ALAMEDA FREE LIBRARY
STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK REPORT

September 2025

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

The Alameda Free Library ("library") conducted an extensive strategic planning engagement effort in mid-2025, gathering input from over 1,600 stakeholders including community members, key partners, and library staff. Feedback was collected through surveys, interviews, focus groups, and feedback boards.

Top Themes and Takeaways:

1. **Libraries as Essential Community Hubs**

   - The library is valued as a safe, welcoming, and inclusive "third space" that fosters connection, learning, and access to resources for all ages.

   - Patrons and partners view the library as central to literacy, lifelong learning, and community well-being.

2. **Facilities and Accessibility Needs**

   - Staff workspace limitations, accessibility improvements, and safety concerns are pressing issues, particularly at the Main Library.

   - Community members emphasize the need for flexible, modernized spaces with study areas, children's corners, and maker/tech spaces.

3. **Collections and Programs**

   - Books and materials remain the top priority for patrons.

   - There is high satisfaction with core collections, but expansion is needed in multilingual materials, digital resources, and nontraditional collections ("Library of Things").

   - Children's and teen programming are consistently prioritized.

4. **Equity, Outreach, and Awareness**

   - Barriers include limited awareness of library offerings, inconvenient hours, and parking challenges.

   - Non-patrons are often unaware of resources available, highlighting the need for stronger marketing and outreach.

   - Language access and support for vulnerable populations remain critical.

5. **Future Vision**

- Library Partners want the library to continue balancing its traditional role with a modern, community-centered approach, providing both robust collections and innovative services.

- Expansion to Alameda Point, a mobile library, or nontraditional service points are supported.

Overall: The Alameda Free Library is highly valued, but it has areas that could be improved by addressing facility improvements, broadening equitable access, and expanding awareness of its services. Library stakeholders envision the library as both a trusted literacy institution and a dynamic hub for lifelong learning, inclusion, and civic connection.

Engagement and Response

Community, staff, and library partner input were central to this process, ensuring the strategic plan is shaped by diverse voices. This report contains a description and analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data collected for The Alameda Free Library Strategic Planning Process. This includes both the internal and external information collection process and summary results from this research which took place in mid 2025. This process was facilitated by The Pivotal Group Consultants (TPG) and the Library Strategic Planning Team.

The purpose of this document is twofold: (1) to learn and understand significant results identified through internal and external feedback efforts, and (2) to use this data to guide the development of focus areas, goals, objectives, and key activities for the strategic plan.

This stakeholder study employed a range of collection methods to minimize bias, cross-validate findings, accommodate complexity, and gain a comprehensive understanding of context and issues. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used to collect feedback from community members, key partners, and library staff. Various techniques were used for community engagement including surveys in multiple languages (English, Spanish, and Simplified Chinese), 1:1 interviews, physical feedback-boards, and open-invite and invite-only focus groups, marketed through a variety of communication channels and outreach initiatives. To broaden outreach, regional media ads, direct mail flyers and interviews with key stakeholders were conducted. Staff feedback was collected through surveys, workshops, and discussions, providing a holistic view of staff experience and perspectives across library locations and positions.

The participation in stakeholder feedback opportunities is typical of public library strategic planning engagement efforts. The strategic planning team collected feedback from:

- 30 individuals at invite-only key partner focus groups or 1:1 interviews

- 24 individuals from open-invite community focus groups or conversations

- 1,319+ community survey respondents

- 201 written comments from feedback boards at library locations

- 44 staff survey participants

- Nearly full staff participation during one strategic planning all-staff meeting
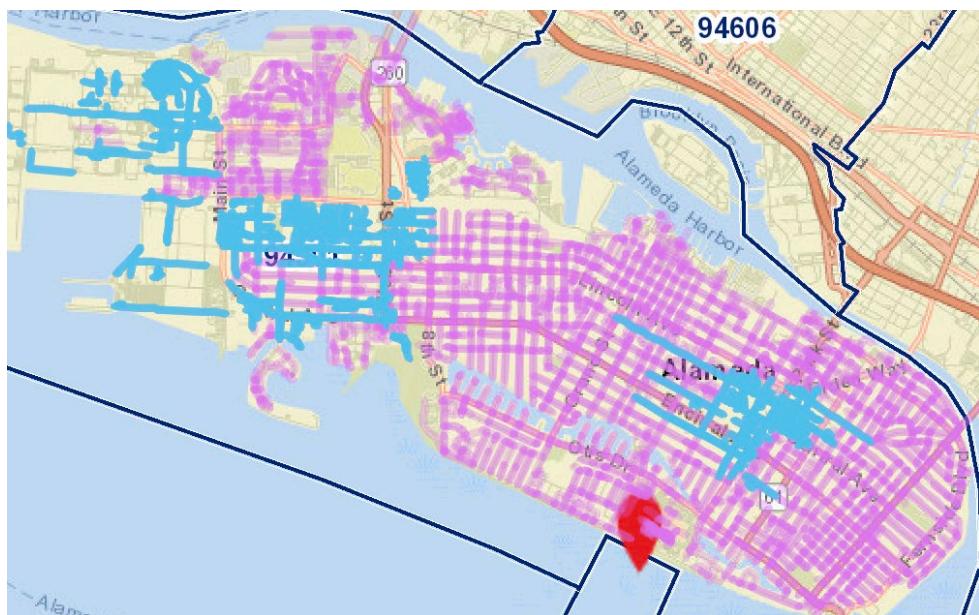
Outreach Methods

Multiple outreach methods were used to increase equity of participation. This included:

- Key Partner interview invitations were sent to:
  - Library Board Members
  - Friends of the Library
  - City Council Members
  - Select City of Alameda staff
  - Select Alameda Unified School District staff
  - Leadership from various local organizations
- Community Conversation tables (open to all):
  - 7/12/25 at West End facilitated in English
  - 7/15/25 on Zoom facilitated in English
  - 7/19/25 at Bay Farm facilitated in English
  - 7/20/25 at Main facilitated in Spanish
  - 8/2/25 at Main facilitated in Mandarin
  - Invitation to Alameda Point Collaborative
- Feedback Boards with Post-its at each library location
- Library website banner
- Multiple social media (Instagram, Facebook) posts via library, City of Alameda accounts, and Board Member personal community connections
- City Press Release
- AUSD newsletter
- Library and Friends of the Library eNewsletter
- 4 runs in the Alameda Journal (print editions) in English and Spanish
- Physical flyers and posters and each library location

- USPS Every Door Direct Mail (EDDM)

To boost survey participation from lower income residents, 4,371 physical mail pieces were sent to the 7 USPS mail routes listed as having the lowest average income (range is $27K-63K).[1] The routes used are shown in blue on the Alameda map below. This demonstrates targeted outreach successfully engaged lower-income residents, a critical audience often underrepresented in community surveys.

Community Survey Response

The following demographics provide context for who participated and highlight which voices were most represented in the survey results. The Community Survey launched in July 2025 and most outreach occurred during that month. **The data analyzed in this report is from 1,301 responses collected on August 6, 2025**.[2] For an opt-in community survey (not a random sample) a 1-2% response rate is considered typical. The population of Alameda is 78,795 people which makes the survey response rate **1.65%,** solidly within the typical range and a respectable return. Likewise, the range for typical public library strategic planning open community survey response rates are between 0.2% and 3% of the population. The Alameda Free Library Survey response rate is sufficient to identify themes and priorities.
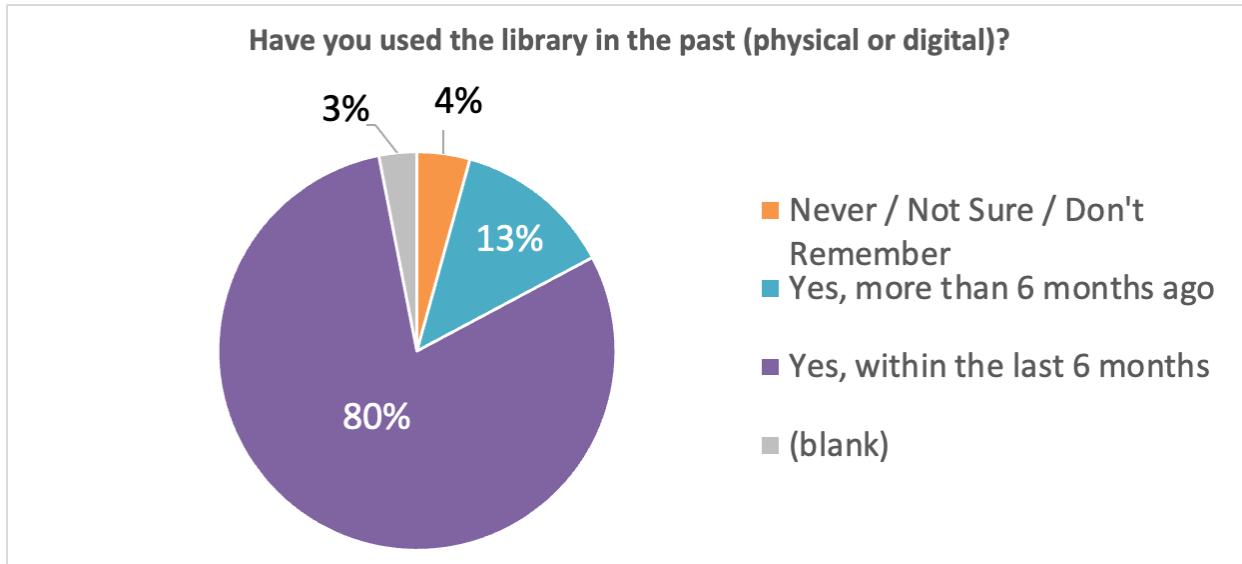
Most of the survey participants are existing library patrons which is expected given the nature of the survey and outreach methods. Non-patrons have little incentive to participate

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[1] Data is based on prior report of the U.S. Census Bureau.
[2] As of August 28, 2025, the survey response number was 1,319.
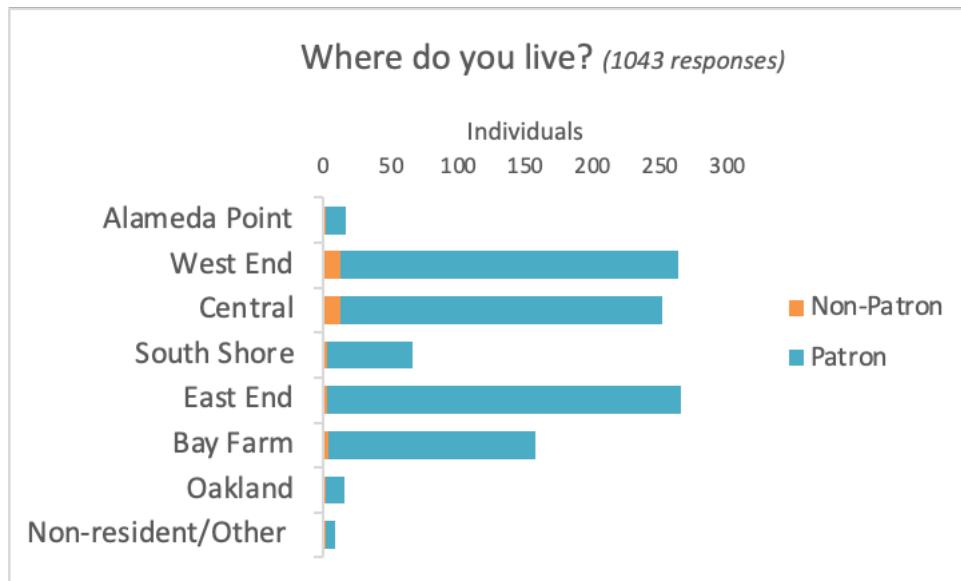
in such a survey about a service they do not use, and the library's primary survey distribution channels naturally target patrons. Around 4% of survey respondents (56) identified as non-patrons (see graph below).

The survey completion rate was excellent at 64%, meaning most individuals who accessed the survey ended up submitting a response and the average completion time was 6 minutes. This indicates good engagement and strong survey design.

