

Project Summary

A LIBRARY FOR ALL: ADD YOUR VOICE TO THE NEXT CHAPTER (INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY DATA)

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DESCRIPTION

The City of Guelph is pursuing a development project in the Baker Street District that is focused on transforming the existing parking lot and adjacent properties into a mixed-use development including a new central **Guelph Public Library (GPL)**. **The Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW)** and **Guelph-Wellington Women in Crisis (WIC)** see this project as an opportunity to engage and incorporate community members' voices, especially women, in planning the Central Library. Engagement can help to ensure that the needs and priorities of all groups, including those often excluded from research, are reflected in the design of the library as well as the services offered.

PRIMARY GOAL

The primary goal of this project is to work with CFUW and WIC to engage community members' voices to inform the planning process for the new Central Library and to include their input about the GPL system into the new library's design and services.

THIS REPORT

This report analyzes data collected at a community engagement event:

Location: St. George's Church

Date: Friday, March 8th, 2019

For: International Women's Day

Held by: CFUW, WIC and the Community Engaged Scholarship Institute (CESI)

You can find this report online:

"A Library for All: Add Your Voice to the Next Chapter"

<https://atrium.lib.uoguelph.ca/xmlui/handle/10214/8902>



DATA COLLECTION

The researchers used two methods for data collection:

- ① Table discussions
- ② A brainstorming sticky note activity



Table discussions lasted approximately fifteen minutes and questions specifically asked about participants' current use of the GPL system, gaps in spaces, services, and resources in the current library/libraries they use, as well as beneficial aspects of the library. There was one table dedicated to attendees who wanted to engage in conversations and feedback, but did not want their input included in the research. The brainstorming sticky note activity was an optional activity taking place before the commencement of the event. The researchers made it clear that if individuals agree to participate, it will be a part of the research.

KEY RESULTS

The findings are a combination of participant responses from the brainstorming sticky note activity and the table discussions.

BENEFICIAL ASPECTS OF THE CURRENT LIBRARY SYSTEM

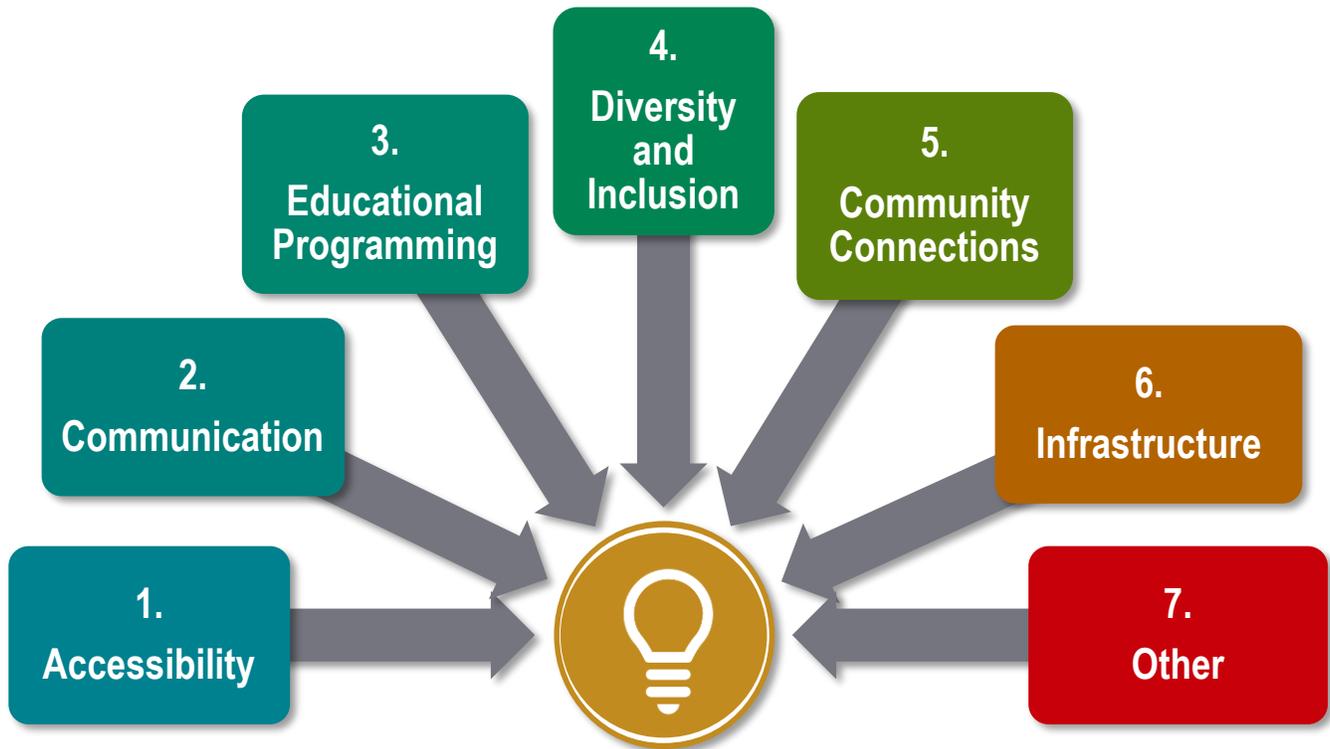
From the brainstorming sticky note activity, participants note that various components are working well with the current GPL system, and they hope these will remain the same for the new Central Library. These include:

