

Boulder Public Library Community Survey

Please Note: This is an edited version of a report originally prepared for the Boulder Chamber of Commerce Leadership Boulder County program. It was edited to highlight the survey design process and the survey findings.

For access to the entire original report, including complete survey results and all tables, charts and graphs, please contact Jim Marshall at the Boulder Public Library, 1000 Canyon Blvd. Boulder Colorado. Phone: 303 441-3107, or by email to marshallj@bouldercolorado.gov

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Project scope

The Leadership Boulder County group was given the following goals and questions to address in their project for the Boulder Public Library:

- Provide input, insights and ideas to the Boulder Public Library's Master Plan Committee
- Reach non-users and low users of library services
- Determine why their usage is zero or low
- Do they go elsewhere for services? Where?
- What would it take to reach them?

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Process

As part of the Master Planning process in 2005, the Boulder Public Library (BPL) had begun a survey of current library users. That survey relied on library patrons taking a survey form, completing it, and submitting it to the library. The results of the survey were to be used to plan marketing activities, services and other outreach that would educate non-users in the community and perhaps entice them to visit.

At the same time, the library administration was searching for an affordable survey method to reach those members of the community who do not use library services. Our role was to help come up with a format for an unscientific survey that would reach as many people as possible, including non-users, in order to determine why they did not take advantage of the library.

Our group determined that the best way to reach non-users would be to put a survey online and link to it from various Web sites in the community. The survey was also made available in hard copy to accommodate non-Web users.

Working with the library's original survey, we researched other possible questions. We explored what other information on library usage was available on the Internet and from local marketers and librarians. We each interviewed six contacts with several questions about library usage and examined their responses for keys we could use in a survey.

Sharon King, Derek Kiernan-Johnson, and Anne Watson devised the survey instrument, with help from library staff. Nino Gallo translated the survey into Spanish to help reach the Hispanic population in Boulder County. Jeff Van Damme produced the survey in an interactive form and put it online. There were links to the survey from the Daily Camera, the Chamber of Commerce and Boulder County government Web sites.

In addition to the online links, we ran stories in the Daily Camera directing readers to the survey. We also put notices in the newsletters of the Chamber of Commerce and other civic organizations and hard copies were delivered within our business and social circles.

By late April we had well over 300 responses. We determined that about 25% of those were from low users and non-users, which we felt would give us sufficient information about their preferences and issues with the library. We also felt that responses from users would give clues to what might entice non-users through marketing and public relations campaigns.

We cross-referenced responses from the following groups: all users, high-users, low-users, non-users, and Hispanic users.

Applications & Design

The survey design was influenced by three factors:

- The results of smaller, informal surveys that the Leadership Boulder County group compiled were used to identify specific questions for inclusion in the formal survey.
- The existing survey being distributed in hard copy at the library identified specific issues on which the library wanted feedback.
- The library lacked sufficient demographic information about its patrons and felt that such information would be useful.

The Leadership group felt the survey should be designed to allow for some written feedback, but should focus on empirical answers that could be sorted to shed light on the characteristics of various demographic groups.

Data from the survey

In this section we summarize data from several categories of respondents. Complete results from each category are included in the appendices to this report. **Editors note: For access to the entire original report, including complete survey results and all tables, charts and graphs, please contact Jim Marshall at the Boulder Public Library, 1000 Canyon Blvd. Boulder Colorado. Ph: 303 441-3107, or by email to marshallj@bouldercolorado.gov**

Demographic information for total sample

- Total responses 314
(17 did not respond to the question about how often they used the library.)
- High users (used 4 to more than 10 times in last 12 months) 77%
- Low users (used 1-3 times in last 12 months) 14%
- Non-users (used 0 times in last 12 months) 9%
- Hispanic users 9%

Which library used most often?

