Library Services Review

Engagement Report

Annapolis Valley Regional Library (AVRL)

February 28, 2025

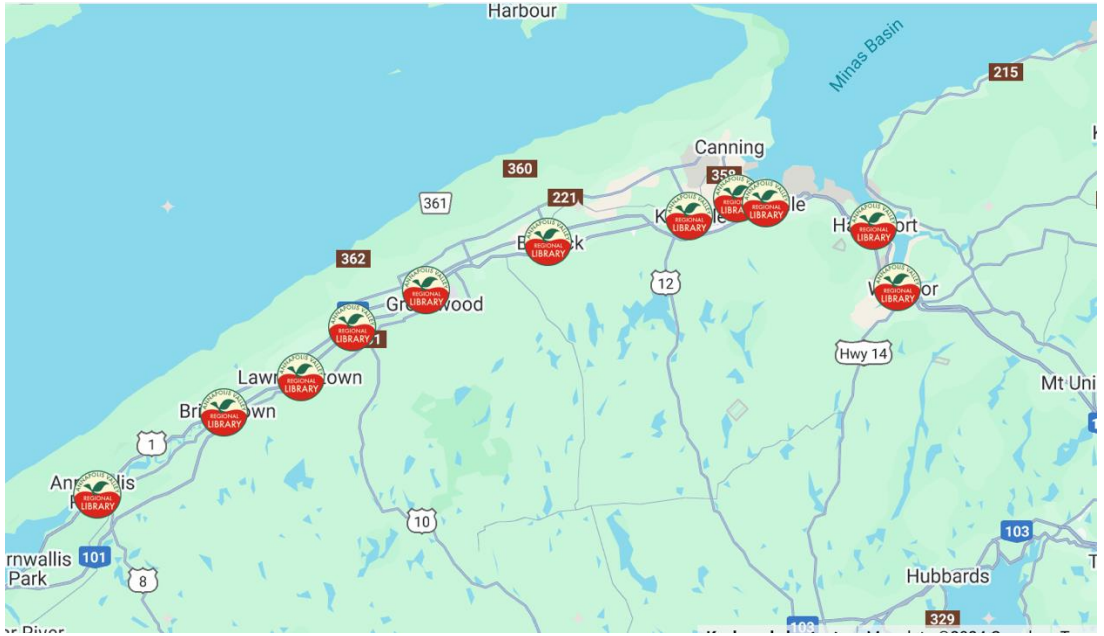
DAVIS PIER

Table of contents

Purpose of AVRL Library Service Review

Annapolis Valley Regional Library (AVRL) engaged Davis Pier to conduct a review of their library services, that included two components:

1. *Engagement with community and key partners* – gathering perspectives and identified priorities and opportunities
2. *Sensitivity analysis* - assessing the impacts of changes to services, funding, or staffing



This report intends summarize insights from engagements with community, staff and key partners.

AVRL intends to use the insights from this engagement and overall analysis as an input for their upcoming Strategic Planning effort and planning for the future.

DAVIS PIER

Project Approach

DAVIS PIER

Project Approach

1. Engagement Plan

Developed engagement plan with input from AVLR management and staff to understand what's working well, existing gaps, and identify potential opportunities.

Key Deliverables:

- **Project initiation document**
- **Stakeholder engagement plan**

2. Conducted Engagements

Conducted community engagements to hear from various user groups, partners and community members to understand their needs, expectations, and potential for new programs and services.

Key Deliverables:

- **'What we've heard' summary**

3. Sensitivity Analysis

Conducted sensitivity analysis. The analysis factored in services, funding, costs, and/or staffing.

Key Deliverable:

- **Sensitivity analysis – Key Findings**

4. Key Recommendations

Provided key recommendations to AVRL based on overall analysis and service delivery model takeaways.

Key Deliverables:

- **Recommendations Report**

Community Engagement Approach

DAVIS PIER

Approach | Community Engagement

Davis Pier adopted a comprehensive strategy to collect insights from the communities in the Annapolis Valley region, ensuring people from all demographics were effectively engaged. Working closely with the AVRL Project Team, the team employed a variety of engagement methods to reach the different groups of interest to the libraries. Carefully thought-out prompts were used to help participants reflect on their needs, aspirations, and the role of the library in their daily lives.

Gallery Style Pop-up - Interacted with families with young kids following the Berwick Library story time and play group hearing from diverse groups of families

Public Survey – Public survey helped reach a broader population and gather quantitative as well as qualitative insights at scale.

Interactive Boards – The boards set-up across the 11 branches with prompt questions helped engage with visiting patrons to share their thoughts without any time commitment

Virtual Focus Group – Virtual focus group engaged with newcomers to Canada within the Valley to hear their experiences and thoughts.

Approach | Pop-up event

Pop-up feedback event | Berwick library

November 27

All morning pop-up feedback station in the Berwick Library with multiple input eliciting activities. The pop-up was planned right after story-time, during the play group in the gym area.

Recruitment strategy: The event was publicized through prior weekly story-time, AVRL event calendar, and newsletter.

Pop-event set-up:

1. Feedback wall:

Families used sticky notes to respond to below prompts on the wall.

- *What is your family's favourite things about the library?*
- *What are your family's learning or activity goals?*
- *How can we make the library a more welcoming and accessible place for families with kids?*

2. Library wishes:

Families and kids wrote down their wishes for the library and dropped them in the wish box.

3. Survey station:

Families filled out the survey using the iPad or paper copies.