Neighborhood Location
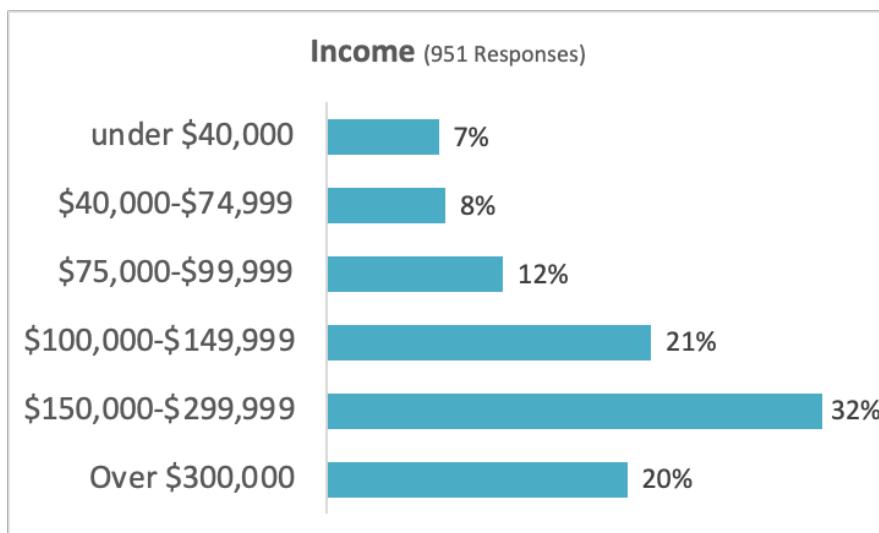
Survey responses reflected participation from across Alameda, with particularly strong representation from neighborhoods closest to library branches and those with higher population densities. The Central and East End neighborhoods together accounted for the largest share of responses, aligning with the location of the Main Library, which sits between these two areas. The West End and Bay Farm neighborhoods, where the other two library branches are located, were also highly represented. Smaller but meaningful participation came from the South Shore (66 responses) and Alameda Point (16 responses). A small number of responses came from outside Alameda, including 15 from Oakland and 9 from other locations. Overall, the results show broad citywide participation, with especially high engagement from neighborhoods that host or are adjacent to library facilities. See graph below.

Where do you live? *(1043 responses)*

Income Level and Every Door Direct Mailer Response
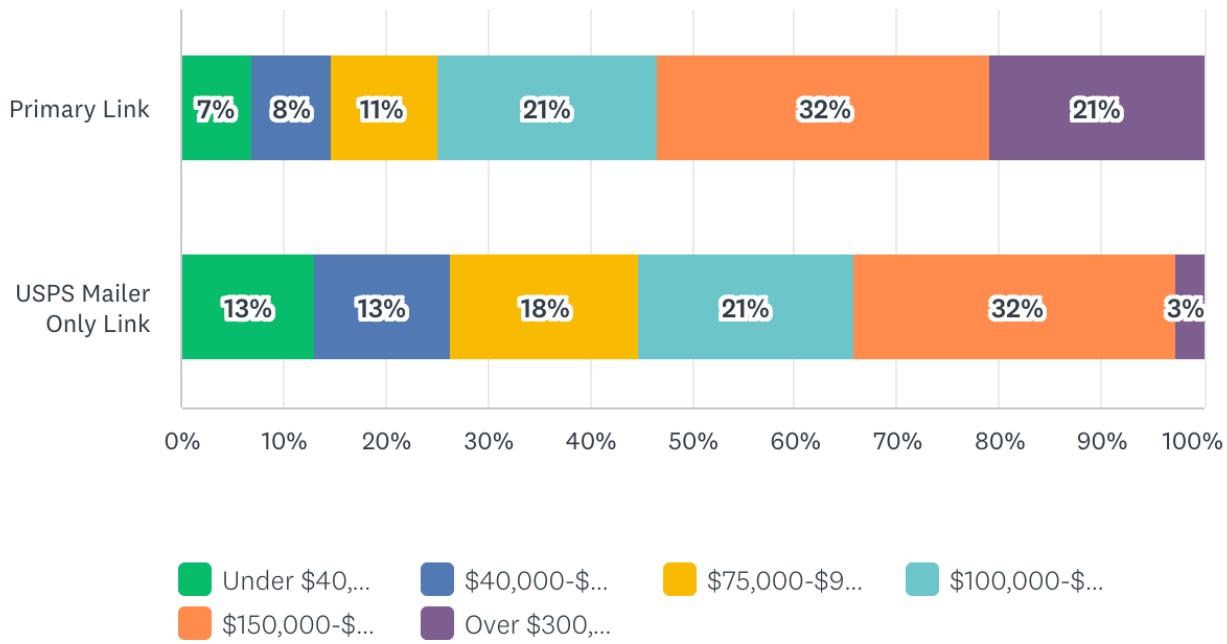
Among the 951 individuals who shared their income level, the largest share, 32%, reported earning between $150,000 and $299,999. Considering Alameda's per capita income of $84,715 and median household income of $132,015, survey respondents appear to skew toward higher earners. See graph below for the full income breakdown by percentage.

The benefit of including this question allows the survey findings to be sorted by income level, helping to highlight perspectives and needs specific to lower-income respondents that might otherwise be overlooked.

Income (951 Responses)

According to direct mail statistics, the average response rates for direct mail are between 0.5 to 2 percent, meaning that in a non-targeted marketing campaign with 200 mail pieces, 1 to 4 people might respond to the advertising. For the survey outreach 4,347 mail pieces were sent and 57 people responded via that collector link. **That's a 1.30% response rate which is a very solid return rate.**
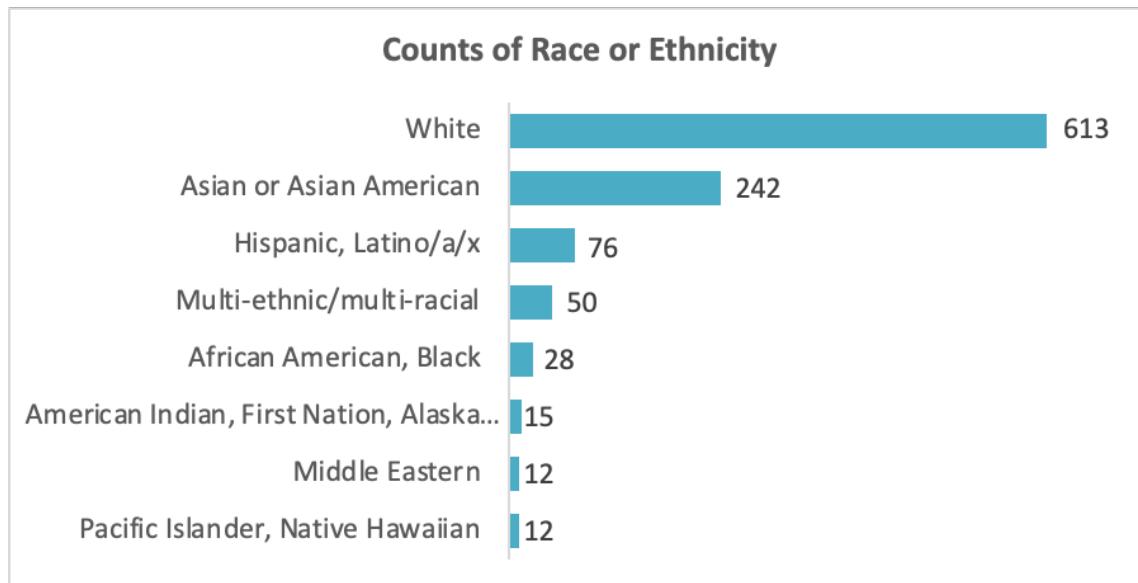
Furthermore, the EDDM collector (USPS Mailer) did pull in higher response rates of lower income (under $40K, $40-74K, $75-99K) participants comparably to the primary (digital) collector.

Language, Race & Ethnicity
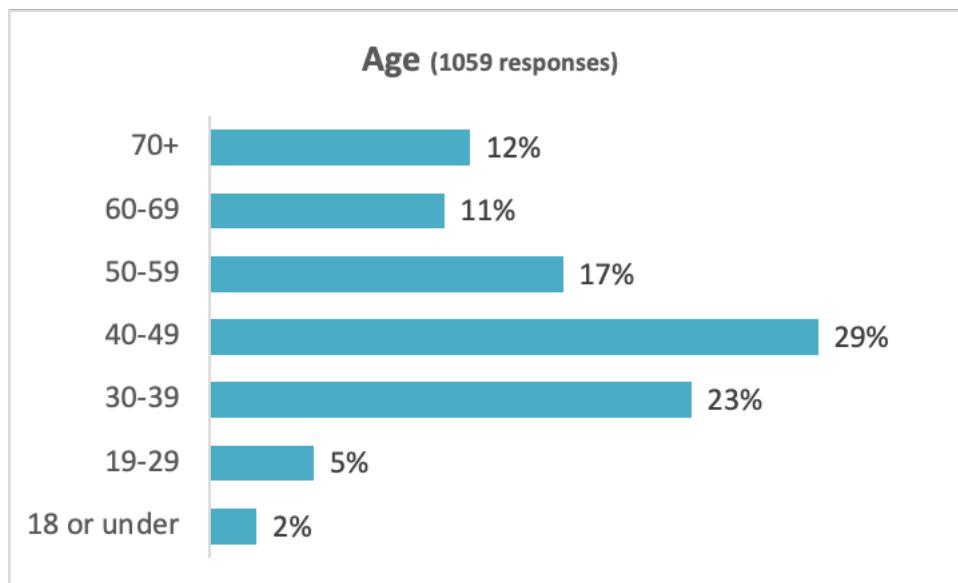
The Community Survey was offered in three languages (English, Spanish, and Chinese-Simplified). Most respondents chose to take the English version of the survey (99%). This highlights a likely accessibility gap; specifically the need for intentional outreach and marketing in non-English languages. The survey also asked optional demographic questions about race and ethnicity using the City of Alameda's standard multiple-choice options. Around 73% of survey respondents (954 individuals) elected to answer a question about their race or ethnicity. The graph below shows the demographic breakdown by race and ethnicity.[3]

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[3] 19 people elected to write in their own description. For full answers, see excel sheet, *Write-In Responses Library Community Survey*.

Counts of Race or Ethnicity

Race or Ethnicity	Count
White	613
Asian or Asian American	242
Hispanic, Latino/a/x	76
Multi-ethnic/multi-racial	50
African American, Black	28
American Indian, First Nation, Alaska...	15
Middle Eastern	12
Pacific Islander, Native Hawaiian	12
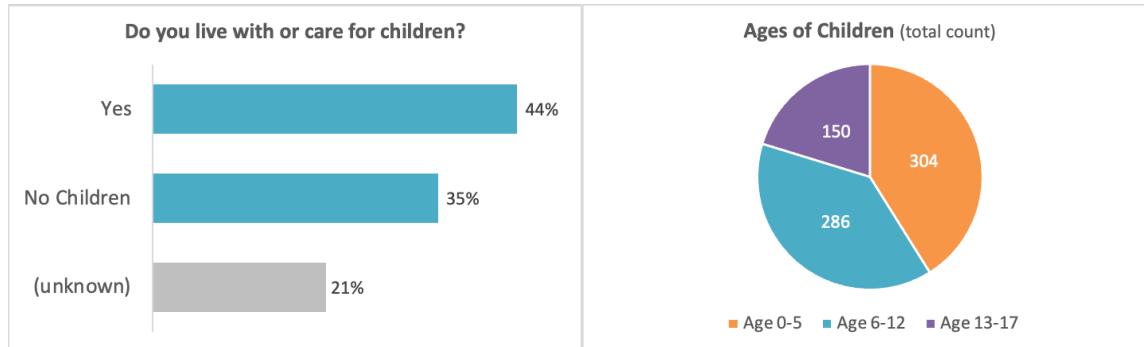
Age and Ages of Children

Out of the 81% (1,059) of respondents who shared their age, the largest group falls within the 40–49 age range (29%), followed by 30–39 (23%) and 50–59 (17%). Older participants are moderately represented, with 11% aged 60–69 and 12% aged 70+. Overall, the data indicates most respondents are middle-aged. Representation drops off in the younger age groups, with only 5% aged 19–29 and 2% aged 18 or under. However, 44% respondents also identified as child caregivers which suggests they are likely offering perspectives on behalf of the minors they care for or live with.

