up just 2%), circulation has climbed steadily in the last decade, to a peak in 2021. Circulation to the lockers dipped in 2022, but remains up by one-fifth (19%) over 2019.

Table 47. After-hours pickup locker circulation statistics, 2013-2022

Statistic	Sparkline, 2013-2022	Pandemic change (2019-2022)
After-hours pickup locker circulation		+19%

Both survey respondents and focus group participants cite the convenience of pickup lockers, especially when providing access to the library after hours.

I use the pickup lockers for reserved materials rather than waiting in line for the drive up window. Much more convenient and not reliant on library opening hours.

— Survey respondent, White male, age 65+, NWL

I have two kids in car seats, so we often will swing up to the lockers, and I'll jump out and grab it. If I have to get two kids in and out of car seats every time I pick up, it would never happen.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 35-44, WPK

We use the lockers... that has been great because, in the summer, we never seem to make it here. And I don't want to come here on the weekends because it's too busy, so we can come after hours and pick up our books.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 45-54, OWL

Gadgets and gear

While reported use of activity kits for both children and adults increased 6-8% from 2018 to 2023, still a small minority (14-15%) of survey respondents report using activity kits. Nevertheless, focus group participants spoke glowingly of the range of items they can borrow, including activity kits and more.

As a homeschooling parent and as an educator, having all those different resource bags available for your children, and other ones for your household, or your car... It's a single mother's dream because there's stuff that I would not be able to get access to as easily if I didn't have the library.

— Focus group participant, Multiracial female, age 45-54, WPK

From the exchangeable puzzles to the adventure kits, we're never bored when it comes to things we can get from the library

— Focus group participant, White female, age 25-34, WPK

You can borrow almost anything. Meeting rooms, computers, chargers, free classes...

— Focus group participant, White female, age 45-54, OWL

you can do things like checking out a basket that you can take with you to take your books home, you can check out a walker while you're here.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 25-34, OWL

I'm always surprised that there's so many more things other than just books. There's all kinds of resources. I remember I rented a mobile hotspot for camping. Who would have known that you could get that?

— Focus group participant, White male, age 45-54, WPK

[It's a] huge network of resources. We just used the maneuverability kit that you can borrow for my son's driving. There's an unbelievable amount here if you just look for it. We've used the notary service. There's a lot [of resources] outside of books that are huge.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 45-54, OWL

I borrowed for my mom one of those lights that you're supposed to use to get light during the winter... it was a good way to see if it was a good fit for her without buying it.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 45-54, OWL

In summary, the top services, used by more than one-third of survey respondents, facilitate borrowing in convenient ways (curbside pickup / drive-up window, mobile app), encourage literacy (summer reading program) and offer affordability (free printing). Although not everyone uses gadgets and gear, people are thrilled that the library offers a wide range of things to borrow.

Awareness

On average, 49% of survey respondents who hadn't already used a given service had heard of it. Half of the services have been heard of by more than half of the respondents; all but two were heard of by one-quarter or more of respondents.

Table 48. Awareness of library services and materials, 2018-2023

Service or material	Heard of, 2018	▼Heard of, 2023	Δ
Summer reading program	-	75%	-
Storytimes	-	73%	-
Meeting rooms	74%	73%	-1%
Study rooms	74%	72%	-2%
After-hours pickup lockers	63%	69%	+6%
School and homework help	65%	68%	+3%
Curbside pickup / drive-up window	51%	67%	+16%
Activity kits for families and adults	47%	50%	+3%
Educational kits for children	30%	50%	+20%
Materials in different languages	32%	45%	+13%
Resume and job search help	30%	43%	+13%
Mobile app for smartphone or tablet	42%	35%	-7%

Service or material	Heard of, 2018	▼Heard of, 2023	Δ
Notary service	22%	35%	+13%
Culture Passes	-	32%	-
Email newsletter	46%	30%	-16%
Free printing	-	27%	-
Library Goods	22%	23%	+1%
Interpretation services	-	17%	-

For the 13 services we asked about in both 2018 and 2023, awareness was at least steady for 11 of them; we saw increases of >5% for nearly half (6) of them.

The greatest gains in awareness were for existing services: educational kits for children (+20%), curbside pickup / drive-up window (+16%), materials in different languages (+13%), resume and job search help (+13%) and notary service (+13%). In contrast, our newer (and re-imagined) services—mobile app, Culture Passes, free printing, Library Goods and interpretation services—are at the bottom of the list in terms of awareness.

In its focus group report, Grindle Marketing Communications observes that participants have “gaps in their knowledge” about “the full range of library offerings” (p. 17). Survey respondents also indicated a lack of familiarity around library services.

The pandemic put us in a situation where we had to be a bit more creative with how we did things, which forced me to peruse the library website more thoroughly. I had no idea how many services you offered!

— Focus group participant, White female, age 45-54, OWL

My neighbor was telling me about something that I didn't know that you could either do or get here.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 65+, OWL

There's so many resources, nobody can know them all.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 35-44, NWL

I wasn't aware of the other services offered (like printing) and would definitely go in for things like that, so I'm glad I learned that from this survey!