13 families met

40 sticky note responses to prompt questions

17 wishes shared in in wish-box

Approach | Public survey

Public survey

November 25 – December 6

All public survey (5–8-minutes to fill out) seeking feedback on library services was launched. The survey was created to be comprehensive and adapt to all user-groups perspective.

Recruitment strategy: The survey was marketed through QR codes put up in all 11 branches, digital newsletters shared with patrons, and printed copies were socialized by the library staff. A flyer was also promoted through outreach to secondary institutions to target young adults of age 18-25.

Survey methodology:

1. Frequency of library visits

- If visitor: purpose of visits
- If none: reason for not accessing

2. Ranking of existing services and resources

3. Understanding personal goals

- Personal and family goals
- Community connection

4. Rating of experience at library (on a scale of 1 to 10)

5. Additional feedback

6. Self identifiers in demographics:

- Closest library branch
- Age range (18-25/25-40/40-55/55-65/65+)
- Gender
- 2SLGBTQIA+
- Visible minority

726 total survey responses

120 paper surveys filled

Approach |Interactive boards

Interactive Board | All Branches

November 25 – December 6

The boards set-up across the 11 branches with prompt questions helped engage with visiting library users to share their thoughts without any time commitment.

Recruitment strategy: The boards were set-up in accessible places at each branch with the 2 prompt questions getting rotated. The library staff were leveraged to encourage people to contribute their ideas and feedback.

Approach:

1. Prompt Boards

Participants can add sticky notes with personal goals or memories from the library

- *"My favorite thing about the library is …."*
- *"If I could change one thing about the library it would be…."*

2. Love Boards

Visual list of library resources and services and voting system with stickers, where users can "vote" for the resources they love the most.

11 library branches

121 sticky note responses to prompts

736 unique stickers across the love board

Approach | Virtual focus group

Virtual Focus Group

December 4

The virtual focus group for Newcomers to Canada with the goal of including diverse perspectives in the Valley. The 60-minute virtual call was conducted via Zoom call using Mural based activities.

Recruitment strategy: The outreach was done via the 11 branches community boards and outreach via Annapolis Valley Welcome Network.

Approach:

Participants used sticky notes on Mural to share their thoughts. Below are the prompt questions asked:

- About you and where you moved from
- What kind of library services do you find most valuable?
- How can the library make you feel welcome and more connected to the community?
- What are your learning or activity goals for yourself or your family as you make the Annapolis Valley new home?

6 engaged participants

Challenge: The virtual group had 18 people join during the session and had some excellent contributors. However, there was a challenge of people living outside the Valley joining the call with the intent of monetary compensation (gift card). These individuals stayed off camera, didn't speak, and avoided participating meaningfully.

Community Engagement Insights

DAVIS PIER

‘What’ve we heard’ themes | Overview

Below is an overview of the five key themes that emerged from the community engagements in no particular order. The data was classified using thematic analysis, which involves identifying and interpreting patterns or themes within qualitative data to understand key insights and underlying patterns. This method helps to organize the data into categories that highlight significant trends and ideas. The following slides provide a deeper insight into each of these themes.

Increased service hours

Many individuals and groups expressed a desire for libraries to be open for longer periods, beyond the current operating hours, to better accommodate diverse schedules.

Expanded collection of books and digital content

Expanding the existing collection of books and audiobooks emerged as a key theme from the community feedback, with many individuals expressing a strong desire for a broader and more diverse selection.

More programming for all-ages

A recurring theme that emerged from all types of community engagements was a strong desire to see more library programs for all age groups in increased frequency and flexible time.

Library as a community hub

Majority of the library users expressed a strong appreciation for the role libraries play in people's daily lives reflecting a broader community investment in libraries. .

Improved infrastructure

People expressed their wish to see better infrastructure set-up within libraries that allows varied user-groups to use the space effectively.

Theme 1 | Extended service hours

What we've heard

Many individuals expressed a desire for libraries to be open for longer periods, beyond the current operating hours and days, to better accommodate diverse schedules and needs.

Users from all demographic groups voiced a strong desire for longer service hours of operations particularly weekends for libraries.

- More evening hours
- Open hours on Sundays
- More morning hours
- We would go even more if the branch was open on Sunday but understand that is a challenge for staffing
- I love our libraries and think they do a wonderful job. If they were open more or had more space to study that would be even better

More service hours was separately mentioned **26 times** across public survey, interactive board and pop-up events.

Key user-groups impacted

- Working parents and seniors who prefer to visit the library earlier in the day or on the designated weekly day off are the ones most affected.
- The evolving role of libraries as a safe space where people like to spend time is reflected in the feedback.

Theme 2 | Improved collection of resources

What we've heard

Community feedback highlights a strong demand for libraries to expand their collections of books (89% survey participants) and audiobooks (44% survey participants). Active users appreciated the inter-library loan system and suggested expanding it to include all libraries across the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM). Many library users expressed concern over long wait times for popular books that have only a single copy available.

- More extensive collection of books
- More book titles available, faster inter library loan transfers, more audiobooks
- Offer more titles online. I tag titles I am looking for hoping to get notifications that the titles have been added.
- Bring back science fiction and fantasy section
- I'd like to see a better selection of fiction and non-fiction books [especially cookbooks].
- Wait times for holds on certain books are off the charts. Sometimes it's impossible to get certain materials.
- A separate kids section with age categories. More series for elementary school ages

Key user-groups impacted

- Many seniors expressed interest for increased magazine subscriptions, while others called for a broader selection of both fiction and non-fiction titles in all formats to cater to diverse interests and reading preferences.
- Expanding collections in French, books of Canadian authors, and more LGBTQA+ friendly books were other areas of interest.
- Young adults mentioned the longer wait times for audio books and the need to have more copies in digital versions too.