Age (1059 responses)

Age	Percent
70+	12%
60-69	11%
50-59	17%
40-49	29%
30-39	23%
19-29	5%
18 or under	2%

83% (1,027 individuals) of survey respondents answered the question on whether they live with or care for children. 35% (451 individuals) reported having no children, while 44% (576

individuals) indicated they live with or care for children. Among those with children, the largest share care for young children ages 0–5 and ages 6–12, while fewer care for teenagers ages 13–17. This highlights that children's library programs are key for many patrons, particularly those with younger children.

Facilities Report

Facilities emerged as a major theme across all groups. Stakeholders identified both strengths and areas for improvement, ranging from immediate maintenance needs to long-term modernization. This section summarizes feedback from municipal leaders, Library Board and staff, and community members (primarily library patrons) regarding the condition and future needs of the Alameda Free Library facilities. Input was collected through interviews, staff surveys and a community-wide survey, providing a well-rounded perspective on both system-wide preferences and location-specific issues. The findings highlight areas where the Libraries are performing well as well as providing insights as to how library patrons prioritize library spaces.

One area of key area of contrast was that patrons emphasize children's areas and study spaces while staff emphasize workspaces and safety. This divergence suggests the need to balance patron-facing upgrades with staff work environment improvements.

Partner Feedback on Facilities

As part of the strategic planning process one-on-one conversations were held with the City Facilities Manager, City Manager, Assistant City Manager, City Council Members, Library Board Members and Friends of the Library Board Members. Feedback from the municipal stakeholders was generally positive while Library Board Members tended to offer comments on ways the facilities need improvement and updates.

Key Trends

- Call to reimagine library spaces in a modern and fun way: flexible seating, coworking areas, updated children's and teen zones, media/maker spaces, and high-tech education resources.

- Support and enthusiasm of efforts to establish a tool lending program sooner rather than later.

- Support towards expanding into Alameda Point, possibly a phased project or mobile/non-traditional option (not necessarily a building).

- The City's existing library facilities are generally in good condition, with the Main location being the newest and requiring the least maintenance comparably to other branches.

- Upcoming changes, such as the phasing out of fluorescent bulbs, will require modifications to the library facilities.

- The city recently conducted an ADA assessment and identified accessibility issues that will need to be addressed at the Libraries in the next few years.

- The homeless population has caused some issues at the Main Library, but this has not resulted in significant facility-related problems.

Staff Feedback on Facilities

Staff were surveyed about library facilities that need improvement across each location. All responses including write-in comments are shown in the following three graphs.

Staff workspaces emerged as the most frequently cited area needing improvement across all three locations. This issue was identified by 65% of respondents at both the Main Library and Bay Farm Branch, and by 55% at the West End Branch, signaling a system-wide concern that may reflect overcrowding, outdated work environments, or insufficient space for library staff to perform their duties effectively.

Safety and security was another major concern, particularly at the Main Library (65%) and West End Branch (30%), while Bay Farm reported a lower, but still notable 15%. This disparity may indicate differences in the perceived safety of each location, with the Main Library potentially serving more vulnerable populations or experiencing more safety incidents.

Accessibility for patrons with disabilities was a moderate-to-high concern at the Main Library (46%) and Bay Farm Branch (40%), but significantly less so at the West End Branch

(15%). This could suggest that the West End facility is either newer or already more accessible, or it may point to a need for greater awareness or assessment of accessibility issues at that location.

Building maintenance (heating/cooling, etc.) was also a shared concern at the Main Library (46%) and to a lesser extent at the West End and Bay Farm branches (15% and 20%, respectively), suggesting that infrastructure issues may be more pronounced at the larger or older facility.

The **Main Library** stands out for having more extensive concerns across nearly every category. Beyond the top issues, it also shows relatively high percentages for service desks, layout and stacks, restrooms, technology access, and quiet/study areas, each cited by over 30% of respondents. This suggests that the Main Library may be under greater strain or in need of a more comprehensive facility update.
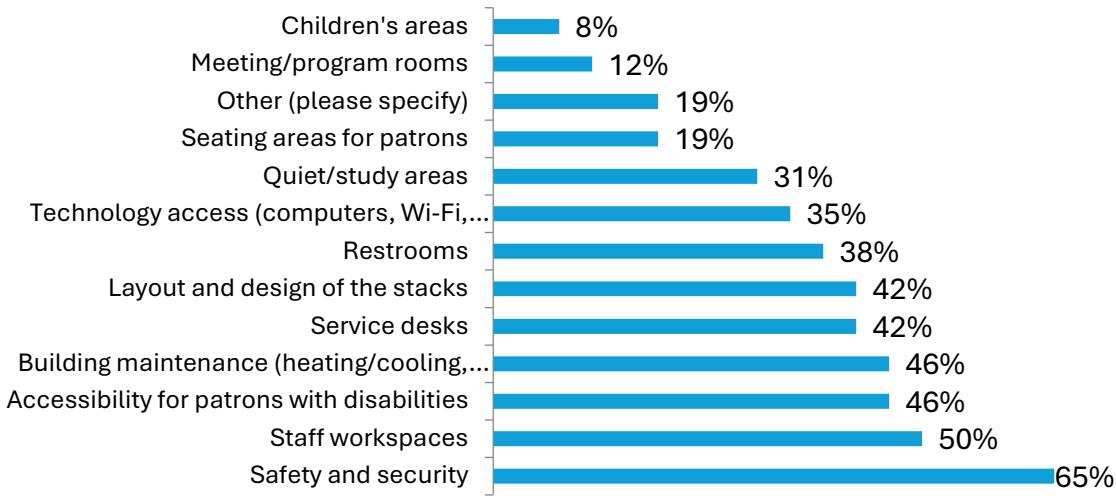
In contrast, the **West End Branch** shows generally lower percentages across all categories. Aside from staff workspaces and meeting/program rooms, no category exceeds 30%, which could imply that the branch is better meeting current facility needs or is used differently by the community.

The **Bay Farm Branch** displays a pattern somewhere in between, with staff workspace (65%) and accessibility (40%) being the most prominent concerns, while most other categories remained below 25%. This might reflect selective areas of need rather than widespread infrastructure gaps.
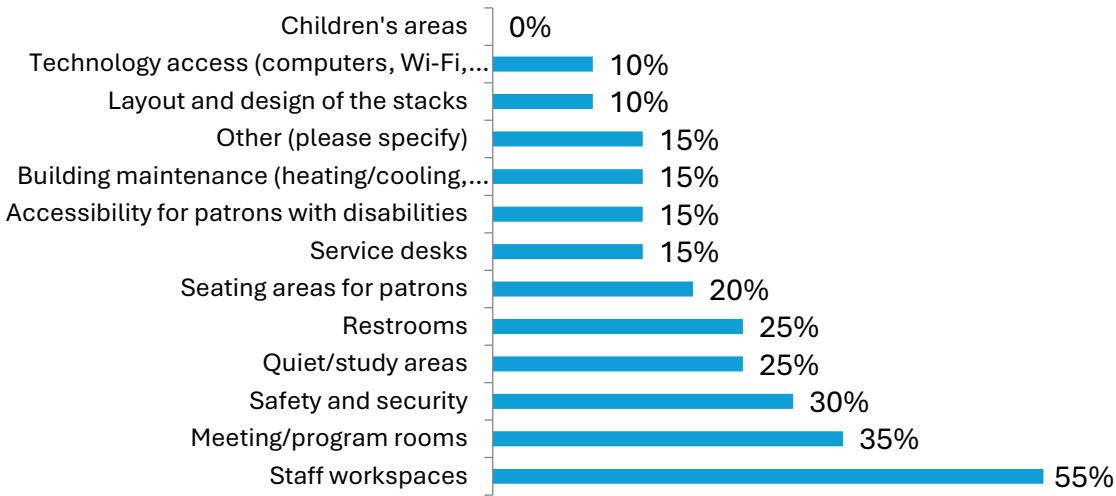
Overall, the data suggests that while there are shared system-wide concerns, especially around staff workspace and accessibility, the Main Library requires the most urgent and comprehensive facility improvements. In contrast, West End and Bay Farm branches show more focused, facility-specific issues. This analysis could help inform prioritization in capital planning, resource allocation, and future renovations.

See the following graphs for responses to facility improvement needs at each library branch.
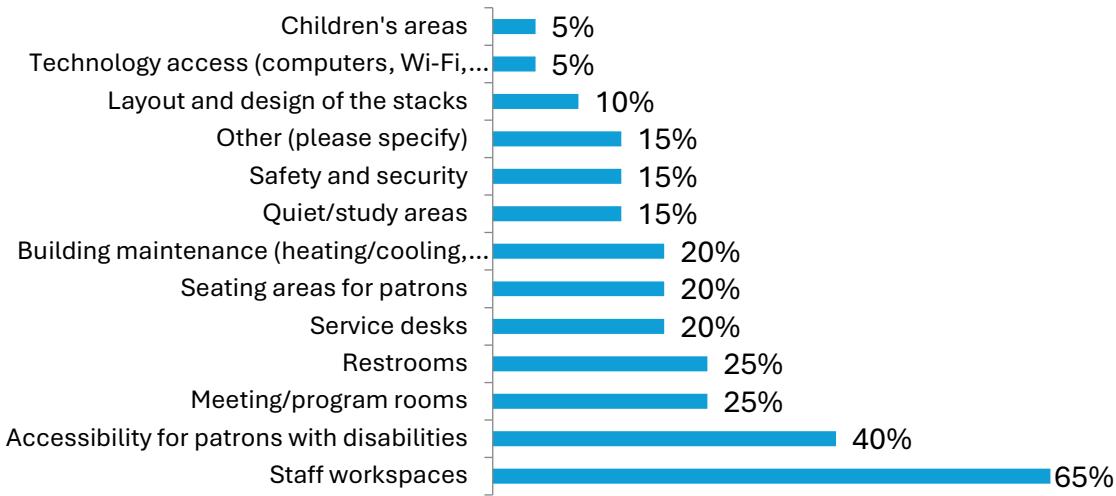
What areas of the Main Library location facility need improvement? (26 responses)

Area	Percentage
Children's areas	8%
Meeting/program rooms	12%
Other (please specify)	19%
Seating areas for patrons	19%
Quiet/study areas	31%
Technology access (computers, Wi-Fi,...	35%
Restrooms	38%
Layout and design of the stacks	42%
Service desks	42%
Building maintenance (heating/cooling,...	46%
Accessibility for patrons with disabilities	46%
Staff workspaces	50%
Safety and security	65%

What areas of the West End Branch facility need improvement? (24 responses)

Area	Percentage
Children's areas	0%
Technology access (computers, Wi-Fi,...	10%
Layout and design of the stacks	10%
Other (please specify)	15%
Building maintenance (heating/cooling,...	15%
Accessibility for patrons with disabilities	15%
Service desks	15%
Seating areas for patrons	20%
Restrooms	25%
Quiet/study areas	25%
Safety and security	30%
Meeting/program rooms	35%
Staff workspaces	55%

What areas of the Bay Farm Branch facility need improvement? (24 responses)

Category	Percentage
Children's areas	5%
Technology access (computers, Wi-Fi,...	5%
Layout and design of the stacks	10%
Other (please specify)	15%
Safety and security	15%
Quiet/study areas	15%
Building maintenance (heating/cooling,...	20%
Seating areas for patrons	20%
Service desks	20%
Restrooms	25%
Meeting/program rooms	25%
Accessibility for patrons with disabilities	40%
Staff workspaces	65%

Community Feedback on Facilities

The Community Survey likewise collected feedback on library facilities. Participants were asked to rank specific library facilities in order of importance to them. Study Spaces / Tables ranked as the most important following closely by Layout of Children's Corner according to the average of all survey responses.

Ranking	Facility	Average
#1	Study Spaces / Tables	3.2
#2	Layout of Children's Corner	3.3
#3	Accessibility	3.5
#4	Design of Book Stacks	3.7
#5	Meeting / Community Rooms	4.0

A cross-section of responses by "library most frequently visited" shows some shifts in how facilities are ranked. The following table presents the ranking by library use. Key takeaways include:

- **Both West End** and **Bay Farm** patrons place a much higher priority on the Layout of Children's Corner more than the other locations (the largest deviation from the overall average).
- **Digital User's** rankings show only minor differences, suggesting this group does not show strong trends in facilities preferences.