-  Presentations and workshops*¹ (i.e. covering “out of the box topics” such as sexual identity; Guelph Reads Stratford Series; Family-centred)
-  Services (e.g. book club)
-  Branch system supported by a strong Central Library
-  Location
-  The flow of books from branch to branch

¹ Items marked with a * indicated they were frequently noted in the data.

NEW IDEAS AND AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

Participants' input in this section were inductively categorized by the researchers into **seven themes**:



The results offer a unique and important contribution in exploring current use of the GPL system and visions for spaces, services and resources to inform the planning process of the new Central Library, located in the Baker Street District.

1. ACCESSIBILITY

Physical Barriers

Physical barriers are physical hazards or obstacles that can impede accessibility and mobility. Physical barriers noted by participants that would improve accessibility include:



Lighting in parking lots that is adequate



Ice and snow removal



Accessible bathrooms that can be easily accessed from street level

Accommodations

Participants suggested that the new library accommodate diverse bodies and abilities to increase accessibility. Specific suggestions include:



Adjusting the width of aisles*



Changing spacing of shelves



Designing wide, open doors for easy access



Having low stimulation times and days for those individuals who are sensitive to light and noise



Creating a sensory-aware space



Providing a variety of chair sizes and types



Providing accessible washrooms

2. COMMUNICATION

Signage

Participants suggested an increase in signage within the library, as a means of visible internal communication. They recommended:



Welcome signs in different languages



A public display of directions to specific areas and facilities



A form of land acknowledgement located in a prominent, visible location in the library (e.g. a permanent plaque)

Promotion/Social Media

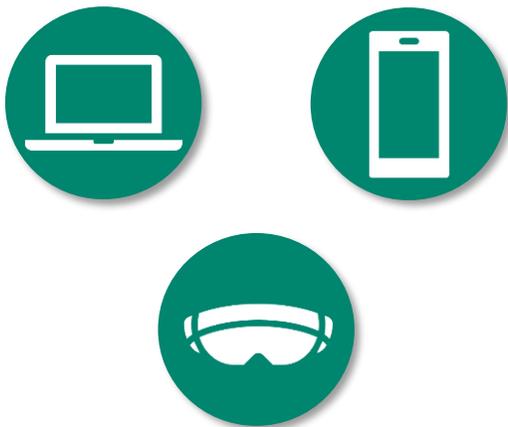
Social media is a means of external communication which can inform the public of events and activities occurring at the library. Participants **emphasized the importance of better promotion and an active social media presence by the GPL** to reinforce events, programs, and services offered at the library. Participants suggest engaging youth in a branding exercise to make the library 'cool' and to change youth's perception of the library from a place 'to read' or 'like school' to a space to socialize, have fun, and learn. Another recommendation was to include social media handles on library cards.



3. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

Technology

Full social and economic participation depend on a person's ability to navigate the digital world. Without access to technology and the skills to use it, individuals are at risk of exclusion that will impact their success and well-being.



Thus, participants were keen on GPL investing in more computers (with a longer rental period), **new 'cool' technology to attract youth** such as VR and 3D printers, and **a lending library** to sign out Chromebooks, kobos, iPads and other electronics especially for those who cannot afford it. Participants also recommend technology that would support learning, as well as staff to help all age groups access and learn how to use technological devices at the library.

Assistive Technology

Participants indicate an interest in assistive technology at the new library for children with special needs and software and technology that accommodates different abilities.

Non-Print Learning

Non-print learning refers to informational resources (i.e. materials and programs) that facilitate learning in a non-print format. Participants recommend:



Music classes, programming and spaces to practice music



A lending library: easel rental, musical instruments and equipment*, and art supplies



Oral history (i.e. historical information available on video or audiotape)



Other forms of facilitated expression that are creative and imaginative

Public Events and Programming

In addition to being a place of communication and learning, libraries have a role in serving as a community hub. A well-designed and well-resourced library contributes to the social cohesiveness of a community. As such, [participants were adamant about the need for public events, programs, and workshops](#) expanded to different topic areas and formats.