Theme 3 | More programming for all-ages

What we've heard

Survey participants expressed a strong desire to reinstate the library programs that had been reduced or eliminated in 2024 due to financial constraints and staffing shortages.

More kids and family centric programming, arts and craft programs for adults in a flexible time format, and educational workshops were rated most valuable services collectively amounting to **58% of participant preference.**

- Offering more programs, like children's groups (throughout the year, not just in the summer).
- Readings by local authors, lectures by local experts
- More programming and workshops where I could meet other people
- Adult events that aren't just during the workday. A book club!
- More programming, easier ways to access information about what is being offered at each branch
- Craft programs for adults.

More programming for all age groups was separately mentioned **over 50 times** across public survey, interactive board and pop-up events.

Key user-groups impacted

- Families with young kids expressed interest in joining more programs for kids and working parents wished for more flexible time programming to accommodate their schedules.
- Many adults pointed out the need for programming for all age-groups as it serves as a means of connecting with others who share similar interests and goals.

Theme 4 | Library as a community hub

What we've heard

Library users expressed a strong and heartfelt appreciation for the role libraries play in people's daily lives reflecting a broader community investment in libraries. 88% of the survey takers rated their library experience as 8 or above indicating very high satisfaction levels. Many appreciated the library's function as a welcoming, inclusive, and safe space where individuals of all backgrounds can come together. Participants often used phrases like "we love our library" and viewed the library as a place where everyone can find something of value.

- Favorite thing about library is that it exists. Libraries are so important.
- Libraries are the best public institution in existence and librarians should be classified as civil servants
- The library should be the core of the community, a safe space.
- The library is one of my connections to the community.
- Somewhere to hangout on a rainy day
- Library Cafe
- Bring back free covid tests
- More options for book groups and social opportunities to meet people within the context of the Library

Key user-groups impacted

- Overall, the public shared having a deep connection with their local libraries.
- Many library users expressed their wish to see a library café to connect with other people over coffee and snacks within the library set-up.
- Newcomers to Canada wished to be part of Newcomer welcome groups via the library to meet other people.

Theme 5 | Better infrastructure

What we've heard

People expressed their wish to see better infrastructure set-up within libraries that allows varied library users to use the space effectively. This speaks to the need for libraries to evolve into multi-functional spaces catering to a diverse base such as such young readers, supporting adult learners and remote workers, and providing everyone with a peaceful space to think, read, and create.

- More books in a bigger facility; more space to sit, read and work
- Some libraries are not accessible for those with mobility issues – we need to address this issue.
- The Kingston library should really have more individual tables tucked away in corners where people can plug in a computer and study/do work while children browse as my son is happy to read for two hours there. More seating areas are needed.
- Make a more comfortable seating area, couch, chairs for mothers to read to their children, people to work with a laptop, read etc.

'More space' was separately mentioned **over 40 times** across public survey, interactive board and pop-up events.

Key user-groups impacted

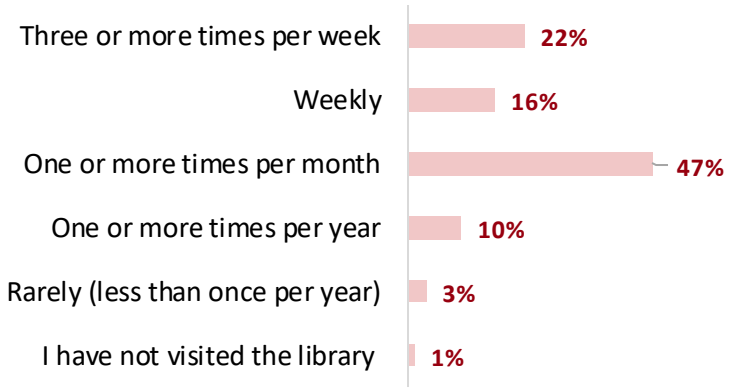
- As work and study habits evolve, particularly with the rise of remote work and digital learning, libraries are seen as vital spaces for quiet productivity.
- The need to make all libraries accessible to people with special needs was called out.
- Families with young kids wished to see dedicated children's zones to engage in activities without disrupting those seeking a quiet environment.