— Survey respondent, White female, age 25-34, non-user

I just learned of services I didn't know were available and it's time to renew my passport, so I may be in for that!

— Survey respondent, White female, age 55-64, OWL

In summary, awareness of library services is generally higher now than it was five years ago. People lack awareness of our newest services, but several existing services saw great gains in

awareness. Communicating to the public about the full range of services we provide is a perennial problem, but awareness does grow over time.

Interest

On average, 23% of people who had not already used a given service reported interest in trying it.

Table 49. Interest in trying library services and materials, 2018-2023

Service or material	Interested in trying, 2018	▼Interested in trying, 2023	Δ
Culture passes	-	66%	-
Notary service	37%	41%	+4%
Free printing	-	40%	-
Library Goods	31%	40%	+9%
Activity kits for families and adults	25%	30%	+5%
After-hours pickup lockers	40%	26%	-14%
Mobile app for smartphone or tablet	18%	24%	+6%
Curbside pickup / drive-up window	25%	23%	-2%
Email newsletter	19%	20%	+1%
Educational kits for children	15%	17%	+2%
Summer reading program	-	14%	-
Study rooms	14%	14%	0%
Resume and job search help	14%	13%	-1%
Meeting rooms	14%	12%	-2%
Materials in different languages	17%	8%	-9%
Storytimes	-	7%	-
School and homework help	6%	6%	0%
Interpretation services	-	4%	-

In 2018, we observed that no single service was of interest to half the respondents who hadn't already used it, and only three services were of interest to more than one-third of respondents. Against that backdrop, it's striking that a whopping two-thirds (66%) of respondents are interested in culture passes. Mentioned by focus group participants and survey respondents, affordability is the obvious draw.

Finances are tighter, so I take advantage of culture passes.

— Survey respondent, Asian female, age 25-34, WPK

Two of the top three services now—notary service and Library Goods—were also top services in 2018, and interest has only grown (+4-9%) in five years.

New services

In addition to asking people's level of interest in existing services they may not have used, we also asked people to rate their likelihood of using several new services.

When it comes to new library services, passport applications and/or photos were far and away of the greatest interest, with more than three-quarters (81%) of survey respondents saying they are likely to use the service (Appendix B, Figure 10).

Nearly half (48%) of survey respondents expressed interest in a makerspace, with tools and materials for crafts or creative activities. Focus group participants offered suggestions for what such spaces could offer.

There's craft space at [another] library, like a room this size, and they have a Cricut and sewing classes.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 35-44, OWL

I'd love to see a bigger technology section with 3D printers and maybe cameras and camcorders. New enough that the youth could engage with that instead of trying to videotape TikToks on their phone.

— Focus group participant, Multiracial female, age 45-54, WPK

The other services proposed were of interest to less half of survey respondents—book mobile (40%), photo / recording booth (23%) and electric vehicle charging station (19%)—and never came up in focus groups.

Although coffee was a big part of what people wished for at the library in 2018, it was not a strong theme in the focus groups. Just one participant expressed a strong wish for a café.

A true cafe. I know they've got the vending machines, but if they had a manned place that had coffee and maybe some bakery, that would be wonderful.

— Focus group participant, White male, age 45-54, NWL

In summary, the library services—both existing and new—with the highest appeal offer affordability (Culture Passes, free printing), convenience (notary service, passport applications and/or photos), creativity (makerspace) and personalization (Library Goods).

Library hours

With the exception of the time during the pandemic, library hours have not changed in a decade, when year-round Sunday hours were offered starting in 2013. We asked questions in this survey to gauge whether library hours are influencing library usage.

The vast majority (94%) of survey respondents agreed that “the library is available at days and times that work for me,” with more than half (54%) agreeing strongly (Appendix B, Figure 11). When asked what times of day they would prefer using the library (Appendix B, Figure 12), the most popular timeslots were weekends, with around two-thirds selecting Saturday and Sunday afternoons (64% and 68%, respectively) and more than half (56%) selecting Saturday mornings.

Weekday afternoons and evenings were the next most popular, with around half (47-49%) selecting those times. Weekday mornings were selected by 39-40% of respondents.

There was, however, some ambiguity in survey responses when it comes to library hours. Despite the strong agreement that current library hours are satisfactory, there were a few timeslots outside of regular library hours that were of interest to a quarter or more of respondents: Saturday and Sunday evenings (28% and 24%, respectively), Sunday mornings (40%) and Friday evenings (44%).

One way to get a sense of how much people are using the library outside of operating hours is to look at circulation statistics for the after-hours pickup lockers at Old Worthington Library and Northwest Library, where items are checked at the time a patron retrieves them. (At Worthington Park Library, items are checked out prior to being placed in the lockers.)