- Main 175 66%
- Meadows 32 12%
- Reynolds 36 14%
- Carnegie 1
- Don't use Boulder Library/don't know 8%

Other demographics:

- 97% lived in Boulder County
- 88% lived in or nearest to Boulder city
- Majority between 25 and 64 years old, largest individual group 35-44.
- 70% did not have children in household.
- More than 20% said household income was \$35,000 to \$74,999;
18% lower than \$35K, 36% higher than \$75K.
- Of those who responded to ethnicity question, 76% were Caucasian, 9% Hispanic.

Issues raised by survey

Below we've extracted information from the survey on the areas of highest and lowest concern from each of the subgroups we analyzed.

From all users: Most and least important library experiences and services

At least 75% of all respondents rated experiences and services having to do with the library building, staff capabilities and library collections "very important."

- Building cleanliness and general atmosphere were deemed very important to most respondents; no one viewed these aspects of the library as not important at all. Satisfaction with these qualities was generally positive.
- Staff knowledge and staff friendliness were also considered very important, with only a few respondents stating these attributes were not important at all. Evaluation of these qualities was generally positive, although less so than compared to building atmosphere and cleanliness.

- Respondents felt that the library's non-fiction collection was very important (no one indicated that it was not important at all, and more than 7% more characterized the non-fiction collection as very important to them than did so with respect to the fiction collection). Evaluation of the non-fiction collection was positive, but rather less so than with the other two groups of high-importance experiences and services. More than 8% of the respondents characterized the collection as poor, and almost 5% said it was failing.

Specialized services and other-language services and resources were not terribly important to large numbers of all respondents.

- Classes and meeting rooms, while very important to about a quarter of respondents, were not important at all to another quarter, with everyone else feeling indifferent. Ratings of classes were fairly evenly distributed from great to failing, and those for meeting rooms were generally positive but not great.
- Only about a quarter of respondents characterized as very important the bilingual capability of the staff, the library's collection of Spanish-language titles, and other language resources. Slightly more of the remainder were indifferent than viewed these factors as not important to them at all. Ratings for these services were fairly evenly distributed from great to failing.

Response from High Users

It appears that the "high users" are a pretty traditional bunch when it comes to library usage. They seem to be most interested in a good print collection, a clean building, and knowledgeable, helpful librarians. This can partly be explained by the age demographics of the group. Only 11% are 24 or under and more than 47% are over 45 years old.

For high users, three of the top five items in importance are related to the library staff. The majority of "high users" rank staff great or good in all categories except bilingual. The library also gets high marks on atmosphere and cleanliness, also considered very important.

Items about the staff considered most important were knowledge of staff, friendly staff and availability of staff. The nonfiction collection rates as important but less well on its quality, with only 50% of responses rating it "great" or "good."

In order of importance. the top items are:

- Knowledge of staff, rated important by 80%, great or good by 73.7%
- Atmosphere, important to 80%, great or good to 80%
- Non-fiction, important to 80%, great or good to 51%
- Friendly staff, important to 78%, great or good to 70%
- Availability of staff, important to 74%, great or good to 67%
- Cleanliness, important to 74%, great or good to 86%

The bottom-rated items are:

- Meeting rooms, important by 30%, great or good by 29%
- Bilingual staff, important by 27%, great or good by 6%
- Spanish-language titles, important to 25%, great or good to 5%
- Classes, important to 25%, great or good to 7%
- Other language titles, important to 25%, great or good to 4%

While the importance of the print collection is rated high, satisfaction with the collection is relatively low with only half of “high users” rating it great or good. The DVD and CD collection is rated significantly lower. The ratings on Spanish titles are low in both the importance to the individual and on the adequacy of the collection.

- The highest importance was placed on the fiction and non-fiction collections, considered important by about three-quarters of respondents but rated great or good by only about half.
- Magazines, considered important by half, were rated highly by almost 55%.
- Spanish titles were considered important by a quarter and rated great or good by only 5%.
- DVDs and CDs were important to almost half but rated great or good by less than a quarter.

“High users” rated the print collection much higher in importance than other services offered by the library. Less than half of the “high users” rated the other services as great or good.