Community Engagement Survey Results

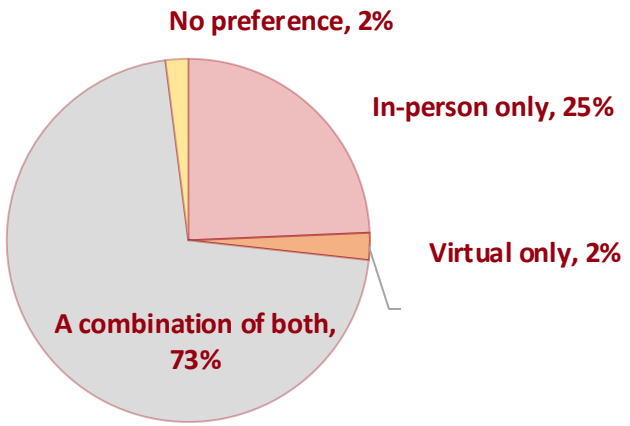
DAVIS PIER

Survey | About the participants

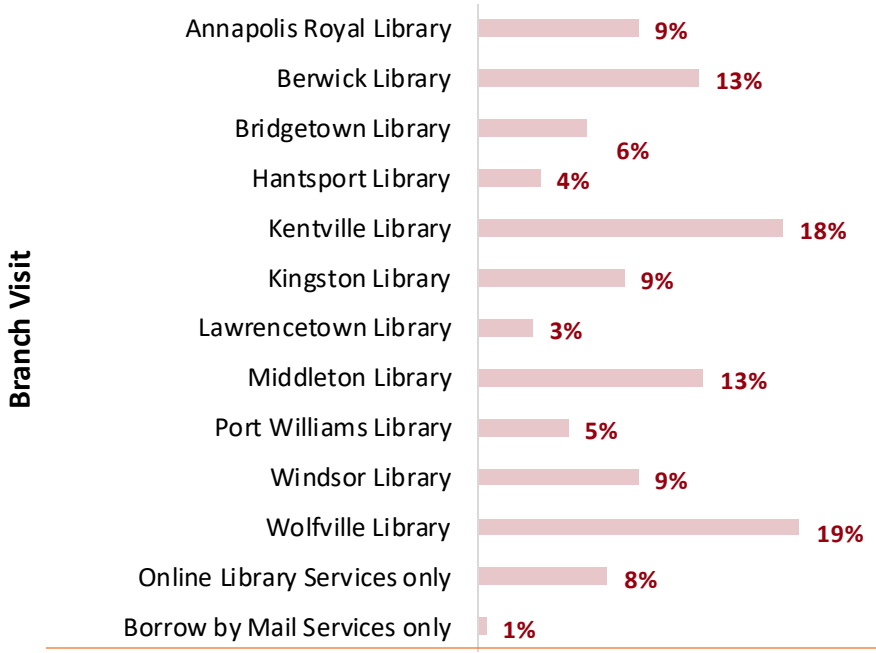
Frequency of Visit



Preferred Access to Library: In-person or Virtual



Branch Visit



9% identified as 2SLGBTQIA+

2SLGBTQIA+ stands for Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and additional sexual orientations and gender identities

3% identified as BIPOC

BIPOC stands for Black, Indigenous and/or Person of Colour

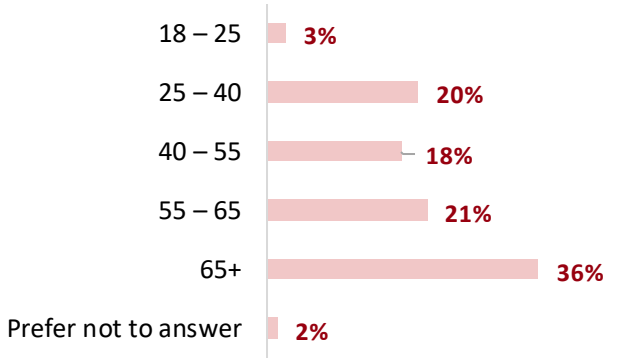
4% identified as Newcomers to Canada.

Newcomers to Canada are classified as anyone who moved to Canada in the last 5 years

Key takeaways:

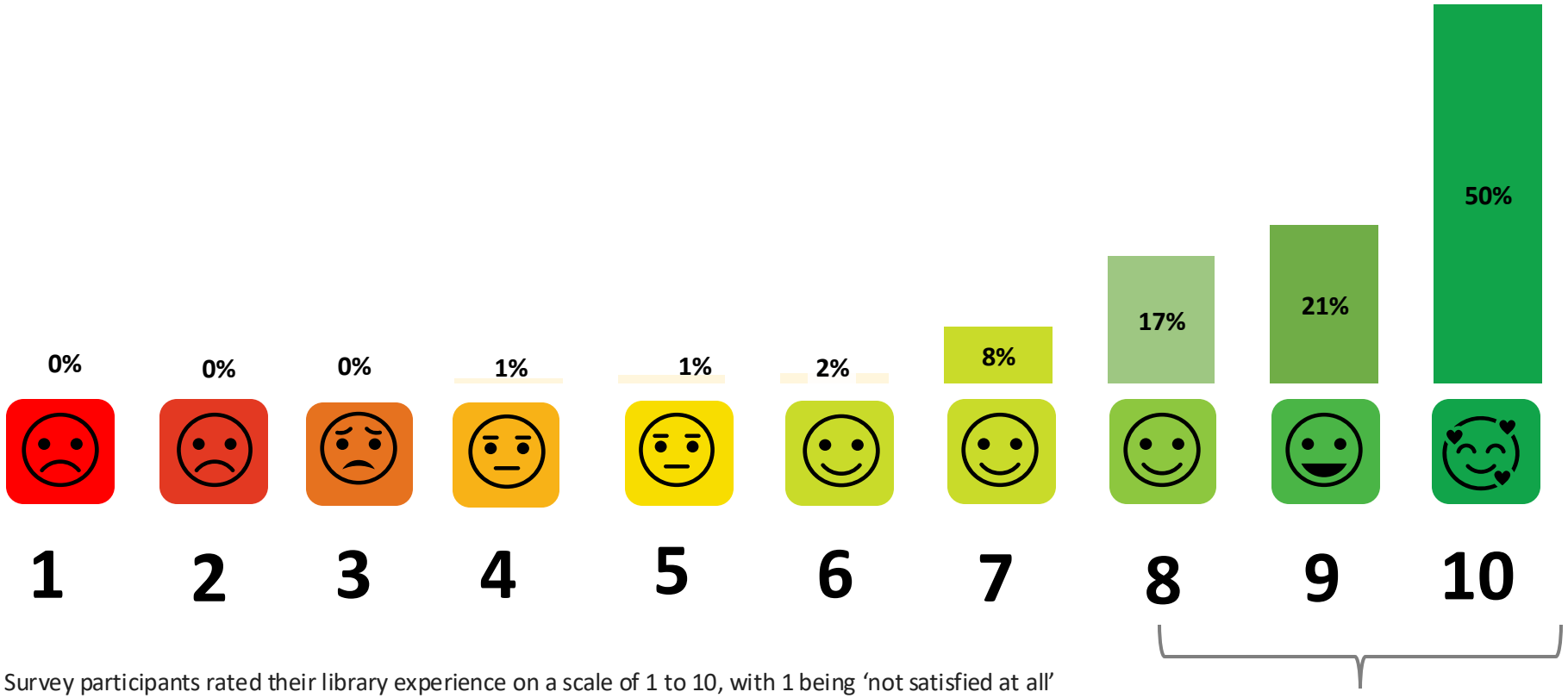
- 99% of the participants of the survey have visited AVRL, of which 85% visit an AVRL library at least once a month.
- Berwick, Kentville, and Wolfville branches collectively contributed to 50% of survey participants.
- 73% of all participants preferred to use the library in a combination of in-person and virtual services. while 8% of the participants said they use only online library services to access the digital resources..