- **Home Delivery Program** participants, who are predominately seniors, place the highest importance on Accessibility and the lowest on children's spaces, which is unsurprising given their needs.
- **Layout of Children's Corner** is ranked as highly important by patrons while library staff ranked this feature the lowest for "needing improvement" across all branches, suggesting that patrons are more likely to notice improvements in this area over those library staff selected as most needing improvement (i.e., workspaces).

Location	Study Spaces / Tables	Layout of Children's Corner	Accessibility	Design of Book Stacks	Meeting / Community Rooms
Main	#1	#3	#2	#4	#5
Bay Farm	#2	#1	#3-4	#3-4	#5
West End	#2	#1	#4	#3	#5
Digital User	#2	#5	#1	#3	#4
Home Delivery	#4	#5	#1	#2	#3

Overall, the feedback indicates that while the City's library facilities are generally in good condition, there are areas that warrant attention. Staff workspace limitations, accessibility improvements, and safety concerns—particularly at the Main Library—emerged as key priorities. At the same time, community members emphasized the importance of reimagining library spaces to be more flexible, modern, and engaging. Taken together, these insights provide a roadmap for facility updates that can balance immediate maintenance and accessibility needs with long-term investments in innovation, ensuring the libraries continue to serve as vital community hubs.

The Role of Libraries

Stakeholders reflected on the fundamental role of the library today and into the future. Throughout the data collection process, several questions were asked across stakeholder groups to gather feedback about how people perceive the purpose of the library and what the future of the library might look like. Individuals across all stakeholder groups see the library as both a literacy center and a broader community hub.

Library Partner Perceptions on the Role of the Library

Across library partner groups (Board, Friends, select community organizations, City of Alameda staff, and AUSD staff), libraries were described as safe, welcoming, and inclusive spaces. Friends of the Library characterized the institution as "a candy store," "a safe, warm, comfortable, happy place," and there were many references across these

stakeholder groups of it being a "third space" for gathering without commercial pressure. Community Organizations emphasized the library's role as a haven for unhoused individuals, teens, and adults facing mental health challenges, as well as a place where families and children can connect. At the same time, leaders highlighted the library's dual identity: remaining centered on books and literacy while evolving into a hub for learning, support, and community connection. Library partners acknowledge that the library's role includes addressing elements of pressing social issues—homelessness, and mental health—while maintaining its core mission of access to information and resources.

Patron Feedback on the Role of the Library
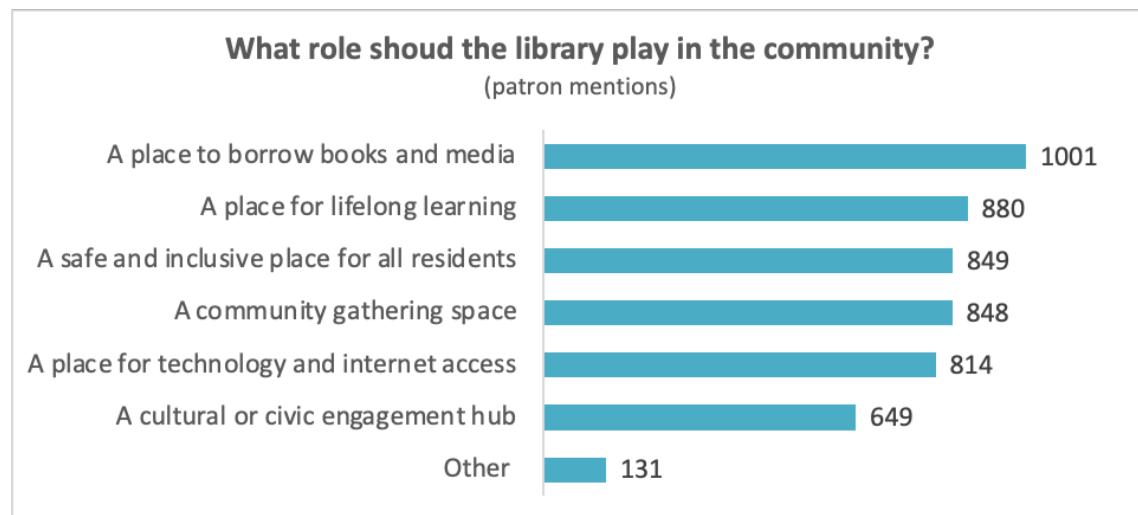
85% (1,024) of individuals who identified as patrons responded to the question *what role should the library play in the community?* The most frequent answer was *a place to borrow books and media* (see graph below). The top themes from "other" comments are children's programming, community learning and events, borrowing nontraditional items, safe or quiet spaces, and more study and work areas.

The "other" write-in comments primarily offered specific examples within the survey categories (for the full list see excel sheet *Write-in Responses Library Community Survey*). Some example quotes include:

"Printing and copying services are crucial."
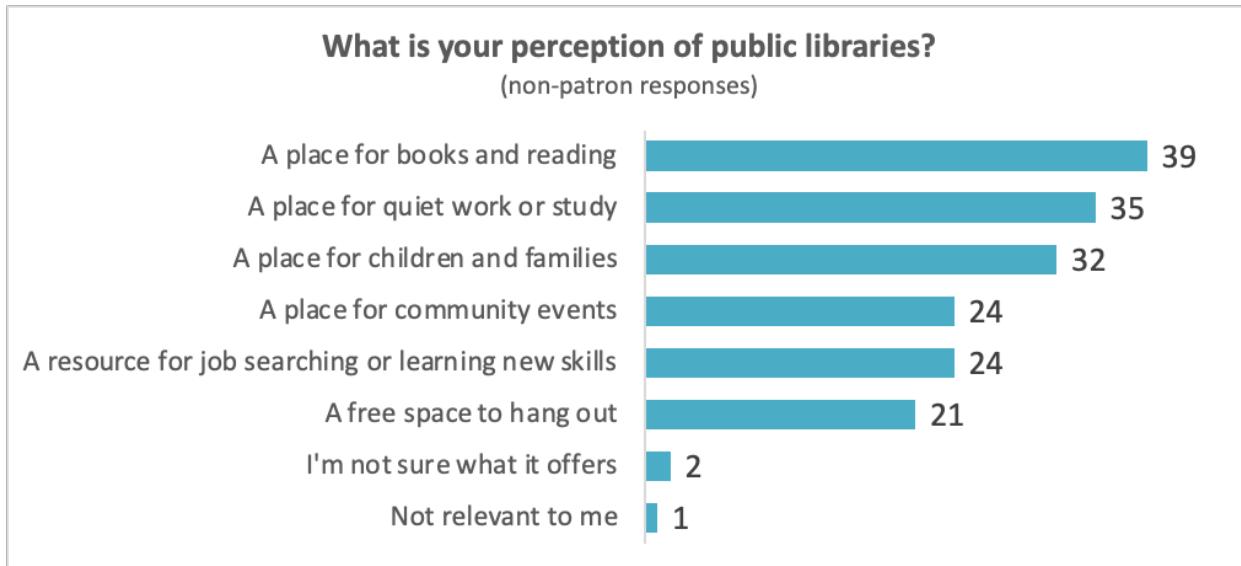
"Kids Reading Programs - books as a healthier alternative to social media and harm."

"Tool lending library!"

What role shoud the library play in the community?
(patron mentions)

Role	Mentions
A place to borrow books and media	1001
A place for lifelong learning	880
A safe and inclusive place for all residents	849
A community gathering space	848
A place for technology and internet access	814
A cultural or civic engagement hub	649
Other	131

Non-Patron Perception of Libraries

68% of non-patron survey responses (38 individuals) offered data on their perceptions of public libraries. The most frequent mention was *a place for books and reading*, followed by *a place for quiet work and study* and *a place for children and families*.

What is your perception of public libraries?
(non-patron responses)

Category	Count
A place for books and reading	39
A place for quiet work or study	35
A place for children and families	32
A place for community events	24
A resource for job searching or learning new skills	24
A free space to hang out	21
I'm not sure what it offers	2
Not relevant to me	1

Library of the Future

38% (455 individuals) of Community Survey takers who identified as patrons wrote in comments about how they envision the future of the library. These hundreds of comments spanned a variety of topics:

Physical + Digital Resources: Robust digital and e-book offerings and still valuing substantial hardcopy/print collections.

Community & Social Hub: A "third place" beyond home and work and a vibrant, active gathering space for all ages.

Welcoming & Inclusive Environment: Accessible, safe, and comfortable for everyone and child-friendly (e.g. interior play spaces).

Trusted Source of Information: A reliable provider of factual, quality information and a learning and discovery resource for the community

Modernized Space & Technology: Tech resources and functional and inviting physical spaces

The table below shows the frequency mentioned across general categories.

Count	Category	Explanation
268	Facilities, Technology, & Access	Infrasturcture, design, modernization, hours, access, funding, sustainability, service satisfaction, etc.
180	Community & Learning	Events, programs, education, social support, civic connections, community gathering, etc.
153	Collections	All collections, reading and non-reading materials, physical and digital resources, equipment, etc.
14	Other	Unsure, N/A, etc.

Library Offerings: Programs, Services & Collection

Library Partner Views on Offerings

Several high-impact programs were highlighted, including the summer reading program, which was seen as particularly valuable for engaging youth. The interlibrary loan system was recognized as an important resource but in need of better promotion and a more user-friendly interface and generally stronger outreach to let the public know what is available. Community partners identified additional opportunities for collaboration, such as adult learning programs, outreach visits by librarians to community organizations or other locations in Alameda, and hosting field trips for clients of community organizations. Partners also recommended creating a navigator or guide system to help new patrons learn how to access library services, as well as expanding digital equity initiatives by offering internet access, computer resources, and educational workshops. While the collection itself was valued, some concerns were raised about navigating inclusive library collections in the future, underscoring the importance of continuing to reflect community diversity.
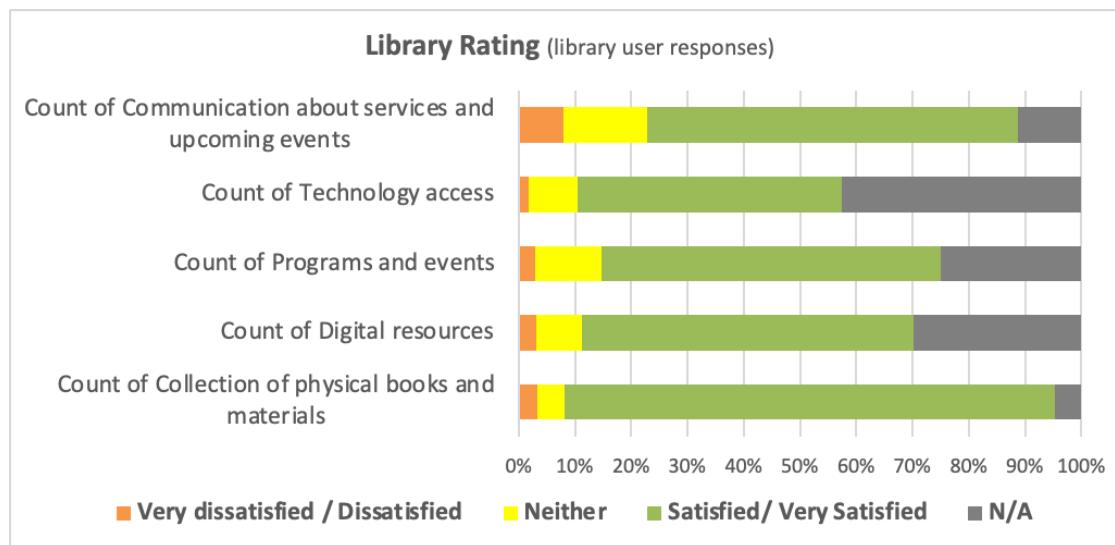
Current Patron Ratings

78% (1,019) of patron survey respondents responded to this set of questions, which asked them to rate different aspects of the library's services. Overall, responses show high satisfaction across all categories, with most areas receiving strong "Satisfied/Very Satisfied" ratings.