Table 50. Circulation at after-hours pickup lockers, August 2023

Library	Checkouts during open hours	Checkouts during closed hours	Percent of checkouts during closed hours
Old Worthington Library	559	148	21%
Northwest Library	412	119	22%

For the month of August 2023, the pick-up lockers were overwhelmingly accessed when the libraries were open. Only around one-fifth of the check outs from the lockers at Old Worthington Library (21%) and Northwest Library (22%) occur outside of library hours. This usage is fairly evenly distributed across early mornings and late nights, with no particular peaks during the timeframes cited above.

Sunday mornings

Using door count and circulation statistics, we are able to break down usage by days of the week and times of day. By both measures, Sundays are exceptionally busy at all three libraries.

Of the 70 hours the libraries are open in a typical week, the first two Sunday hours rank in the top five busiest hours for door counts at Old Worthington Library and Northwest Library, for August 2023. In fact, the first hour the library opens on Sunday has the highest foot traffic all week at both those locations.

Table 51. Top five hours for door counts, August 2023

Rank	Old Worthington	Northwest	Worthington Park
1	Sunday, 1-2pm	Sunday, 1-2pm	Wednesday, 5-6pm
2	Wednesday, 3-4pm	Sunday, 2-3pm	Wednesday, 4-5pm
3	Tuesday, 3-4pm	Tuesday, 11am-noon	Tuesday, 4-5pm
4	Sunday, 2-3pm	Thursday, 11am-noon	Wednesday, 2-3pm
5	Saturday, 11am-noon	Wednesday, 1-2pm	Wednesday, 6-7pm

We see a similar pattern when it comes to first-time checkouts. For August 2023, two of the four Sunday hours at each library rank in the top five hours for checkouts. In fact, the top hour for the whole week at Northwest Library and Worthington Park Library are Sunday hours.

Table 52. Top five hours for first-time checkouts, August 2023

Rank	Old Worthington	Northwest	Worthington Park
1	Saturday, 11am-noon	Sunday, 2-3pm	Sunday, 4-5pm
2	Thursday, 11am-noon	Sunday, 4-5pm	Saturday, noon-1pm
3	Sunday, 4-5pm	Wednesday, 4-5pm	Sunday, 3-4pm
4	Tuesday, 11am-noon	Thursday, 1-2pm	Wednesday, 11am-noon
5	Sunday, 2-3pm	Tuesday, 3-4pm	Thursday, 4-5pm

While these attendance and circulation statistics do vary from month to month and there are seasonal effects, a sample of winter months and an annual aggregate show that Sunday hours are consistently among the busiest of the week.

People in both the survey open-ended question and focus group discussions supported and provided context to these results, sharing that Sundays are often the only day they have free time available to spend at the library. With extended hours on Sunday mornings, people felt they would use the library for family togetherness or personal relaxation.

more hours on Sunday

— Survey respondent, White female, age 55-64, NWL

Longer open hours on weekends

— Survey respondent, White male, age 65+, NWL

Sunday is often my only day off so I wish it were open longer.

— Survey respondent, MENA female, age 25-34, NWL

I would love to have access to the library same hours on Sunday as I have on Saturday. So, the earlier the better for my kiddos on a Sunday.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 25-34, WPK

Sunday would be ideal... [After 1] it feels like our day is sort of started and we're busy, and we just don't make it on Sunday.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 35-44, NWL

Sundays are our only family day. And we're like, "Let's go to the library. Oh, it opens at one." ... In the right context, on Sundays, things should be open. And I feel like if the library opened around ten, it would still be respectful but used. I would use it as more of a quality time with family.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 35-44, OWL

My Monday to Saturday is very scheduled, very busy. I actually don't get to spend much time inside the library walls, which is a shame because I like to peruse the library shelves. It would be a great stop post-church. Grab a cup of coffee. If it were open at 11am, it would give me that window.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 45-54, WPK

Friday evenings

Although Friday evening hours were of interest to the largest share of survey respondents, the hourly door count and circulation statistics don't show any particular peaks in usage on Fridays when the library is open.

A few focus group participants felt they might use the library later on Fridays, especially if special activities were planned, but seemed somewhat less enthusiastic than those who spoke in favor of Sunday morning hours.

hours until 7 on Fridays would help.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 55-64, OWL

The evenings are helpful because Saturday mornings, my kids all have soccer... So, Friday nights would be great if there were activities, but it's not expected or required.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 25-34, WPK

I would like an activity, I spend my evenings at Barnes and Noble. If there was a Friday night book club [I'd go].

— Focus group participant, White female, age 25-34, NWL

If I went on a Friday or Saturday, it'd be a little different... more of a family outing. "Let's go to the library, hang out a little bit, and then we'll go get pizza."

— Focus group participant, White male, age 45-54, NWL

Ultimately, people acknowledged the challenges of offering longer hours, especially when it comes to staffing, and expressed willingness to accept the status quo.

If you're pushing hours and you're extending the time, what is that going to do to the librarians? Is it going to dilute them or put them in a position where they can't have off time to be with families? I don't want to put them out.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 25-34, WPK

I could see maybe until 8:00 on Friday night so that the staff has some time to get home. And so, you don't get a bunch of teenagers looking for a place to hang out and cause mischief, which I could see happening Friday and Saturday night.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 55-64, OWL

If they're closed [on a Friday night], I'm still going to be okay. I've got other things to do. It's not a necessity.