Age of Respondents



DAVIS PIER

88% of the library users rated their library experience as 8 or above indicating high satisfaction levels. This feedback is consistent with the qualitative data received across various engagements expressing great appreciation for the library and its staff



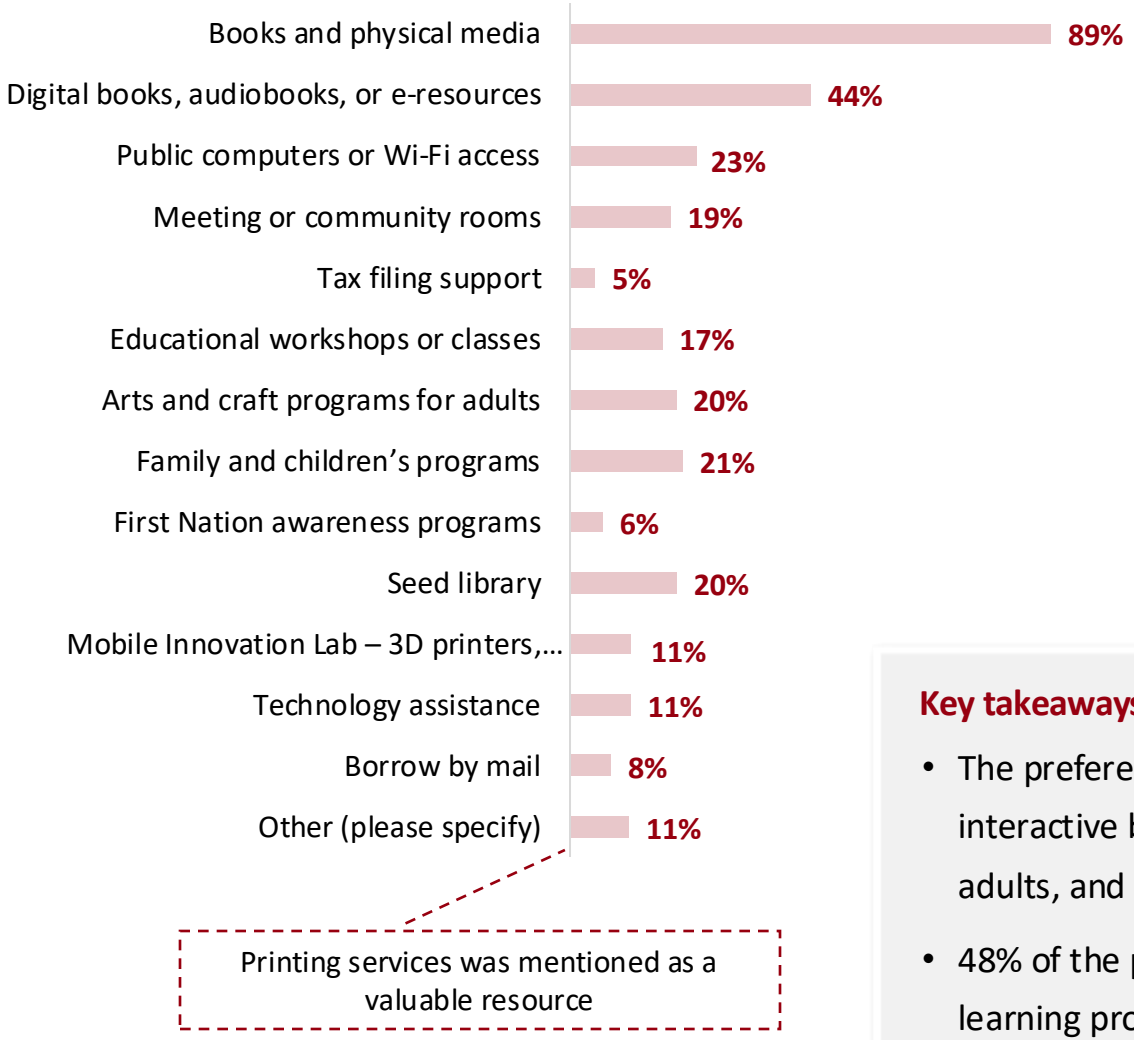
Survey participants rated their library experience on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being 'not satisfied at all' and 10 being 'extremely satisfied'.

Library users especially highlighted their gratitude for the library staff, frequently using words like "kind," "friendly," and "helpful" to describe their interactions.