- *Collection of physical books and materials* received the highest satisfaction, with nearly all respondents rating it positively and very few dissatisfied.

- *Programs and events* and *digital resources* were also highly rated, with the majority of patrons satisfied, though a small portion indicated room for improvement.

- *Technology access* and *communication about services and upcoming events* showed slightly lower satisfaction compared to other areas, and had higher percentages of "Neither" or "Dissatisfied" responses.

- Across all categories, a notable percentage of patrons selected N/A, suggesting that not everyone uses or is familiar with every service.

In summary, library patrons report strong satisfaction overall, with the core collection and programs performing best, while technology access and communication present opportunities for growth. See graph below.

Responses from Feedback Boards

Feedback boards along with post-it notes and pens were displayed at each library location (Main, West End, Bay Farm) during the month of July 2025. These feedback boards captured patron thoughts on the following topic: **What would improve your visit to the library?**

201 comments were collected through this process. The three most frequent and repeated comments are *requests to add more graphic novels/Manga/comics* (10+ mentions), *longer hours* (8+ mentions), and *fixing the elevator* (7+ mentions). Topics generally fall under the following categories:

Collections & Materials

- More graphic novels, comics, manga (kids, teens, adults)
- Expanded children's and YA books (Geronimo Stilton, Babysitters Club, board books, series completion, more popular YA/romance)
- More books in different languages (Arabic, Spanish, Chinese)

- More digital copies of books (to reduce wait times)
- More biographies, sci-fi, cookbooks, maps, history, science, computer books
- Indie/self-published/local authors shelf
- DVDs (continue purchasing for non-streamers)

Facilities, Comfort & Accessibility

- Fix the elevator to improve accessibility for disabled (most frequent request)
- More seating (bean bag chairs, comfy chairs, individual/quiet seating, introvert-friendly areas)
- Cleaner bathrooms & better hand-drying options
- Larger/better parking
- Improved outdoor patio (seating, shade, string lights, plants)
- Indoor book drop & kid-sized self-checkout
- Cleaner, updated toys & computer equipment
- Better signage/wayfinding for book categories
- Dust-free study/work rooms
- More space at Bay Farm Branch

Environment & Atmosphere

- More quiet areas (reduce loud talking, no phones/videos without headphones)
- Cleaner/staff monitoring of food/smelly eating
- Greet people when they arrive
- General praise: many notes say, "best library," "love the staff," "we love you"

Hours & Access
- Longer hours (earlier openings, later evenings, Sundays at Bay Farm & Main)
- Extended computer lab time & individual sessions

Children & Family Programs
- More Storytimes, read-alouds, puppet shows
- More toddler/young child activities after 5PM
- Arts & crafts, Lego/iPad activities, games for older kids
- Expanded children's section (more books, space, activities/play areas)
- Scavenger hunts, coloring sheets, family gaming/creative days
- Events in Spanish for children
- Support for early literacy programs

Teens & Adults Programs
- Arts, crafts, ceramics, sewing, upcycling, woodworking, makerspace
- Job skills workshops, coding, UX/design learning
- Language courses (Spanish, Chinese, non-ESL focus)
- Tutoring & homework help
- Movie nights, theme parties, board games, speed-friendship events
- Art exhibitions, contests, monthly galleries
- Senior programs and activities

Community & Support Services
- Tool lending library
- Housing and jobs info board
- Social support services (case manager, Cal medical support, Bloom bags, clothing closet)
- Recommendations shelf ("best of" lists)
- Local school reading challenges

Fun & Miscellaneous Requests
- Ice cream / snacks / free food
- Waterslide (playful request)
- Squid Game events
- Speed-dating-style friend-making events
- Prize incentives for reading challenges

Responses from Conversation Tables

Five open Conversation Table/Focus Groups were scheduled across library locations and virtually, two of which were facilitated in Spanish and Mandarin. Event facilitators spoke with 24 individuals in English (20) and Mandarin (4).

Across drop-in conversations, community members described the library as a welcoming community hub that provides books, learning opportunities, and safe spaces for all ages. One participant summed it up simply: *"The library serves its purpose, no critiques."* Others highlighted the comfort of the branches, *"I like to read and study at all the locations. There are always places to sit,"* and praised staff as *"friendly and welcoming."*

Children's and family programming emerged as a major strength, with parents frequently mentioning the value of toddler Storytimes, summer reading, and hands-on workshops. As one parent put it, *"We enjoy the kids' activity area... it's a fun place to bring kids to."*

Attendees also appreciated the breadth of the physical collection, from comics and graphic novels to local history books, and many noted the convenience of being able to place holds, use computers, and access printing services.

At the same time, participants raised questions and ideas for the future. Some asked about the library's ability to withstand federal funding cuts or respond to book bans. Others requested expanded hours, especially evenings and weekends at Bay Farm, and better communication from leadership through clearer newsletters or a director's column. Suggestions for new programming ranged from *"a comic book club for adults"* to more events for older children, and from author talks to opportunities for community networking.

Feedback from the **Mandarin-language conversations** brought forward especially strong themes of cultural representation and family use. Parents and children described the library as a vital resource, *"I like to take my kids to events like the Lego coding workshops and the costume swap event,"* but also voiced a desire for expanded collections and culturally responsive programming. Several requested *"more books in Chinese, including about Taiwan and Asian cultures,"* noting that such materials help families maintain heritage language and identity. Participants also suggested social programs like a movie club, more coding workshops for kids, and celebrations of AAPI holidays. Ideas for the physical space included *"a play space for kids"* and incorporating local art to create a more welcoming tone. As one participant concluded, *"The library could play an invaluable role in representing our cultures and bringing families together."*

Services Expansion

On the Community Survey, library patrons had the option to write-in comments answering the question, *what services or programs would you like the library to offer or expand?* 492 individuals responded. The top themes are shown in the table below.

What services or programs would you like the library to offer or expand?		
# of Times Referenced	Themes	Description
123	Children & Youth Programming	Children, teens, family, etc.
123	Facilities & Access	Physical library branches, design, meeting/study rooms, café, hours of operation, timing, parking, safety, staff, general library satisfaction, etc.
117	General Programming/Lifelong Learning	Non-age specific activities, art exhibits, author talks, etc.

103	Other Services & Desires	Maker space, printing, digital resource usage experience, community organizing, volunteer opportunities, tutoring, donating, legal aid, other
68	Book Collection	Any reading material, physical & digital books, audiobooks, e-books, journals, magazines, etc.
61	Non-Book Collection	Other materials: music, movies, tools, seeds, equipment, etc.
48	Adult & Senior Programming	Children, teens, family, etc.

A selection of quotes include:

"Love the community events that support Alameda, i.e., free seeds, local authors, environmental. Keep it up!"
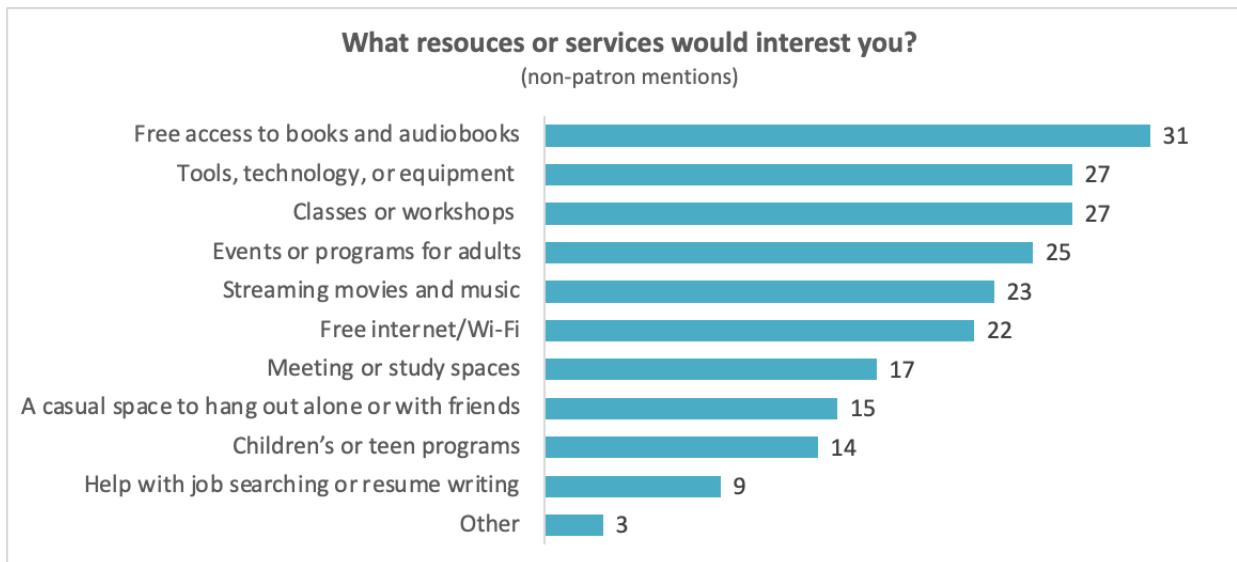
"I appreciate our public library. I would like more community awareness so more people would utilize this amazing resource."

"More free activities for teens, such as the Color Me Mine events! My friends and I loved that. Also, more seating during finals week as space fills up super-fast."
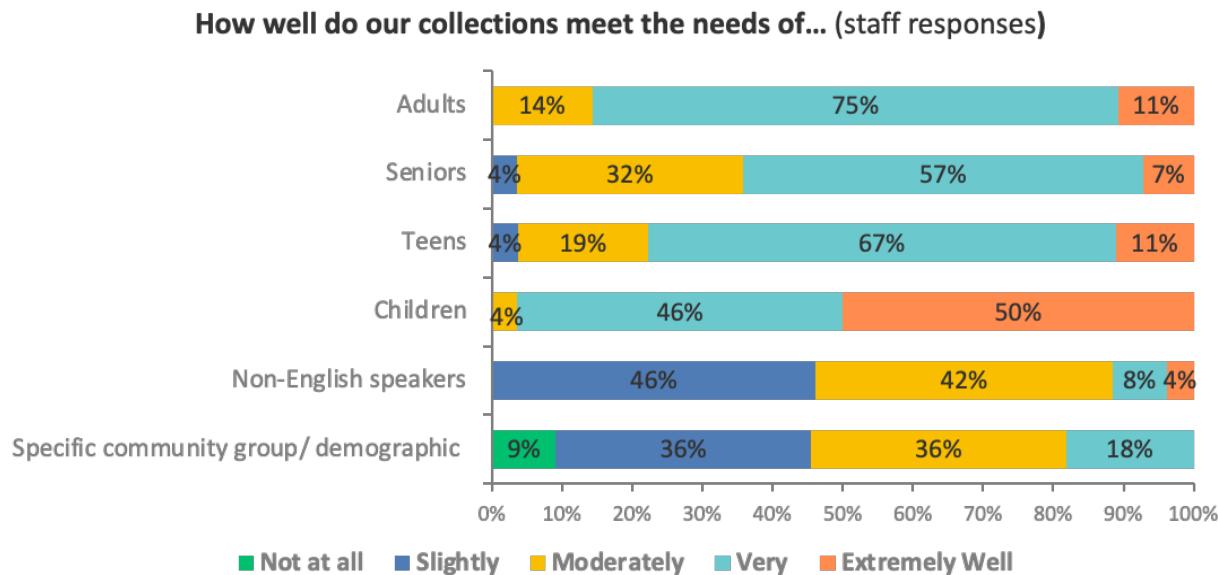
"I wish the library would work on offering a bilingual (English/Spanish) toddler story time. I am a mom, and I go to the toddler story times with my daughter and son who speak only Spanish at home. I notice that a lot of the group (at least at the story time that I attend) is about 40-50% Spanish speaking. [I] would love for story time to be bilingual to include English and Spanish speakers, and I am happy to help facilitate that."