In particular, families use libraries for purposes such as recreation, family engagement, relationship building, social networking, and accessing educational resources. To achieve these objectives, participants suggest:



- Training sessions for parents
- A broader scope of age-specific programming (older children and youth)
- Activities for a variety of intellectual abilities
- Movie viewings for youth
- Library sleepover nights for children and youth
- Different clubs: kid's club, games club, reading club
- Game nights
- An escape room
- A toy lending library
- Temporary exhibits to keep youth engaged



Other recommendations by participants include:



Technology-related programs such as repair cafes and computer cleaning



Technology support services and workshops



Group discussions and engagement



Free events such as book signings and movie viewings



Art exhibitions



Nutrition education and kitchen/recipe classes

4. DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Community Ambassador

Community ambassadors are representatives or leaders of local community organizations and agencies that act as ‘champions’ for the GPL system, and promote library services and programs. [Participants suggested that ambassadors be from priority groups and organizations](#) and that they have an understanding of the needs of marginalized people.

Staff and Volunteers

To accommodate the expansion of the GPL system, participants involved in the event encouraged the library to hire more staff and volunteers from diverse backgrounds. More specifically, participants recommend:



A greeter to welcome and direct people within the library



Individuals that can help those with language barriers



University volunteers for technology support as well as to teach older volunteers about technology thereby allowing them to educate same-age peers



Non-paid or volunteer opportunities for students interested in pursuing library/information sciences as a career (e.g. co-op, practicum, internships)

Emotional Safety

An emotionally safe space is one where individuals feel safe to express themselves emotionally and feel comfortable enough to take on new challenges and risks, without judgement. There was a range of responses by participants regarding emotional safety. Common themes include:

Welcoming language
and cultural
representation

Programs and
services for different
lifestyles and skills

Visibility for a
variety of
intellectual abilities

Moreover, participants indicated that the library is a place of refuge for some and should have the ability to service marginalized individuals because:

“No one should feel threatened or discouraged from entering the library”



Suggestions made to achieve emotional safety include the library becoming less intimidating for older youth (20-29 years old) who may have low literacy and feel apprehensive coming to the library.

Some participants did, however, acknowledge that the library is a non-threatening space to access technology support, specifically by seniors.

Cultural Education

As the population of Guelph increases, so does the need to acknowledge cultural and religious diversity. With this in mind, participants propose a range of cultural education programs and resources for individuals accessing the GPL system.

Recommendations include:

Indigenous knowledge
across all sections of the
library (e.g. health, law,
fiction, etc.)

Designated days for
cultural learning

Children and youth
activities related to
cultural holidays

Recognition of culturally
relevant holidays (e.g.
multicultural calendar)

All faith's religious
books (e.g. Quran,
Torah, Bible, etc.)

Languages

In addition to cultural education, libraries can be more inclusive by providing material, resources (e.g. signs), and support to those who speak languages other than English and French.



Examples suggested by participants include foreign language books and signs (e.g. in Indigenous languages, in Arabic), technology support offered in different languages, as well as creating a space for women to practice their English.

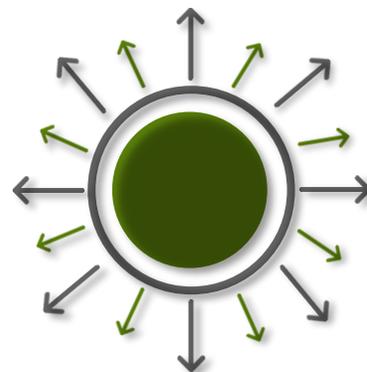


5. COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Community Outreach

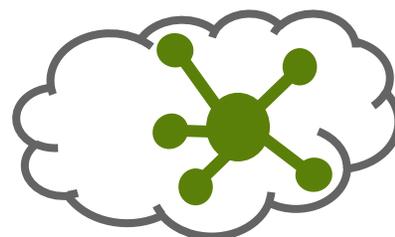
Libraries serve as community hubs that bring community members together and cultivate linkages both socially and informationally.²

To create the feeling of a ‘community hub’, participants recommend an online and in-person ‘centralized information network’ for individuals to access different social services as well as to look for job/volunteer opportunities.



Additionally, a suggestion made by participants was to create a **community liaison position** at the new library (e.g. peer outreach worker or social worker) who is responsible for connecting with service providers and connecting individuals to different services within the community.

Furthermore, participants recommend a **volunteer-run online service** linked to the library website that **connects service providers** (similar concept to LinkedIn but for Guelph-Wellington services).