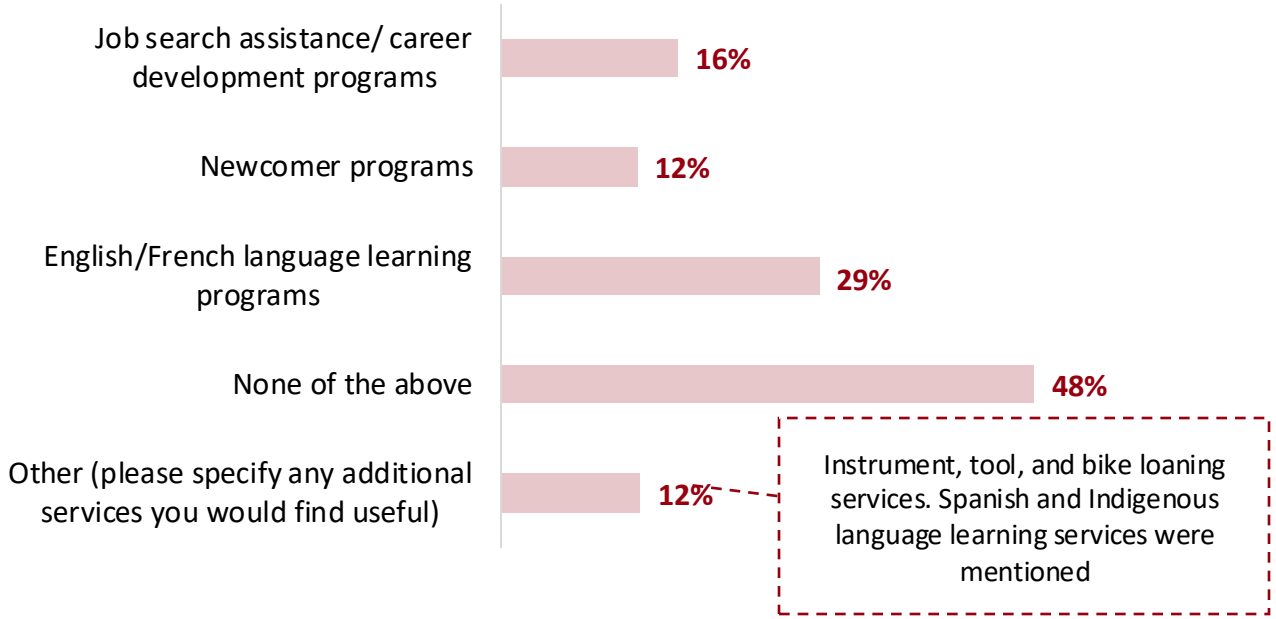
DAVIS PIER

Books, physical media, and digital resources were rated as top two most valued services at 89% and 44% respectively