— Focus group participant, Black female, age 65+, NWL

In summary, people’s lives are busy and they struggle to find time to complete their obligations, let alone relax and unwind. While our patrons make it work with our current hours and understand the costs associated with extending library hours, they also express a desire for library service on Friday evenings and, especially, Sunday mornings.

The pandemic and people’s lives

At the end of the survey, respondents were asked several questions assessing the enduring impact of the pandemic on their lives.

COVID caution

Just under a third (31%) of the survey respondents expressed some degree of current worry about getting the coronavirus (Appendix B, Figure 13). Notably, just 3% of respondents said they were very worried, compared with 23% on the other extreme of the scale who said they were not worried at all.

Table 53. Level of worry about getting COVID-19

COVID outlook	Worthington Libraries	Gallup, Feb. 2023
COVID cautious	31%	25%
Very worried	3%	3%
Somewhat worried	28%	22%
COVID comfortable	69%	75%
Not too worried	46%	36%
Not worried at all	23%	39%

When compared to national findings (Gallup, nd; McCarthy, 2022), a greater share of our respondents in Worthington expressed some level of worry about getting the coronavirus (31% vs. 25%).

Respondents with children in their household were asked a second question assessing their level of worry about their children getting the coronavirus (Appendix B, Figure 14). Although there were twice as many at the extreme end of the scale—with 6% saying they were very worried—the results are very similar. (Our numbers don’t add up to 100% because respondents could answer “does not apply” in our survey.)

Table 54. Level of worry about child(ren) getting COVID-19

COVID outlook	Worthington Libraries	Gallup, Oct. 2022
COVID cautious	31%	33%
Very worried	6%	7%
Somewhat worried	25%	27%
COVID comfortable	66%	66%
Not too worried	39%	31%
Not worried at all	27%	35%

Compared nationally, our survey results were very close to the Gallup findings for October 2022 (the most recent available).

Areas of recovery

When asked how life may have changed, a slim majority of respondents—53%—reported that their priorities in life have changed at least a fair amount (Appendix B, Figure 15).

I think generally, going anywhere and doing anything has changed.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 45-54, NWL

My priorities have changed and I have a better, slower, more intentional life. Never going back.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 45-54, OWL

I started reading during the pandemic – something I never enjoyed until my life [halted] and I had time to try it...now I find the time to sneak away and read.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 35-44, NWL

Another set of questions asked which areas of life had returned to normal, followed by a question that asked if the areas of life that had changed are likely to ever return to how they were before the pandemic (Appendix B, Figures 16-17).

Compared to national results, a greater share of our respondents has recovered from the pandemic when it comes to personal finances and physical health. Just over half of our respondents say that personal finances (53%) and physical health (52%) are back to normal, compared with fewer than half nationally (43% and 46%, respectively). On the flip side, when compared with national results, a smaller share of our respondents says that work (54% locally and 62% nationally) and parenting (48% and 59%) have returned to normal.

Table 55. Facets of life that have returned to normal since the pandemic

Facet of life	▼ Worthington Libraries	Gallup, Oct. 2022	Δ
Using the public library	79%	-	-
Socializing with friends and family	68%	68%	0%
Shopping	59%	64%	-5%
Dining out	58%	60%	-2%
School (among households with children under 18)	56%	53%	+3%
Work (among employed adults)	54%	62%	-8%
Personal finances	53%	43%	+10%
Your physical health	52%	46%	+6%
Entertainment and recreation	50%	50%	0%
Parenting/raising children (among households with children under 18)	48%	59%	-11%
Traveling	45%	45%	0%
Your mental health	43%	40%	+3%
Your outlook on life	42%	41%	+1%
None of these are back to normal / Nothing in life	8%	10%	-2%

While the basics of everyday life—socializing, shopping, school, work, finances, physical health—have returned to normal for more than half of the respondents, people’s underlying wellbeing—their mental health and outlook on life—have the lowest rates of recovery.

Just 42% of respondents reported that their outlook on life has returned to normal. (Nearly identical to the Gallup results: 41% in October 2022.) That means that well over half (58%) of our survey respondents feel their outlook on life is *not* back to normal. In the follow-up question, nearly half (47%) of those respondents said their outlook on life may have changed permanently (Appendix B, Figure 17). Taken together, that’s just over one-quarter (28%) of all survey respondents who say that their outlook on life has changed permanently.

Library use

Compared to other areas of their lives, library use was back to normal for the most people, with more than three-quarters (79%) of the survey respondents saying their use of the library was completely back to the way it was before the pandemic. The remaining 21% of the respondents were asked an open-ended follow up question to understand what about their library use had changed and what it would take—if anything—for their library usage to return to pre-pandemic patterns. (See Appendix C for complete details of the open-ended question analysis.)