- The highest quality rating for other services went to art shows, considered great or good by 42% of respondents but important by less than 40%.
- The café was important to 30% and rated great or good by 40%.
- Business reference services were important to 31% and rated great or good by 16%.
- Classes were important to 25% and rated great or good by 7%.
- Electronic databases were important to 48% and rated great or good by 36%.
- Other reference services were important to 38% and rated great or good by 27%.
- Programs were important to 35% and rated great or good by 31%.
- Public Internet access was important to 43% and rated great or good by 37%.

A large percentage of “high users” rated the library facilities great or good. Meeting rooms and study areas rated low, but were also rated as less important.

- Rating highest in importance was atmosphere, with 80%; 80% called it great or good.
- Cleanliness was important to 74% but 86% rated it great or good.
- Furnishings were important to 42% but rated great or good by 60%.
- Noise level was important to 73% but rated great or good by 60%.

Which branch used most often? More than two-thirds indicated they visit the Main Library most often. Of others, 14% use the Meadows Branch and the 18% the Reynolds Branch.

Responses from low and non-users

Library Usage

Low users, those who visited the library 1 to 3 times in the last year, constituted 14% of the respondents, and non-users, those claiming they had not visited the library, 9% of the respondent pool. Combined, the low and non-user groups constituted 23% of respondents.

We were surprised how many self-described non-users commented on experiences and services at the library. Since that information was not likely to have been current, we did not include those numbers in the percentages given here, being unsure whether they were valid.

Below are the 5 items receiving the highest percentages of “very important” ratings and “not important at all” ratings, along with the percentage of the contrasting opinion for both the low and non-user groups.

It should be noted that there seems to be a greater consensus on the most important items and a wider range of opinions regarding what is not important at all.

One might also conclude that the reason for so many respondents rating bilingual staff, Spanish titles, and other language resources as being “not important” is because the question was phrased “to you.” A reasonable person might conclude that these services are important, but not to him/her personally. The same may be true of the children’s services question.

- Among **low** users, the highest percentages of “very important” ratings to an experience/service (no one said these were not important at all):
 - Atmosphere 79%
 - Cleanliness of building 78%
 - Availability of staff 72%
 - Knowledge of staff 71%
 - Noise level 71%
- Among **non-users**, the highest percentages of “very important” ratings to an experience/service (few or none said they were not important at all):
 - Cleanliness of building 89%
 - General atmosphere 85%
 - Study spaces 79%
 - Availability of staff 78%
 - Non-fiction collection 77%
- Among **low** users, the highest percentages of “not important at all” ratings to an experience/service were:
 - Staff bilingual capability 36% (18% called it very important)
 - Business reference services 33% (33% called it very important)
 - Spanish language titles 29% (21% called it very important)
 - Other language resources 26% (22 % called it very important)
 - Classes 26% (26% called it very important)
- Among **non-users**, the highest percentages of “not important at all” ratings to an experience/service were:
 - Other language resources 55% (No one called it very important)
 - Spanish language titles 50% (25% called it very important)
 - Bilingual capability of staff 39% (11% called it very important)
 - Classes 35% (41% called it very important)
 - Programs 24% (47% called it very important)

Which branch used most often? Of the low users, 94% indicated they visited the Main Library most often. 6% indicated they visited the Reynolds Branch.

Responses from Hispanic users

This portion of the sample was relatively small, but we were able to make some generalizations about them nonetheless.

Summary of Findings

- 70% of the Hispanic respondents have visited the library and 65% of them have visited only the Main Library.
- 60% of the users rated the atmosphere is good or O.K.
- Regarding the staff, 35% of the respondents felt availability was acceptable, 35% rated knowledge of staff as poor or failing, and only 20% felt friendliness of staff is acceptable.
- Hispanic users gave acceptable ratings to the fiction (60%) and non-fiction (40%) collections.
- Half of the users live in 3-5 person households, indicating they likely have children at home. 20% say they have 3-5 children.
- 55% of users have income below \$35,000 and 30% of them earned less than \$15,000.

