

Yakima Valley Libraries: Town Hall Analysis

In August 2023, YVL hosted four community town halls, facilitated by Co/lab Capacity. The purpose of these discussions was to solicit community input on potential strategic priorities for the library, including what success might look like and ways to achieve it.

Three town halls were held in-person, at the Toppenish, Sunnyside, and West Valley libraries. One town hall was offered virtually. They were scheduled to offer weekday, evening, and weekend options. All sessions offered Spanish interpretation, and the in-person sessions provided children's activities and refreshments. By offering a variety of locations, times, and modes of participation, our goal was to maximize the number and diversity of people who would be able to engage. Overall, approximately 35 community members joined a session.

In the town halls, community members were provided with four service areas where the library could potentially focus. They were:

- Safe & Welcoming Spaces
- Community Partnerships
- Opportunities for Youth
- Technology Skills and Access

These areas were developed based on input from the community, library leadership, and staff. Earlier in the year, a community assessment identified key needs in the region. Through a series of listening sessions, library leadership and staff discussed how the library might feasibly and effectively meet those community needs. The four service areas presented at the town halls were intended to summarize some of the top service responses identified so far. This gave the public a second opportunity to provide input on the library's plan.

For each of the four areas, participants were asked, on a scale of 1-5, "In your opinion, how important is it for the library to focus on this area?" They were then prompted to provide any actions they would like to see the library take in this area. The questions posed were: "What do you think the library should do in this area? What would success look like to you?" People were also given the option to share additional ideas not clearly covered by any other category.



Overall, participants agreed that all four areas were important, with Opportunities for Youth and Safe & Welcoming Space being the most important. In most cases, their suggestions for how to achieve success in these areas closely aligned with staff input so far. The following section will summarize participant comments in each area.

- **Safe and Welcoming Spaces**

This was seen as one of the two most important areas, with a majority of responses rating its importance at or near a 5 out of 5. In their comments, people valued after school programs for older kids and teens. For all ages, they wanted a variety of interest-driven, hands-on, and STEM activities. They repeatedly suggested the idea of having youth-led or leadership development opportunities, such as opportunities for older children to mentor younger ones, for youth to teach or lead programs, and for youth to volunteer or access paid internships.

- **Opportunities for Youth**

This was the other of the two most important areas, with responses tending to cluster between 4.5 and 5 out of 5. People valued after school programs for older kids and teens. For all ages, they wanted a variety of interest-driven, hands-on, and STEM activities. They liked the idea of having youth-led or leadership development opportunities, such as having older kids mentor younger ones, teach or lead programs, and youth volunteer programs or internships. People noted that limited hours and transportation make it difficult for some youth to access the opportunities the library provides.

- **Community Partnerships and Collaboration**

People thought this was important, rating it approximately 4.5 out of 5. They said that they want the library to partner with community experts (for example, business owners, healthcare providers, and fire safety or disaster preparedness organizations) to provide real-world skills, knowledge, and access to services. Participants wanted ways to learn about and interact with their neighbors through programs and meeting spaces. They also liked partnerships that supported access to the outdoors and other community resources, like Discover Passes, museum passes, and outdoor education programs. Finally, people saw partnerships as a marketing tool - a good way to raise awareness of what the library has to offer, especially when it helped the library bring services out into the community.



- **Technology Skills & Access**

Overall, people thought this area was important, generally ranking it around a 4 out of 5. This is an objectively high level of importance, but by comparison it was the lowest ranked and had the most variability of ranking of all four options. When thinking about actions the library could take, participants especially valued access, both to basics like an Internet connection or computer, and to emerging technology like AI and Makerspaces. They noted that limited hours impeded access for some. In terms of digital literacy and technology skills, a few topics were noted repeatedly. People thought that education on basic digital literacy would be most useful for seniors, and that some support could be provided by youth. However, participants felt that people of all ages needed support on using technology, especially social media, safely. People also valued career-connected technology skills – those that would help someone write a resume, get a job, start or run a business, or prepare for a career.

Participant Appreciation

Multiple participants expressed their appreciation for the library and for the opportunity to give input on the library’s strategic plan. A few of their comments included:

- "I am moved to tears of joy to hear these focus areas. YES! you got it right!"
- "I have so appreciated these efforts to elicit community input in long-range planning for our libraries. Also am glad that you’re offering this participation via Zoom (since I’m out of town)."
- "Me and my mom, along with my sister, enjoy using the computers. During the pandemic, my family and I appreciated the opportunity to check out DVDs and books and magazines."
- "Excellent interpretation! What a good experience of a meeting moving smoothly AND bilingually. I wish everyone could have this experience!"
- "[Y]our library ‘rocks’. I have requested MANY books from other libraries through you on the subject of the Science of Reading, saving me hundreds of dollars. Thank you!"
- "We thank the library staff for their helpfulness."
- "I think this is the best listening session I have every attended."

Next Steps



This feedback supports the the inclusion of all four broad topics in the strategic plan. The specific ideas suggested during the town halls will be combined with staff and Board input (gathered from listening sessions and a system-wide internal survey) to identify potential metrics for success and key actions. These will be vetted by library leadership to ensure the final plan is feasible and realistic. Ultimately, the combination of community, staff, and leadership engagement will result in a plan that is SMART – specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound.