"Expanding the digital collection so that it can draw on other networks in the same way that Link+ does would be great. Libby is fine and functional but there are areas where it has big problems."
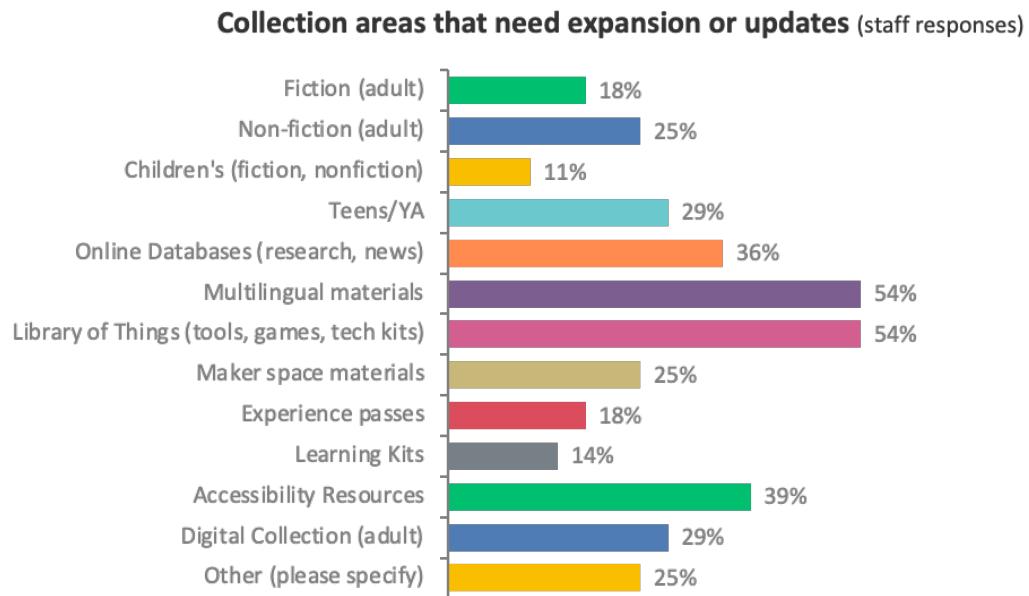
Non-library patrons also had the option to give feedback on the types of resources and services that would interest them. 75% of this group responded to this question (42 individuals). The top answers were free access to books/audiobooks; tools, technology, or equipment, and classes or workshops. See graph below.

What resouces or services would interest you?
(non-patron mentions)

Free access to books and audiobooks	31
Tools, technology, or equipment	27
Classes or workshops	27
Events or programs for adults	25
Streaming movies and music	23
Free internet/Wi-Fi	22
Meeting or study spaces	17
A casual space to hang out alone or with friends	15
Children's or teen programs	14
Help with job searching or resume writing	9
Other	3

Staff provided feedback on how well they think current library collections meet the needs of various groups (see graph below). 96% rated the *children's collection* as very/extremely well, 78% rated the *teens collection* as very/extremely well, and the *adult's collection* as very/extremely well. The collection area perceived as weakest is *non-English speakers*. Specific community group/demographic included multiple comments on visually impaired patrons.

How well do our collections meet the needs of... (staff responses)

	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Very	Extremely Well
Adults			14%	75%	11%
Seniors		4%	32%	57%	7%
Teens		4%	19%	67%	11%
Children		4%		46%	50%
Non-English speakers		46%	42%	8%	4%
Specific community group/ demographic	9%	36%	36%	18%	

Staff also offered feedback on collection areas that need expansion or updates. The top areas are Multilingual Materials and Library of Things. See the graph below for the complete breakdown.

Collection areas that need expansion or updates (staff responses)

Collection Area	Percentage
Fiction (adult)	18%
Non-fiction (adult)	25%
Children's (fiction, nonfiction)	11%
Teens/YA	29%
Online Databases (research, news)	36%
Multilingual materials	54%
Library of Things (tools, games, tech kits)	54%
Maker space materials	25%
Experience passes	18%
Learning Kits	14%
Accessibility Resources	39%
Digital Collection (adult)	29%
Other (please specify)	25%

Barriers to Using the Library

Library Partner Feedback on Barriers

Stakeholders noted several barriers that can prevent residents from accessing library services. Community organizations described how intimidation and stigma can keep individuals, particularly those with literacy or language barriers, from seeking help or engaging with staff. Marketing and outreach also emerged as major challenges, with respondents stressing that while the library offers a wide array of programs, many community members are unaware of them. Access gaps were identified as another obstacle: non-English speakers, those with limited internet, and insufficient geographic coverage. Together, these barriers point to a need for targeted strategies that expand awareness, reduce stigma, and create more equitable access across the City.
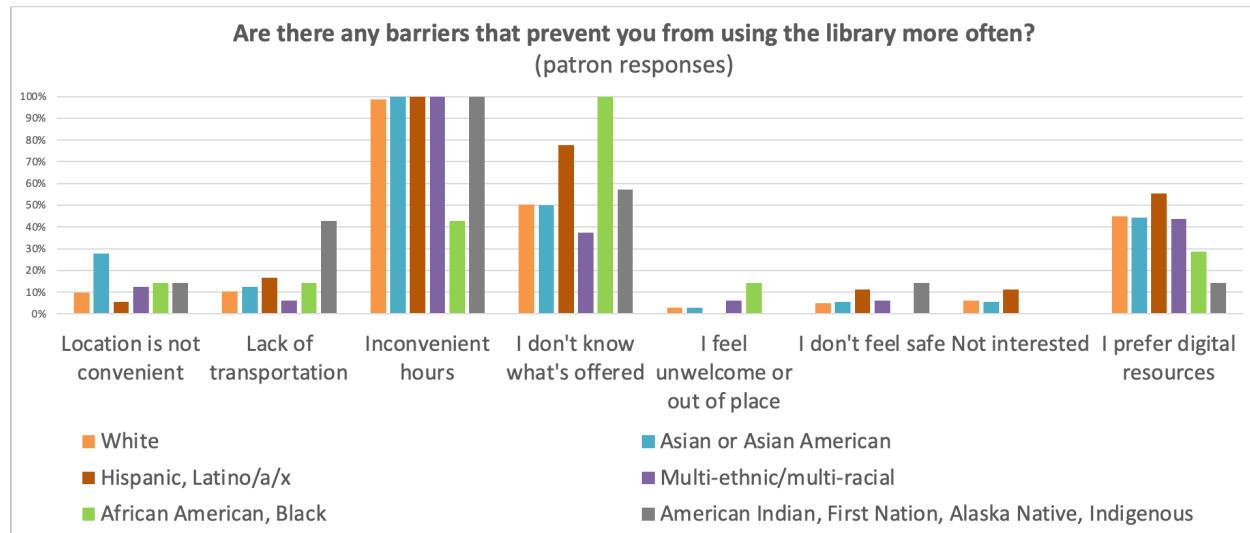
Patron Feedback on Barriers

On the Community Survey only 56% of patron survey respondents answered the question about identifying barriers (671 responders). The most common barriers to more frequent library use are *inconvenient hours* (38%), *not knowing what the library offers* (21%), and a *preference for digital resources* (18%).

The graph below shows results sorted by race/ethnicity. Given that the sample sizes for African American/Black and American Indian/First Nation are *very low* (7 people) there is too much noise to make solid inferences about these demographic groups. (For

comparison reference White is 145 people, Asian/Asian American is 72 people, and Hispanic/Latino is 18 people.) However, it is valuable to note major deviations as this may point to areas the library should explore further to facilitate accessibility and inclusion.

- American Indian/First Nation report a *lack of transportation* as a barrier more so than other groups.
- Hispanic/Latino and African American/Black selected *not knowing what's offered* much more than other groups.
- Hispanic/Latino reported a stronger *preference for digital resources* as a barrier than other groups.
- *Asian/Asian Americans* selected *inconvenient location* more so than other groups as a barrier.
- Across demographics, people generally report feeling welcome, safe, and interested in using the library.

From the 264 "other" write-in comments several themes emerge including the following. (For the full list of comments, see excel worksheet titled *Write-in Responses Library Community Survey.*)

Parking and Accessibility (most frequent)
By far the most common issue mentioned was limited or difficult parking at the Main and West End libraries. Many respondents noted that spaces are too few, too tight, or consistently full, creating a major barrier. Accessibility concerns were also noted, including lack of disability parking.

Hours and Branch Availability (very frequent)
Many respondents expressed frustration with limited hours and branch closures,

particularly at Bay Farm and West End. Requests included later evening hours, more weekend availability (especially Sundays), and more consistent open days across branches.

Homelessness, Safety, and Comfort (frequent)
Numerous comments reflected discomfort with the presence of unhoused individuals in and around libraries, with concerns about hygiene, behavior, and safety. Some patrons reported avoiding the library entirely due to feeling unsafe or unwelcome.

Collection and Resources (frequent)
A significant number of patrons cited difficulty accessing desired books or resources, including long waitlists, limited copies, and smaller collections compared to other library systems. Requests included more new releases, more children's and graphic novel titles, expanded digital offerings, and better magazine and newspaper access.
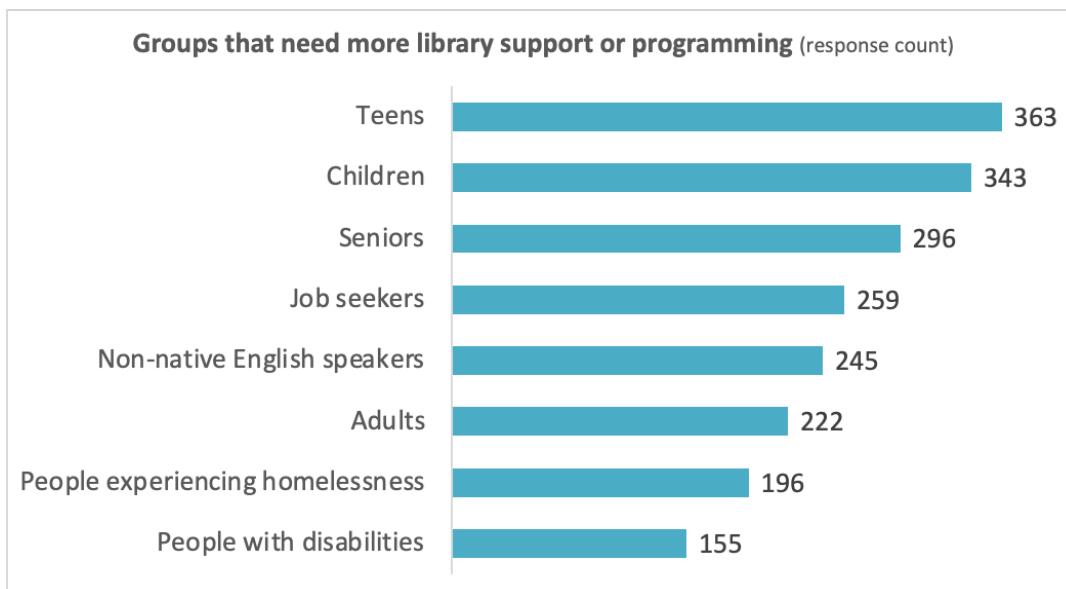
Programs and Services (moderately frequent)
Respondents asked for more children's programming, particularly to reduce overcrowding at Storytime and to expand weekend/evening offerings. Others highlighted the lack of programs for adults and working-age patrons, noting most events skew toward children or families.

Personal or situational barriers (less frequent but notable)
Some respondents mentioned being too busy, health-related challenges, distance/transportation issues, or simply preferring digital resources.
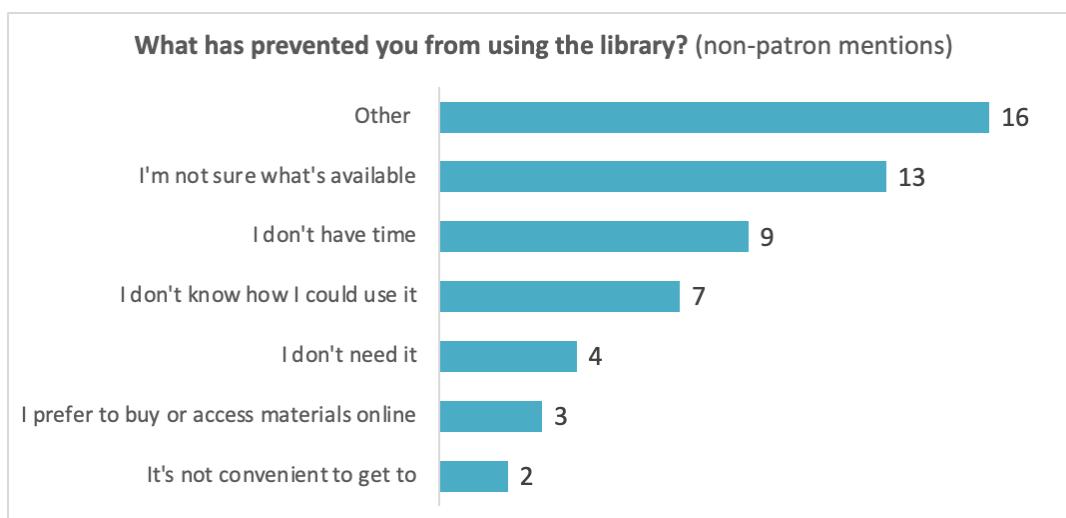
The Community Survey asked existing library patrons for feedback regarding the top 3 groups they feel need more library support or programming (see graph below). *Teen* and *Children* were the top categories followed by *Seniors* and *Job Seekers*.