The data seem to indicate some adverse findings about outreach and services provided to the Latino community. In comparing data for low users against data for Hispanic users, we find:

- Regarding frequency of library use, 9% of low users had not visited the library in the last year, vs. 30% of Hispanic responders. That may be due to lack of a welcoming environment.
- Regarding the library's general atmosphere: 95% of low users rated it acceptable vs. 70% of Hispanic users.
- Regarding the library staff:
 - Availability of staff received acceptable ratings from 71% of low users vs. 35% of Hispanic users.
 - Knowledge of staff was rated as acceptable by 83% of low users vs. 30% of Hispanic users
 - Bilingual capability was acceptable to 21% of low users vs. 20% of Hispanic users

Discrepancies also were present in questions relating to the fiction and non-fiction collections.

Demographically, 50% of the low users live in 2-person households, vs. 50% of Hispanics who live in 3-5 person households, indicating Hispanic families are bigger in size; at the same time, 55% of Hispanic users have income below \$35,000 vs. 46% for low users.

Other barriers that do not show up in the data also may impede the Latino community's access to the library resources, including transportation, location and child care issues.

Analysis and recommendations

How did we perform on meeting our goals?

Provide input, insights, and ideas to the Boulder Public Library's 5-Year Master Plan Committee

We are giving our data to the library to use as they see fit. Although we have done some analysis, it can be broken down much further to provide more specifics about different categories of users and demographic groups.

Reach non-users and low users of library services

25% of our sample identified themselves as non-users or low users. We have analyzed these respondents, recognizing that the actual number is low, and have taken care not to "slice and dice" the respondents into further subcategories with even lower representation.

A significant marketing effort was undertaken to ask community members to complete the survey, and especially to reach non-users and low users of library services. That included Daily Camera newspaper advertising and articles, links on Daily Camera, Boulder Chamber of Commerce and City of Boulder Web sites, as well as personalized e-mails (broadcast and individual) to target segments.

Despite those efforts and the associated in-kind costs, response to the community survey was fairly low, leading us to believe that another vehicle, perhaps focus groups with paid incentive, would be needed to generate a higher response from non-users and low users.

Determine why their usage is zero or low

- Concerns about parking and access.
- Concerns about atmosphere of the library (including cleanliness, noise, ability to find what they're looking for).
- Concerns about quality of the collections, whether fiction, non-fiction, or other media.

Do they go elsewhere for services? Where?

Options mentioned included bookstores, Denver libraries, Internet.

What would it take to reach them?

Specific recommendations regarding the Hispanic community:

- Increase availability and competency of bilingual staff. Bilingual staff would create a more welcoming and friendly atmosphere for Spanish-speaking users and would also increase efficiency in their accessing library resources.
- Increase outreach to members of the Hispanic community who have not visited the library (30%) and disseminate information about other library branches.

- Identify and implement alternatives for library use, such as opening a branch close to pockets of Hispanic population. Increase bus frequency from places where Latinos live -- many families do not have their own transportation and parents work more than one part-time job, making it difficult for families to access the library.
- Host events to familiarize the Hispanic community with the library, such as tours and celebrations that include information about accessibility and benefits of using the library.

What the library should look at in the short term

- Better marketing. The library needs to market its existing services. The marketing budget is an inevitable issue, but low-cost options exist. Could the library list available services (including drop-off book returns, the bestsellers rack, etc.) on a small piece of paper inserted into every book that is checked out? Could a larger sign be developed for prominent display with the tag line "Did you know we have. . .?" Volunteers could do tours for school groups or other interested organizations.
- Clarify the parking situation – many people commented that they do not understand how parking works, in particular whether they need to pay or not. Other comments indicate there is not sufficient parking or people don't know how to find it.
- The presence of homeless people who spend long hours in the library is of concern to many and particularly to those with children. It seems likely to influence whether they allow their children to use the library and whether they will themselves.
- Availability of books also came up frequently in the comments, where people say they are unable to find books that the computer says should be available – perhaps because they haven't yet been reshelved.
- Customer service, while acceptable to many users, seems to have affected many others negatively, especially in the Hispanic community as mentioned above. Emphasis on and training in customer service seem to be advisable.

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