Most valued service



Most likely service to use if offered

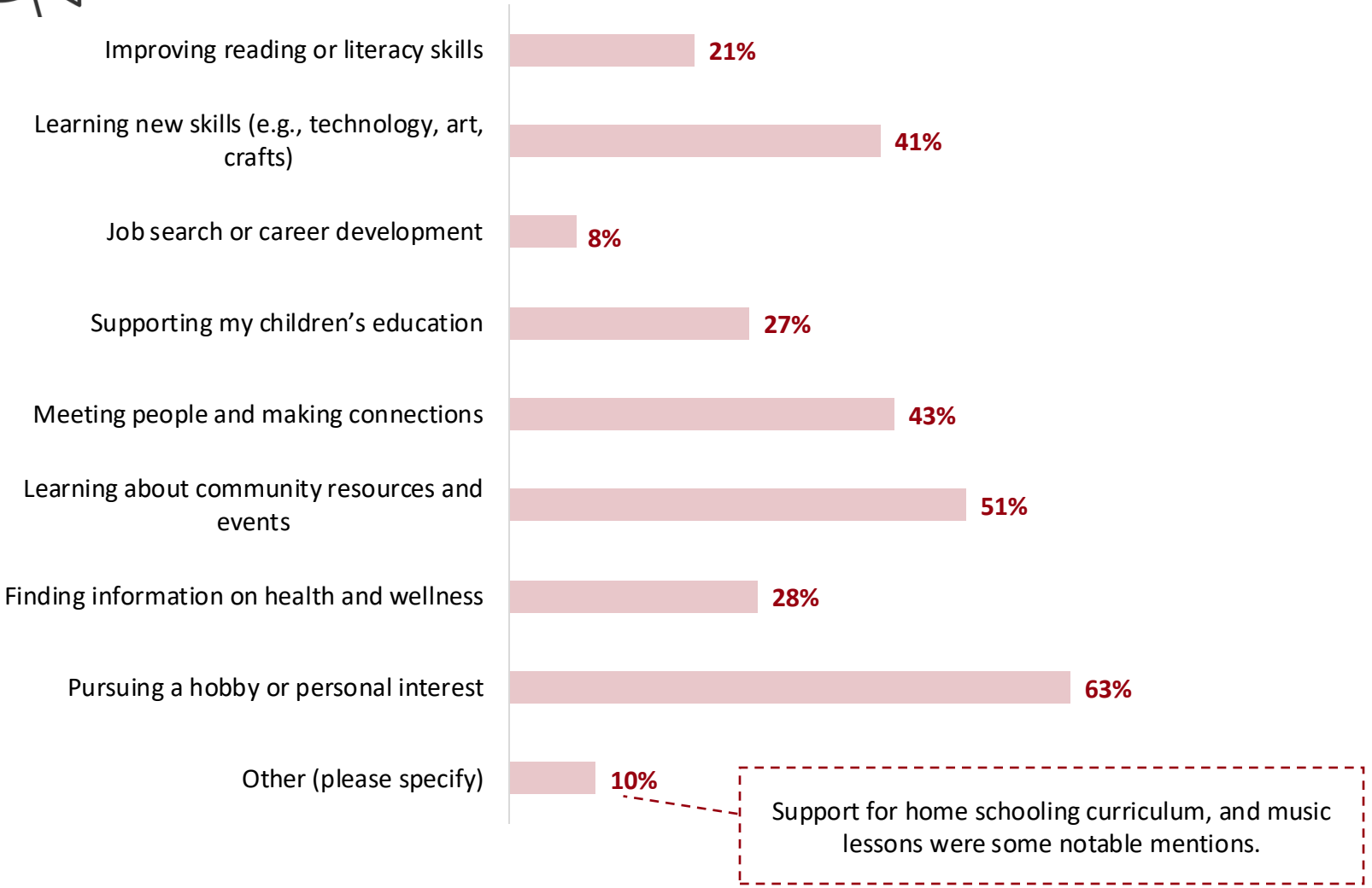


Key takeaways:

- The preference for books, physical media and digital resources were consistent with the interactive boards receiving 183 stickers and 68 stickers respectively. Programming for kids and adults, and access to computers were rated by over 20% of the participants.
- 48% of the participants did not prefer to use any additional services if offered, while language learning programs were the most favored service at 29% if offered.

63% of the participants stated they are looking to the library to support pursuing a hobby or personal interest

Personal or family goals



Key takeaways:

- Learning about community resources and events and meeting people and making connections were top personal goals for the participants.
- This reiterates public perception of viewing the library as a space to connect with other people and resources.

Staff Engagement Approach

DAVIS PIER

Approach | Staff engagement

Working closely with the AVRL project team, Davis Pier went about the staff engagements using a two-tier approach. This included a survey to all staff members that ended with asking interested staff members to self-nominate for an in-person focus group that followed.

Staff survey:

- The staff survey was designed to gather insights into staff perspectives on AVRL's impact, priorities for the coming years and opportunities for changes.
- The responses from staff gave a good view of what they appreciated and where gaps existed. 32 completed survey responses were received.

Focus groups:

- The survey received 20 self-nominations through the survey of which 15 participants from the staff joined the two focus groups. These participants were that were shortlisted to have good representation across various departments, branches and tenure within AVRL branches.
- The focus group was conducted in a circular discussion format to allow for all participants to actively contribute. Themes covered included understanding what a thriving library means to the staff, understanding which changes have felt hard, and identifying opportunities for staff learning.

Staff Engagement Insights

DAVIS PIER

What we've heard themes | Overview

Below is an overview of the four key themes that emerged from the staff engagements in no particular order. The data was classified using thematic analysis, which involves identifying and interpreting patterns or themes within qualitative data to understand key insights and underlying patterns. This method helps to organize the data into categories that highlight significant trends and ideas. The following slides provide a deeper insight into each of these themes.

Increased staff capacity and space

The staff expressed the need to take on multiple roles within the branch due to a lack of designated staff, and how that affects their ability to attend to library users in real-time.

Further expand library services

The staff mentioned the need for AVRL services to keep evolving to meet the changing needs of the communities to stay relevant and attract library users in the long term.

Partner with social services

Staff noted an increasing frequency of vulnerable individuals facing mental health and addiction issues seeking support at the library, highlighting the need for stronger support structures to help staff navigate these complex situations.

Continue strengthening internal operations

Staff highlighted the importance of a more tailored approach to standardization across branches. They emphasized the critical need for enhanced staff training and the establishment of robust, two-way communication channels with management.

Theme 1 | Increased staff capacity and space

What we've heard

The staff expressed the need to take on multiple roles within the branch due to a lack of designated staff, and how that affects their ability to attend to library users in real-time.

- *"We wear too many hats and need more 'heads' to function in more roles. Waiting for funding from the govt is a challenge that contributes to loss of staff and frustration."*
- *"There is a lot of need from people for tech support to access their resources, but the staff do not have the time because there's always a line.*
- *Community spaces for people to come and use it for anything such as meetings without having to pay anything.*

Sub-themes

More staff and extended open hours:

- Staff highlighted that they envision the library as a safe space for all, that operates with increased staff and is open for longer hours catering to a diverse audience.
- Staff also highlighted how the management's prioritization of work-life balance has helped the overall culture positively.

Technology support:

- There is a need for access to advanced printers that can connect via Bluetooth and need lesser assistance.
- Staff expressed that technical support to patrons as very time consuming and taking away from other work and suggested a designated in-person technical support person during specific hours would be very resourceful.

More space and improved infrastructure:

- Staff shared how designated areas for different user groups, including space for working professionals to hold meetings or take online classes, would be the ideal way going forward.
- Staff members expressed concern over lack of storage space and lack of a break-out space for a break to disconnect.

Theme 2 | Expanding library services

What we've heard

- *"It is evident that people rely on the library for physical and digital resources and so we need to maintain a robust collection".*
- *"Library is a great meeting point for people with similar interests as everyone may not prefer to invite new people into their homes".*
- *"Programming is the best way to get people in the door. People really value the way library acts as a social and cultural hub."*

The staff mentioned the need for AVRL services to keep evolving to meet the changing needs of the communities to stay relevant and attract library users in the long term.

Sub-themes

Expanded collection and resources:

- Staff highlighted the need for the latest collections and more variety to cater to library users and attract new library users.