Groups that need more library support or programming (response count)

Group	Count
Teens	363
Children	343
Seniors	296
Job seekers	259
Non-native English speakers	245
Adults	222
People experiencing homelessness	196
People with disabilities	155
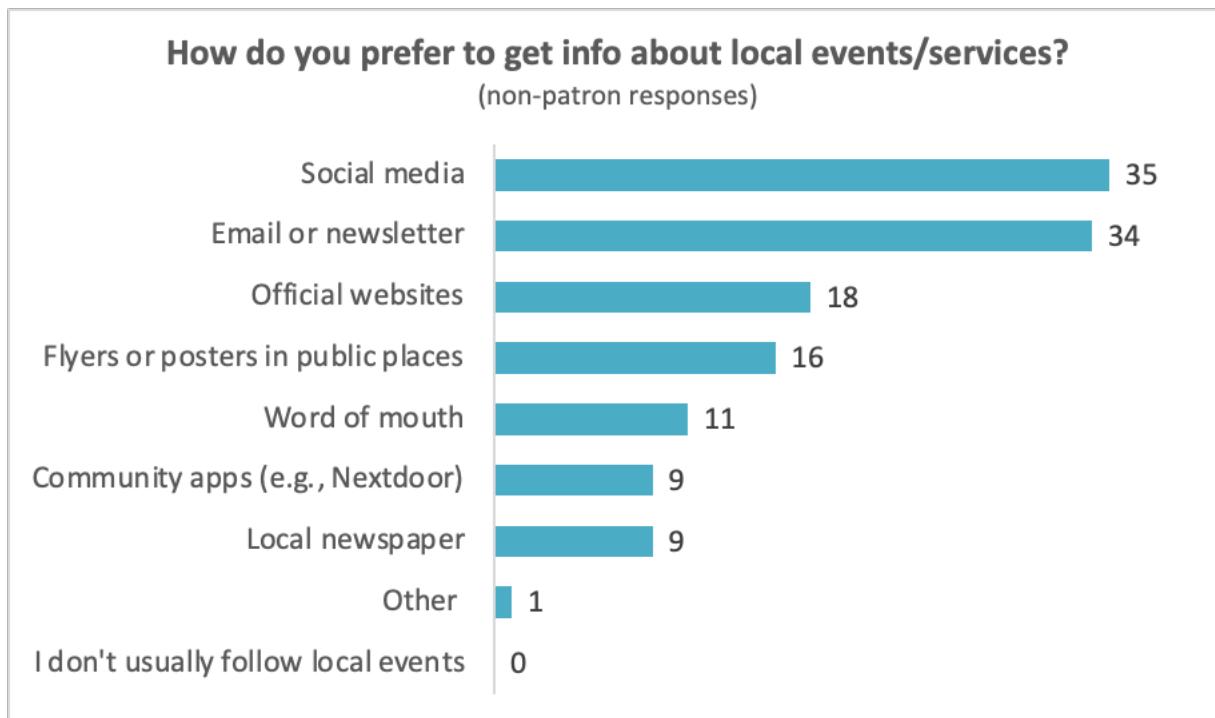
Non-Patron Feedback on Barriers

Survey responders who identified as non-patrons were also asked for feedback regarding what has prevented them from using the library. 73% (41 individuals) responded. The most frequent mention after *other* was *not knowing what is available*. Stand-out other comments include never having heard of the library, recently moved to Alameda, and opening/closing hours. Even with a relatively small number of respondents, the data confirms that library outreach and marketing are likely a key area for driving awareness for residents who are not current patrons.

What has prevented you from using the library? (non-patron mentions)

Reason	Mentions
Other	16
I'm not sure what's available	13
I don't have time	9
I don't know how I could use it	7
I don't need it	4
I prefer to buy or access materials online	3
It's not convenient to get to	2
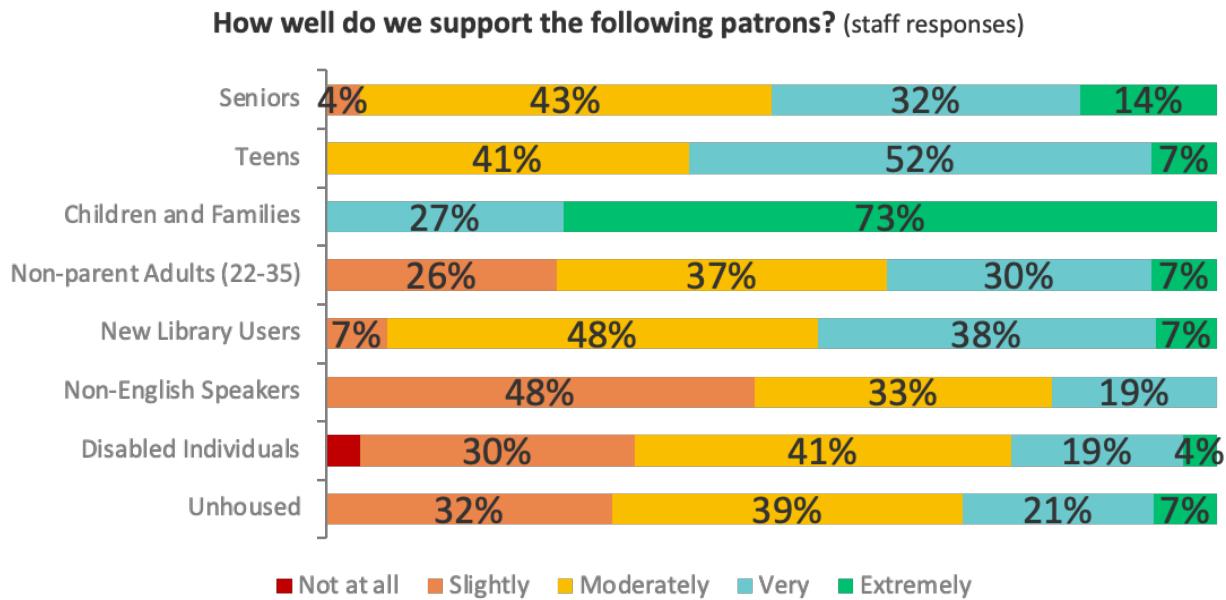
Additionally, 75% (42 individuals) of this group also gave feedback on their communication preferences. The top mentions were social media and email and newsletter.

How do you prefer to get info about local events/services?

(non-patron responses)

|	
Social media	35
Email or newsletter	34
Official websites	18
Flyers or posters in public places	16
Word of mouth	11
Community apps (e.g., Nextdoor)	9
Local newspaper	9
Other	1
I don't usually follow local events	0

Library Staff Feedback on Outreach and Support

Library staff provided feedback through the Staff Survey on the library's community outreach efforts. Staff rated 3 out of 5 stars ★★★☆☆. This rating suggests staff recognize that there is work to be done in this area and further exploration is needed on what areas or which community groups warrant specialized attention.

Staff offered perspectives on how well the library services specific patron groups (see graph below). *Children and Families* received the highest rating of very/extremely well with 100%. The lowest performing (Not at All/Slightly) group is *Non-English Speakers* with 48% and *Disabled Individuals* with 34%.

How well do we support the following patrons? (staff responses)

	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Very	Extremely
Seniors		4%	43%	32%	14%
Teens			41%	52%	7%
Children and Families				27%	73%
Non-parent Adults (22-35)		26%	37%	30%	7%
New Library Users		7%	48%	38%	7%
Non-English Speakers		48%	33%	19%	
Disabled Individuals	▪	30%	41%	19%	4%
Unhoused		32%	39%	21%	7%

■ Not at all ■ Slightly ■ Moderately ■ Very ■ Extremely
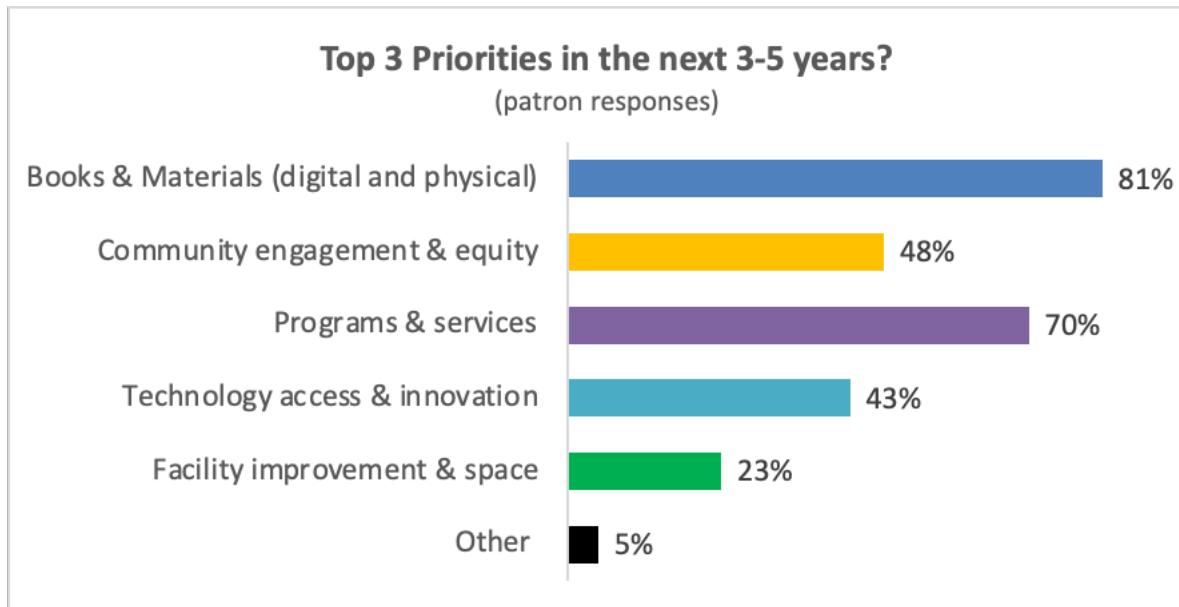
**Row totals will not equal 100% because N/A responses are not included.*

Priorities
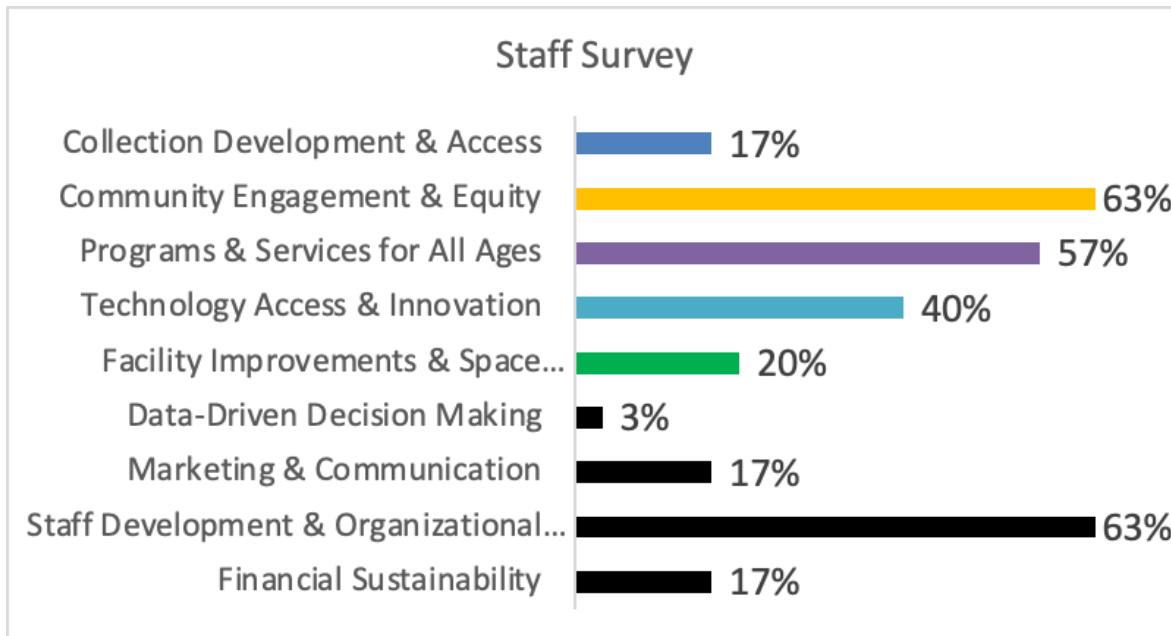
When asked about priorities, stakeholders consistently emphasized strengthening collections, programming, equity, and community engagement, while staff also raised internal needs such as training, tools, and safety.