More than half (53%) of those who responded to the open-ended questions reported using the library less than before the pandemic. More than one-third (39%) of the respondents named concerns about the pandemic as impacting their use of the library, with fear of illness mentioned most frequently (by 16% of respondents).

feel uncomfortable being in the library surrounded by people without masks

— Survey respondent, White female, age 55-64, OWL

I wonder if the books I handle or the surfaces I touch are potentially contaminated with coronavirus.

— Survey respondent, Asian male, age 25-34, NWL

I'm very wary of germs now and touching the books not knowing if they've been cleaned or not has changed for me.

— Survey respondent, MENA female, age 18-24, OWL

Public, crowded spaces pose an inherent risk to my health. It is permanent because this is an illness that will not be going away.

— Survey respondent, MENA female, age 25-34, OWL

I have an immunocompromised child, so we don't spend hours at the library the way we used to.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 45-54, OWL

Group areas are still dangerous for my immunocompromised son.

— Survey respondent, White trans masc, age 35-44, OWL

A change in personal or household circumstances was also a major theme, mentioned by nearly one-fifth (17%) of the respondents.

My kids were 3 and 6 at the start of the pandemic, and now they're 6 and 9. I think my library use isn't the same as it was pre-pandemic mostly because my kids have changed, and our family needs are different now.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 35-44, OWL

I graduated college so my need to study in a good environment has changed hence I don't study that much any more.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 18-24, OWL

I usually would browse in a location close to my workplace, but I work from home now. I don't really see that changing anytime soon.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 25-34, WPK

The change was coincidental- we moved to be further away from a library and can no longer walk to the library.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 35-44, OWL

Although respondents with concerns about illness describe a deliberate avoidance of the library and respondents with changes in life circumstances describe distinctly different needs that impact their use of the library, a small group (5%) of respondents describe a change in library usage that is more passive or inadvertent, commonly using the word “habit.”

I got out of the habit of doing or going anywhere.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 35-44, NWL

We come less often. We need to get back in the habit of coming to the library.

— Survey respondent, MENA female, age 35-44, WPK

During pandemic, got out of the [habit of] using the library.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 45-54, OWL

I think I just got out of the habit of going regularly. And because my child was born during “peak pandemic” we didn’t get into a habit of using the library in the same way we would’ve if she had been born 18 months earlier [or] 18 months later.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 25-34, NWL

Our family has gotten so used to not going out, that we haven’t really returned to doing so even though we feel safe... We always want to go back, but are just used to staying at home.

— Survey respondent, White male, age 45-54, NWL

I think I just got used to buying books. Not having to wait for hold items.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 45-54, NWL

I used to take the children to more activities at the library and we have not gotten back into that habit.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 35-44, OWL

I haven’t attended as many in person activities with the library as I did pre-pandemic.

I think I just need to get back in the habit of doing so...

— Survey respondent, White female, age 35-44, NWL

Frankly, my reliance on the reserve drive-through ... has become a habit. It’s only answering these questions that I’ve realized how much I miss going INTO the library. Thanks! Now I need to work on that!

— Survey respondent, White female, age 55-64, NWL

It has become easier to purchase books through Amazon. Before the pandemic I’d walk to the library and spend an hour, I’m out of the habit. Hopefully, soon I’ll be able to visit the library on a regular basis.

— Survey respondent, White male, age 65+, NWL

On the flip side, about one-fifth (19%) of the respondents reports increasing their use of the library in some way.

I use it more so than before.

— Survey respondent, Black female, age 18-24, NWL

I use the library more since the pandemic.

— Survey respondent, White male, age 35-44, OWL

I started visiting library after pandemic

— Survey respondent, Asian male, age 25-34, OWL

Our frequency has increased exponentially. ... We borrow more materials now than ever. We certainly don't take it for granted.

— Survey respondent, White male, age 35-44, NWL

I didn't use the library at all before the pandemic, while I use it regularly now because I'm reading more.

— Survey respondent, White female, age 25-34, WPK

We use the library more now than before the pandemic for childrens' activities and books

— Survey respondent, White female, age 35-44, OWL

As noted above, about half of those who said they increased their use—11% of all open-ended respondents—said they began borrowing e-books more.

In summary, many people in our community report changes in their priorities and outlooks due to the pandemic; some think these changes are permanent. While many people report using the library less, some people say they use the library more. Concerns about COVID and changes in life circumstances are behind the changes in library use for some. Library use is sometimes described in terms of habit.

Demographic differences

Our previous 2018 survey did not ask demographic questions beyond age and gender. Because we know from prior research that different groups fared differently during the pandemic (e.g., Horowitz, 2020; Keeter, 2020; Lopez, Rainie & Budiman, 2020; NPR et al., 2020; Parker, Igielnik & Kochhar, 2021; Vogels, 2020), we gathered detailed demographic data in this survey to identify subgroups that may be facing particular challenges or have differing needs that the library can address.

Library and community activities

Parents and those aged 25-44—groups which have significant overlap—show the highest engagement levels overall (Appendix B, Table 3). Although only suggestive due to low response rates, BIPOC respondents and those who speak languages other than English had higher engagement scores than those who are White and speak only English.