More programming for all age-groups:

- Staff expressed disappointment over the reduction of many programs due to lack of permanent staff and funding.
- Staff shared how programming for kids, tweens, teens, and adults in flexible formats is a great way for library to welcome people in.

More community connection points:

- Staff reflected on how they often hear patrons share their appreciation of the library and its space to meet and connect with other individuals. Staff think these connection points need to be facilitated intentionally.
    - Coffee gatherings, and book clubs, and meet and greet for newcomers are potential ways to engage with communities directly and encourage these connection points.

Theme 3 | Partner with social services

Staff noted an increasing frequency of vulnerable individuals facing mental health and addiction issues seeking support at the library, highlighting the need for stronger support structures to help staff navigate these complex situations.

What we've heard

- *"We are the buck that gets passed around a lot. We like to help people, but it would be nice if other people in government don't just send everything to the library. "*
- *"Some staff are uncomfortable with confrontation and having to deal with the rising need to deescalate situations have made people feel unsafe" especially because this was not the norm and not what they expected when taking up those jobs."*

Sub-themes

Partner with social services:

- AVRL could partner with social services experts to be present at the library on a scheduled basis so they are more accessible to vulnerable population.
- Staff shared that there is a need to clarify the role of library and its staff in dealing with vulnerable populations.

Staff safety and mental health support:

- Staff expressed concern over single staff branches and potential safety risks involved for staff and library users. They wished for a staffing model that allows for more than one staff at any time in all branches.
- Accessible list of mental health resources for staff to decompress and debrief after experiencing difficult situations and creating intentional space for staff to deal with them.

Guidelines and set protocols:

- Staff expressed need for set guidelines, Standard Operating Procedures from management on what is expected of them when there is social services incident occurs in the library.
    - Clarity on when to call the police and what to do when someone returns etc. are currently left to individual's discretion and may vary from each person or branch.

Theme 4 | Continue strengthening of internal operations

What we've heard

- *"There are multiple, rapid changes in administrative policies leading to a lack of clarity on staff functions at the branches."*
- *"I think there is a disconnect where supervisors can reach someone in management."*

Staff highlighted the importance of a more tailored approach to standardization across branches. They emphasized the critical need for enhanced staff training and the establishment of robust, two-way communication channels with management.

Sub-themes

Standardization vs. customization within branches:

- Staff emphasized the need for a consistent customer experience for library users across all branches, advocating for broader structures and systems. However, some expressed the need for a nuanced approach to accommodate local community needs.

Staff training & upskilling:

- Timely refresher trainings for staff on existing and evolving AVRL policies like accessibility, de-escalation techniques may be helpful.
- Leadership training focused on prioritization, time management, and communication skills.
- Address loss of institutional knowledge with detailed knowledge transfer processes when experienced staff leave.
- More on-demand training opportunities through resource sharing with Halifax Public Libraries.

Communication and feedback:

- Staff would like to see more transparent communication between management and staff and would like to be provided with updates on action taken to address staff feedback.
- Strengthen internal communication to help staff feel more connected, with more opportunities for inter-branch staff interactions.

Municipal Engagement Approach

DAVIS PIER

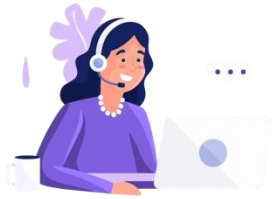
Approach | Municipal engagement

Working closely with the AVRL project team, Davis Pier approached the Municipal engagement through a virtual focus group.

Virtual focus group:

- 10 Municipal representatives joined the Virtual Focus Group hosted by Davis Pier.

Discussion format



The engagement was conducted using Mentimeter tool. Prompt discussion questions included:

- *Role of libraries in addressing the community's evolving needs*
- *Place of libraries in the community's broader infrastructure priorities*
- *Working relationship with AVRL; and what's working well or could be improved*
- *Prioritization of most important library services*

Municipal Engagement Insights

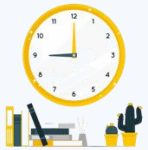
DAVIS PIER

What we've heard themes | Municipal engagement

Below is an overview of the key themes that emerged from the Municipal CAO engagements in no particular order. 10 representatives from various Municipalities across the Valley joined via a virtual focus group. The data was classified using thematic analysis, which involves identifying and interpreting patterns or themes within qualitative data to understand key insights and underlying patterns.

Essential public resource

Municipal staff noted the increasing demand for library resources as its an important 'free' public resource accessible to all.

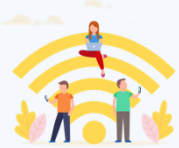


Maintain service hours

Municipal representatives rated maintaining service hours and wider collection of resources for all age groups as most important priorities for them.

Programming is valuable

Key library services of interest included newcomer program, free internet access, programming for preschoolers, support for rural communities, meeting place and community center.



Digital access is vital

Municipal representatives shared access to computers and WiFi as a key community resource accessible to all people in the community as a vital and critical service the libraries provides.

Partner with other community services

The municipal staff shared how libraries need to evolve to cater to varied user-groups by innovative partnerships with other community hubs to stay relevant and attract more funding and investments.

Budget constraints

Municipal staff shared how a lot of their allocation for library funds gets used up to maintain older buildings instead of library resources.

Funding challenges

Municipal representatives also noted how its more challenging for smaller municipalities to make investments on par with bigger municipalities for the library.

More clarity on programming

Some municipalities were interested to understand programming related policies and wanted more clarity on branch specific customizations.

DAVIS PIER