² Scott, R. (2011). The Role of Public Libraries in Community Building. Public Library Quarterly,30(3), 191-227. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2011.599283>

Partnerships

The primary function of libraries is to provide free and open access to information and materials and access to social services across the community. Specific partnerships suggested by participants include:



Corporations

- For technology lending and support for workshops (e.g. Apple)
- Establishing a corporate sponsorship for the donation of technology and electronics

University of Guelph

- Currently, there are no meeting points between library patrons and university students
- Volunteers for technology support
- Shared resources with the university and pushing for open access to resources and research (academic journals)
- CESI (Research Shop) to conduct evaluations of individual programs or activities at the library

Guelph Community Health Centre

YMCA/YWCA

- With the provision of kid-friendly programs and services

Immigrant Services

- To offer English as a Second Language (ESL) programs or space for different ethnic groups to rent out

Out on the Shelf

- Resource exchange

Local School Boards

- To connect with school libraries

County of Wellington

PIN (The People and Information Network)

Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health

Welcoming Street Initiative

General Public

- Household donations of technology and electronics

6. INFRASTRUCTURE

Public Spaces

Public spaces are spaces that are open to the public and open during the library's operating hours.



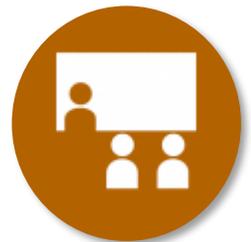
Many participants expressed that they would like the new Central Library to have a coffee shop.



In addition to this, other design ideas include a theatre area, debating area, more computer stations and chairs, flexible space, studio space and more common reading spaces.

Community Spaces

Community spaces important to participants include rooms within the library that can be **rented out by community members** for events and meetings, with little to no cost. As indicated by many participants, these spaces are important for priority groups, local organizations and service providers as a means to book weekly time slots to schedule meetings and events*.



Designated Spaces

Designated spaces refer to permanent areas designed in the library to accommodate particular populations. Specific designated spaces desired by participants included:



Prayer room*



Breastfeeding space*



Safe and separate sleep spaces for children and adults*



Larger space for children and infants*



Space for a variety of intellectual abilities



Maker space (i.e. a space to learn about inventing and to create new things using computers and other technologies)



Designated teen and youth areas:

- Computer lab
- Group workspace for high school students
- Space for interactive and engaging activities (i.e. similar to the Science Centre)



Permanent social services space:

- Outreach worker
- Community service hub (i.e. PIN, Housing Registry, Immigrant Services, Out on the Shelf)

Physical Safety

A library is a space where all users and staff should feel physically safe and supported. **There were mixed opinions regarding physical security and policing of the library.** A few participants expressed the importance of physical security such as the presence of a security guard. However, a subset of participants indicated that even though security guards can be helpful to some, they can be intimidating to others, especially marginalized individuals.



A proposed solution was to have a security guard not dressed in uniform.

Other recommendations to ensure physical safety include:

The use of security cameras with regular monitoring

All staff receiving safety training

Expanding understanding of security to focus more on anti-oppressive practices

Priority on harm reduction

Addressing the fact that certain individuals may pose a risk to others in the library

Washrooms located in a safe, open space (i.e. not in a back, dark corner)

7. OTHER



Providing nutritious meals at the library (individuals need food to learn)



Using the newly designed Kitchener Public Library as an example of planning and developing the new Central Library



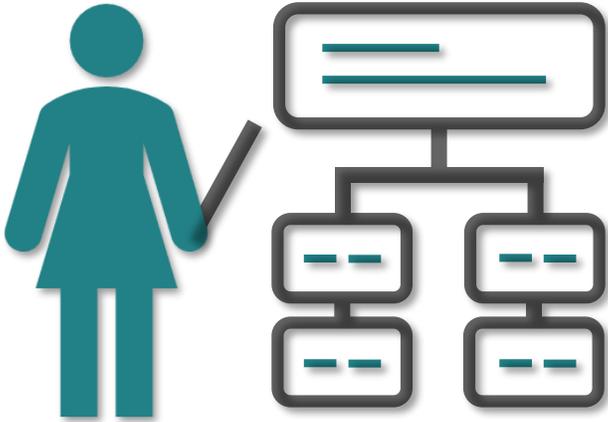
Architectural interest (“beauty will encourage visits to Guelph”)



A participant observed the downsizing of the dimensional layout of the new Central Library since earlier discussions

IMPACT

Public libraries have been identified as a [community hub for marginalized groups](#).^{3,4} Therefore, it is crucial that these populations are prioritized and heard during the library planning process for Guelph's new Central Library.



It is our hope that the results of this project will contribute to the inclusion of groups that can often be left out of public engagement (especially women) to inform the planning and design process of the new Central Library as well as the services offered. Further, it is our hope that it will be useful in the planning of other public spaces in our community.

REFERENCES

² Scott, R. (2011). The Role of Public Libraries in Community Building. *Public Library Quarterly*, 30(3), 191-227. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2011.599283>

³ Hines, S. (2017). Connecting individuals with social services: The academic library's role. *Collaborative Librarianship*, 9(2), 109.

⁴ Freeman, L. M., & Blomley, N. (2018). Enacting property: Making space for the public in the municipal library. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2399654418784024>