Apart from non-library users, those aged 65+ had the lowest overall engagement scores. Those with lower levels of education and lower levels of income had lower overall engagement scores than those with higher levels of education and higher levels of income. However, when comparing

library engagement to engagement elsewhere in the community, both 65+-year-olds and low-income survey respondents had higher library engagement scores.

Looking closely at specific library activities, we see some of the starkest differences when it comes to parents. A larger share of survey respondents with children in their household unsurprisingly report bringing children to the library (Appendix B, Figure 39): more than half (51-57%) of single- and two-parent families report doing so in the last year, compared with only about a third (31-36%) of couples and singles. Families report attending programs at the library at higher rates than those without children in the household (51-57% vs. 31-36%) (Appendix B, Figure 37). Likewise, when it comes to spending 30 minutes at the library (85-87% vs. 75-81%) (Appendix B, Figure 28). Note that each of these findings also applies to those aged 25-44.

Survey respondents with low incomes report using library computers in the last year at higher rates than those with middle or high incomes (59% vs. 36-43%) (Appendix B, Figure 36). Likewise, when it comes to using office services (61% vs. 24-39%) (Appendix B, Figure 38).

We see a strong age effect when it comes to downloading e-books and other digital media, with around two-thirds (61-68%) of those under 55 doing so in the last year, compared with only half (49-51%) of those 55 and over (Appendix B, Figure 32).

Lastly, we see some gender effects in the types of activities people undertake at the library. Women report undertaking most library activities at higher rates than men, with the starkest differences in the following activities: download e-books and digital media (+12%, Figure 32), look for reading recommendations (+10%, Figure 31), check out items (+7%, Figure 22), check calendar for events (+7%, Figure 29), attend programs (+7%, Figure 37) and bring children (+7%, Figure 39). On the flip side, larger shares of men report undertaking these activities: research a topic (+14%, Figure 33), use a database (+11%, Figure 35), use library computers (+8%, Figure 36) and use wireless (+7%, Figure 34). Women use the library for reading and family activities at higher rates than men; men use the library for online research at higher rates than women.

Library services and materials

When it comes to library services and materials, we see similar usage patterns. A larger share of parents, those aged 25-44 and women—taken together, mothers of young children—have participated in the summer reading program and storytimes as well as used activity kits and educational kits (Appendix B, Table 4); for those who haven't used these services and materials, a larger share of these same groups indicate awareness of these services (Appendix B, Table 5). These same groups also have higher rates of interest in our Library Goods service (Appendix B, Table 6), as well as a makerspace (Appendix B, Figure 63) and book mobile (Appendix B, Figure 64). This reinforces that women—and mothers—use the library for reading and family activities.

Survey respondents with low incomes also show some distinctive usage patterns. More than half (54%) of low-income respondents report using free printing (54%) compared to a third or less (25-35%) of middle- and upper-income respondents who reported doing so. While just 16% of low-income respondents report using resume and job search help, that is a much larger share than the 3-5% of middle- and upper-income respondents.

It should be unsurprising that a larger share of survey respondents who are Asian, Hispanic, MENA or multiracial and multilingual report using material in different languages. Roughly one-third of those groups (27-41%) report doing so, compared with just 6-7% of White and Black respondents and respondents who speak only English. While these groups did not report using our interpretation services, roughly one-fifth (16-27%) expressed interest in trying the service, compared with just 2-3% of White and Black respondents and respondents who speak only English. Although interest in passport services was high overall (81%), nearly all respondents who are Asian (97%) and who speak Indo-European (98%), AAPI (92%) and other (100%) languages said they would probably or definitely use the service.

Lastly, we see some differences based on preferred library location. Survey respondents who use Old Worthington Library have higher awareness of notary service: half (49%) of those who use Old Worthington Library have heard of the service compared with less than a quarter (22%) and about a third (35%) of Northwest Library and Worthington Park Library users, respectively. Users of Northwest Library similarly show the highest use when it comes to curbside and drive-up pickup. More than three-quarters (77%) of Northwest Library users have used the drive-up window, compared with less than two-thirds (60%) of Old Worthington Library users and nearly half (47%) of Worthington Park users. For Worthington Park Library, the after-hours pickup lockers are more highly used. One-fifth of that library's users have used the lockers, compared with just 15% of Old Worthington Library users and 13% of Northwest Library users. Notably, each of these services is more physically prominent and/or more established at their respective locations compared to the other two locations. For instance, at Old Worthington Library, notary service is provided at a well-marked, dedicated desk adjacent to the accounts desk that patrons pass by upon entering the library. Similarly, at Worthington Park Library, pickup lockers are immediately visible upon approaching the building's entrance. At Northwest Library, the drive-up window pre-dates curbside pickup service at the other libraries.

Library hours

When it comes to library hours, a greater share of parents show interest in extended library hours, (Appendix B, Table 7). Half or more of single- and two-parent families are interested in visiting the library on Friday evenings (53-63%) and Sunday mornings (49-54%), compared with around a third (32-38%) of couples and singles who are interested in those times.