Library partners outlined several priorities for the future of the library. Expanding geographic access—particularly through a new Alameda Point location—was identified as a need. Other priorities included strengthening the library's role as a safe and inclusive community space, supporting vulnerable populations, and enhancing awareness of existing programs. Several groups emphasized the importance of using the Strategic Plan to educate the public and City Council about the evolving role of libraries. Additionally, maintaining a balance between traditional services, such as literacy and collections, and new roles, such as social service partnerships, was considered central to the library's future success.

82% of Community Survey library patrons (995 individuals) provided feedback on what should be the library's top 3 priorities over the next 3-5 years. *Books and Materials* and *Programs and Services* were to top priorities followed by *Community Engagement & Equity*. See graph below.

Top 3 Priorities in the next 3-5 years?
(patron responses)

Priority	Percentage
Books & Materials (digital and physical)	81%
Community engagement & equity	48%
Programs & services	70%
Technology access & innovation	43%
Facility improvement & space	23%
Other	5%

A similar question was asked on the staff survey (see graph below). One significant note is the gap between community prioritization of *physical and digital collection* and *programs and services* is much higher than staff. It is likely that staff assume these are core library services that will always be supported rather than something unique to the 3–5-year strategic planning timeframe.

Staff Survey

Category	Percentage
Collection Development & Access	17%
Community Engagement & Equity	63%
Programs & Services for All Ages	57%
Technology Access & Innovation	40%
Facility Improvements & Space…	20%
Data-Driven Decision Making	3%
Marketing & Communication	17%
Staff Development & Organizational…	63%
Financial Sustainability	17%

Staff were asked: *If resources were not a complaint, what initiative or improvement would you propose*? 18 staff offered a variety of suggestions. See below for the summary of the topics and a selection of examples.

New Facilities and Access Points (most frequent)

- Alameda Point branch: Several comments call for a new library location at Alameda Point.

- Bay Farm expansion: Suggested expansion of the existing Bay Farm Island Branch.

- Bookmobile / Mobile library: Multiple comments recommend a mobile library to serve schools, neighborhoods, and events, especially for those with access challenges.

Community Support and Safety Services (frequent)

- Calls for a full-time social worker or onsite case management to support patrons.

- Suggestions for staff training on cultural humility, de-escalation, and equity-centered approaches to community safety.

Accessibility and Collections

- Improve and expand Large Type collection (currently outdated and worn).

- Better accessibility across disabilities, languages, and digital resources (e.g., Libby app improvements).

Youth Services

- Ideas for multicultural book clubs, robotics/coding labs, and VR trips.

Facilities and Layout Improvements

- Replace loud stone floors at Main, redesign layout for efficiency and accessibility.

- Add large, multilingual signage at all branches.

- More study rooms, chargers at desks, and flexible work/study spaces.

Programs and Marketing

- Improve marketing for adult programs and services, especially evening hours.

- Expand book clubs (including targeting underserved demographics), lecture series, and film series.

- Monthly community mixers for newcomers.

Technology and Infrastructure

- Build a better library website independent of the city's platform.

Internal Capacity

Library Partner Feedback on Internal Capacity
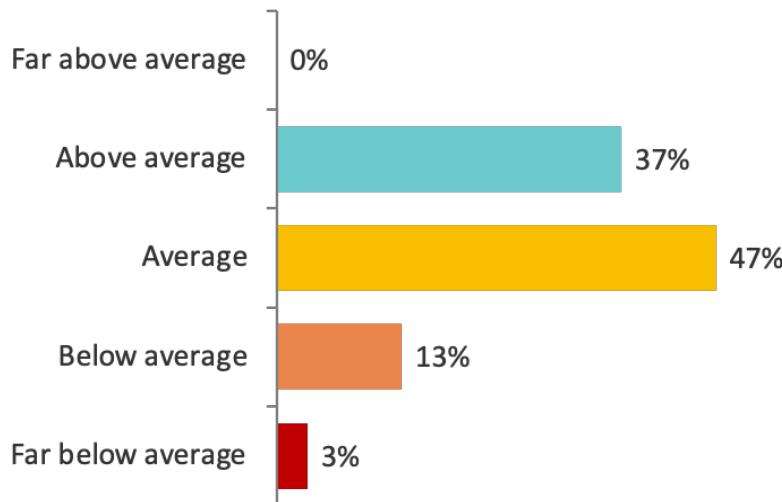
Internally, participants highlighted both strengths and challenges. Staff were praised for their dedication, but concerns were raised about safety, training, and the increasing complexity of responding to social issues in the library setting. Friends of the Library stressed the need for clearer communication and stronger coordination between volunteers, staff, and the Library Board. Municipal leaders noted that improving marketing and outreach capacity is also critical to raising the library's visibility. Together, these insights suggest a need to invest in staff development, and communication structures that can support the library's growing role in the community.

Communication

The majority of staff (84%) said internal communication and collaboration is average or above average. The remaining 16% selected *below* or *far below average*. While these results generally skew positive there is certainly room for growth.

How would you rate communication and collaboration among staff?
(staff responses)

Far above average	0%
Above average	37%
Average	47%
Below average	13%
Far below average	3%
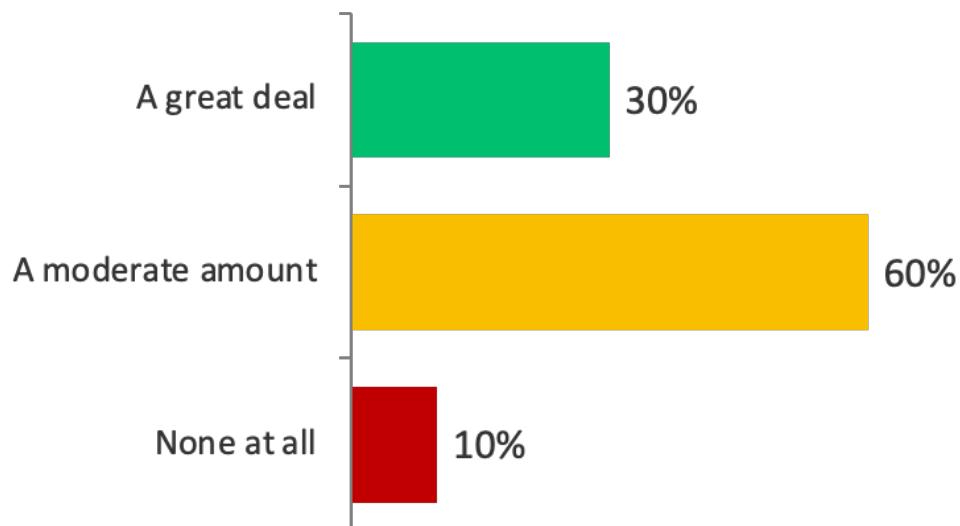
Staff Training, Tools, & Support
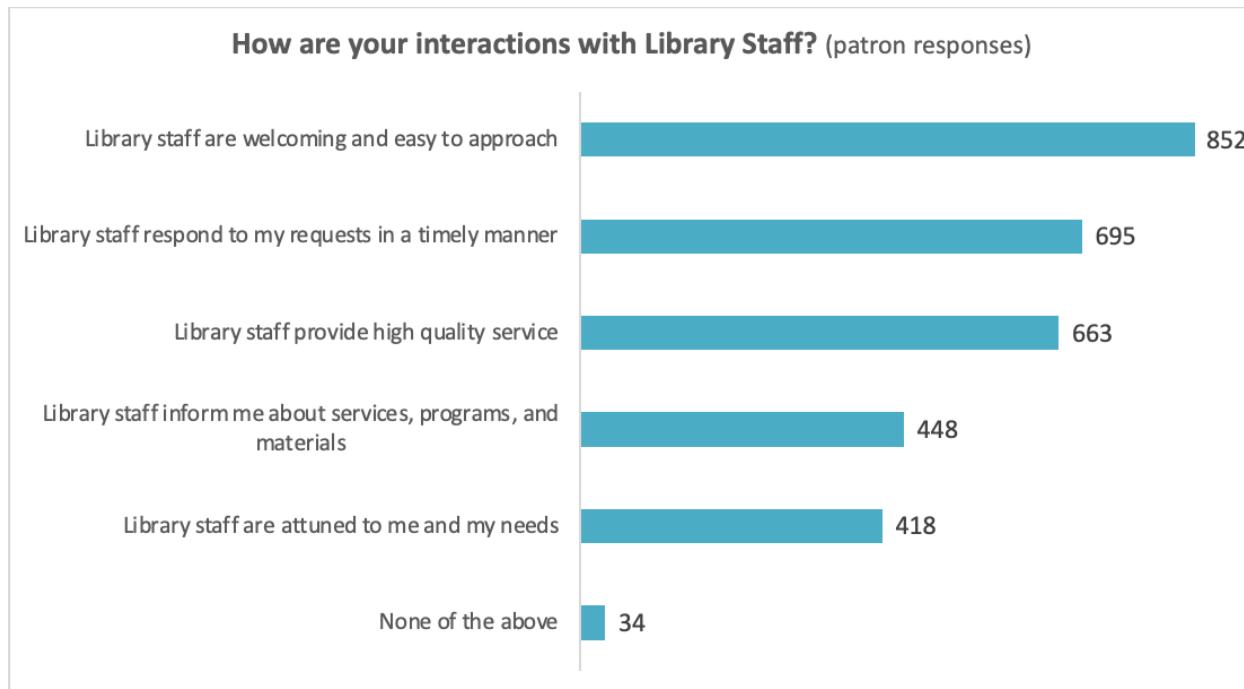
Staff provided feedback on whether they feel they have the tools, training, and support they need to be successful. The majority (60%) selected *a moderate amount*, 30% said *a great deal*, and 10% said, *not at all*.

Do you feel you have the tools, training, and support needed to succeed?
(staff responses)

A great deal	30%
A moderate amount	60%
None at all	10%

Community Feedback on Staff:

Overall, 84% (1,008) of surveyed patrons provided feedback on their positive interactions with library staff. The graph below shows the number who agreed with each statement. Feedback about their interactions with library staff is quite positive across all locations and service types. The strongest area of recognition is *staff approachability*, with respondents consistently agreeing that *staff are welcoming and easy to interact with*. Many respondents also emphasized that staff are *responsive to requests in a timely manner and provide high-quality service*.

How are your interactions with Library Staff? (patron responses)

Response	Count
Library staff are welcoming and easy to approach	852
Library staff respond to my requests in a timely manner	695
Library staff provide high quality service	663
Library staff inform me about services, programs, and materials	448
Library staff are attuned to me and my needs	418
None of the above	34

Conclusion

The Alameda Free Library is in a great place to develop a new strategic plan. Community members, partners, and staff alike value the library as both a trusted source of books and learning and as a modern community hub. Addressing facility improvements, expanding equitable access, and increasing awareness of available services will ensure the library continues to meet the needs of all Alameda residents. The findings in this report provide a foundation for setting strategic priorities that balance tradition with innovation, helping Alameda Free Library thrive in the years ahead.