We see a strong age effect when it comes to interest in extended hours. More than half of those under 55 are interested in Friday evenings (58-63%), compared with less than half (23-42%) of those 55 and over. For Sunday mornings, more than half of those under 45 (57-64%) are interested, compared with less than half (31-39%) of those over 45.

Hybrid workers show strong interest in Friday-evening hours, with nearly three-quarters (71%) expressing interest in using the library at that time.

Asian and MENA respondents and speakers of AAPI and Indo-European languages show greater interest in Friday evenings (58-75%) when compared to those of other races and speakers of other languages (38-51%). Likewise, Hispanic and MENA respondents (67-71%) and speakers of AAPI

and Indo-European languages (52-54%) show greater interest in Sunday mornings than those of other races and speakers of other languages (36-48%).

The pandemic and people's lives

Just over half (53%) of the survey respondents reported that their priorities in life changed at least a fair amount since the pandemic. A number of subgroups had even larger shares reporting changes in their priorities (Appendix B, Figure 70): those with lower incomes (57%), two-parent families (57%), those aged 25-44 (59-61%), those who work hybrid or remotely (59-61%) and those who began living in Worthington during the pandemic (62%), not to mention those who identified as COVID cautious (79%). Although suggestive only due to low response rates, respondents who are Black, Asian and Hispanic and who are multilingual also reported changes in priorities in higher numbers (ranging from 62-86%).

The question about areas of recovery also saw differences among demographic subgroups. When it comes to personal finances, a smaller share of younger people and those with low incomes report seeing recovery in this area (Appendix B, Table 8). Just more than one-third (37%) of low-income respondents report that their finances are back to normal compared with more than half (53-65%) of middle- and upper-income respondents. We see the same pattern with younger people: 31-39% of those under 35 have seen their personal finances recover, compared with 48-64% of those 35 and older.

A smaller share of younger people also reported that their mental health and outlook on life has returned to normal (Appendix B, Table 8). Just one-quarter to one-third (21-34%) of those under 45 report that those two areas have recovered, whereas around half or more (45-55%) of those 55 and older report the same. Families had a similar pattern: 32-36% of single- and two-parent families have seen their mental health and outlook on life recover, compared with 44-47% of singles and couples. Even more starkly, less than one-quarter of those who are COVID cautious (21-24%) say their mental health and outlook on life have recovered, compared with half (51%) of those who are COVID comfortable.

When it comes to work, we see that a much lower share of respondents who report that they work remotely or on a hybrid basis say that work has returned to normal compared with those who work in-person only (37-39% vs. 67%) (Appendix B, Table 8). A much greater share of the hybrid workers say that this change is likely permanent (76% vs. 52-57%) (Appendix B, Table 9). We see a similar effect related to income and educational attainment. About half of those with a college degree or with middle- or upper-income (52-54%) report that work is back to normal, compared with around two-thirds of those with low income or without a college degree (62-71%). Nearly two-thirds (59-62%) of those same respondents report that the changes in work are likely permanent (Appendix B, Table 9). Those with higher educational attainment and high incomes likely have gained greater flexibility in their options to work from home since the pandemic.

In summary, several subgroups have distinctive ways of using the library. Not surprisingly, people with children in their households use services targeted at families more, but they also spend time at the library and attend programs more. More families express interest in expanded library hours and new services, such as a book mobile and makerspace. Parents of younger children have been

impacted by the pandemic in larger numbers, with more reporting changes in their priorities as well as lower rates of recovery when it comes to mental health. People with low incomes have also seen lower rates of recovery when it comes to personal finances. Those with low incomes also use services that are not as widely used by others, such as technology and office services, especially free printing. E-books are used by younger people. Women use reader-related services. BIPOC and those who are multilingual show some different patterns in their use of the library, though additional research with these subgroups may help to validate these tentative findings.

DISCUSSION

The last five years since we conducted our previous study set up near-perfect experimental conditions to test the conclusions of our research. In the midst of the pandemic, we asked ourselves:

When our research found that borrowing and space are what people value most about the library and what set us apart within the community, what happened when use of library materials and access to library space were precisely what was unavailable during the pandemic? When we had learned that the adoption of the library's digital and online services was limited in the face of other options elsewhere than the library, was it possible to successfully transition people to an all-online library experience? Did a focus on creating a friction-free library experience and engaging with our patrons at human scale make people's lives easier and provide a sense of comfort at this difficult time? (Reuter, 2021)

Reviewing the findings of this study against our 2018 findings reveals that some aspects of library use are constants, while others seem to be variable. In keeping with our tagline “full of surprises,” the library also has an X factor.

Constants

In our earlier research, we identified what we called “stand-out services”: borrowing, space, affordability, convenience and aesthetic experience. By and large, these services continue to stand out today. People still appreciate the affordability and convenience of borrowing items and using library services, and they often cite the aesthetic experience of visiting the library spaces, even if it's longing for a time before the pandemic.

The four conclusions from our previous study—library amplified, alone together, friction free and human scale—still hold. Traditional library services are still central to what people use and enjoy most about the library. Our library spaces still offer people peace and solitude as well as connection and community. People still appreciate the ease of using the library and how the library makes their lives easier. Warmth, welcome and personal connection still define the library experience.

Variables

At the same time, several services saw enormous growth during the pandemic. Curbside pickup was widely used and continues to be popular. Use of the mobile app to check out items exploded and remains high. Wireless printing is through the roof. Email reference has found an audience. E-books may have finally found their moment.

Patrons initially adopted each of these services out of necessity when library services were unavailable or limited, but have continued to use each service even now that library service has been fully restored. To adapt a phrase, necessity is the mother of adoption. And convenience sustains use.

We have also established that usage of library services varies based on demographic characteristics. People in different life stages—families and seniors—take advantage of different library services. Both cultural and economic factors—race, language, income level and workplace—influence people’s needs and use of the library.

The X Factor

In our previous study, interviewees were asked what would make the library better and most expressed appreciation for the library as it is, or envisioned the library doing more of what we already offer. Focus group participants likewise had trouble identifying what, specifically, would make the library more appealing.

I’m drawing a blank.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 35-44, non-user

More than 50 years ago, the journal *RQ* (known now as *Reference and User Services Quarterly*) published “Ten Reference Commandments” (Josel, 1971). Coming in at number one: “The patron is always wrong.” This statement isn’t meant to be pejorative, but rather to remind librarians that our patrons’ queries often contain mistakes, misspellings and/or misremembered details that can impede our ability to help them. The purpose of a reference interview is to get at the underlying need that motivates a query (Bopp & Smith, 2011); sometimes we must read between the lines of what the patron says.

Likewise, rather than taking patron suggestions literally, we should instead consider them as aspirational, revealing something about what people are looking for in their lives. It is our job as professionals to uncover people’s wants and needs and translate those into viable library services. In fact, some patrons acknowledge that the library frequently anticipates their needs in unexpected ways.

Over the years, the library added services I didn’t even know what I wanted.

— Focus group participant, White female, age 45-54, WPK

They take you in different directions that you may not have known you wanted to go.

— Focus group participant, Black female, age 65+, NWL

Our work with the City of Worthington Community Coronavirus Task Force (2021) found that people in our community, when asked to rate the performance of a dozen groups during the coronavirus crisis, overwhelmingly said the library was “reacting about right,” ranking third behind healthcare officials and people in their own household. Ultimately, people in our community trust Worthington Libraries to do the right thing.

CONCLUSION

Although much has changed in our community and people's lives in five years, what remains unchanged is the value people place on the library. Some aspects of the library appear to be pandemic-proof, while others must evolve and adapt to accommodate the disruption and new directions present in our community and people's lives.

The findings of this research suggest that we may be at an inflection point. At this point, everything that will return to normal probably has. The rest is full of possibilities. Thinking about how people engage with the library and how that has evolved since the pandemic, we conclude with three key principles we can use to guide us as we continue to navigate what comes next for the library.

Data driven

Many of the new services we introduced (or re-introduced) during the pandemic enjoyed unprecedented levels of adoption and interest. It's no coincidence that these successful services align with the conclusions of our previous research: curbside pickup amplifies the library experience; the mobile app reduces friction in borrowing items; reservable study rooms offer space to be alone together; Library Goods personalized book bundles allow us to connect with patrons at human scale. Introducing services based on observed need and demonstrated interest—using data to drive library service—works. With data about how different demographic subgroups use the library, we can extend this approach to ensuring library services reach everyone in our community.

- How can the library continue to use the findings of our research to expand our understanding of the people in our community, including those in underserved demographic subgroups? How can we use this understanding to offer all people library services they want and need?

Habit forming

The pandemic disrupted our day-to-day lives. As people said for themselves, they got out of the habit of using the library. Many long for a return to normalcy, in their library use and their everyday lives. On the flip side, some people have developed new habits and don't want to go back. Driven by affordability and convenience—not to mention necessity—people tried some existing library services for the first time and, through habit, have come to appreciate them.

- How can we re-connect people with what they miss about the library, and what they're missing in their lives? How can we encourage people to establish new ways to engage with the library?

Seeing beyond

Many people in our community came out of the pandemic changed. While our patrons are often unable to articulate or envision specific ways the library can change along with them, they trust us to anticipate their needs to offer services that improve the quality of their lives.

- How can the library innovate and evolve in response to people's changing priorities? How can we help people adapt and find new meaning in their lives?

In conclusion, this research once again affirms the place of the library in the community and in people's lives and offers new insights into what might come next for us. We must continue to build understanding about the people in our community and how they engage with the library so we can envision new ways to further our organizational focus areas: storytelling, human connection, social justice and sustainability.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Survey instrument.....	AA-1 – AA-9
Appendix B. Survey results	AB-1 – AB-79
Appendix C. Open-ended question coding.....	AC-1 – AC-6
Appendix D. Focus group report ⁵	AD-1 – AD-21

⁵ Grindle Marketing Communications’ focus group report includes the first names of participants along with potentially personally identifying information. In order to protect the privacy of focus group participants, the full focus group report will not be shared publicly.