Background

ATN Strategies was engaged by the Eastern Counties Regional Library (ECRL) to develop a strategic plan for the next three years. This plan will highlight the communities' and the library's priorities over the coming years, with a view to what is practical and achievable, as well as how multiple parties can collaborate to realize these goals.

Of the nine library systems in Nova Scotia, ECRL services the largest geographic area through its nine library branches. ECRL has been challenged to offer equitable service throughout this large and diverse area, while working with resources that vary depending on location or local community involvement.

ECRL offers a variety of services ranging from traditional book borrowing and library assistance, to online resources and public health offerings. Engagement focused on understanding which services community members value most, whether for their own participation or the benefit of their community. Public participants were also asked how they engage with the library while the ECRL Board and staff were consulted on operations and accountability.

Engagement Context

Through discussion with community and other key informants, new opportunities and strategies were identified for advancing the current mandate of furthering education and learning through the provision of programs and services that contribute to the economic and social well-being of ECRL communities.

Stakeholders and partners who participated in engagement included:
- Community members and library users
- ECRL Staff
- ECRL Board of Directors
- Municipal officials and community partners

Recognizing that the ECRL is guided by the Libraries Act and largely funded through external sources, a goal of this engagement was to set reasonable expectations with library clients, community members and others regarding the realm of the possible. This strategy aims to connect and engage the various parties who can collaborate toward advancing the services offered through ECRL in a way that is sustainable for staff and funders, while best meeting community needs.

Overview

The goal of engagement was to hear from all relevant key informant groups to ensure diverse and inclusive feedback from those who use ECRL services and offerings, community partners as well as those responsible for service delivery.

Groups were engaged as follows:
- ECRL Board of Directors
    - Discussion during two Board meetings plus follow up survey
- Regional public representation
    - Three in-person (Guysborough, Petit-de-Grat, Port Hawksbury) and one virtual community session were organized, hosted and facilitated. Attendance for these sessions was 12.
    - A fifth session in Whycocomaugh was uniquely structured to support new library conversations with 15 community members in attendance.
- ECRL Staff
    - An anonymous online survey was shared with staff
- Municipal, provincial, and community partners
    - Municipal partners were engaged through bilateral interviews and small group working sessions

Board Engagement

Board of Directors

Outgoing members of the Board of Directors were engaged through two working session (i.e., one in-person and one virtual) during regular board meetings. The topics of discussion included:

- Allocation of financial and organizational resources in Board's decision making
- Responsible Board stewardship and replacement of capital assets
- Commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility (EDIA)

As a value-added engagement modality, the Board was also consulted through a survey, where they were able to offer supplemental input. ECRL's current mission statement was also workshopped for refinement.

Public Engagement

Open House Stations

Station 1: Dotmocracy – Participants were presented with a list of library offerings and asked to rank their top four. This exercise enabled the determination of the most popular library services and offerings.

Station 2: Visioning Station – Participants were asked to imagine the future of their library. Sentiments included friendly and welcoming spaces, access to internet and tech services, embracing community diversity, flexibility, and offerings for all ages.

Station 3: Community Survey – A survey was administered at the end of the public engagement and additional copies were left at library locations. 34 surveys were completed.

Respondents were asked:
- To rank the importance of several library offerings including physical and digital materials, public health services, or expanded hours.
- Whether there are listed services that they cannot access and how this may be addressed.
- The best method for communicating news or public events.

Public Engagement

Whycocomagh Engagement Session

The session in Whycocomagh was custom designed considering the community is in the planning phase for a new library. Some 15 individuals attended the session, including both community members and municipal representatives.

This ATN facilitated meeting was designed as a question-and-answer format - focusing on topics including but not limited to:
- Service priorities and needs for the Whycocomagh community
- Accessibility-based considerations for the new space and potential users
- Preferred hours of operation
- The role for the library within the community

The meeting closed with a visioning station exercise

Staff Survey

This survey was targeted at ECRL staff members to capture insights from staff across the region. The survey was designed to gather insights into staff satisfaction and comfort with delivering the mandated library services.

The survey was issued to all staff on January 14, 2025.

The staff survey included the following themes for response:
- Public expectation regarding job duties outside of assigned tasks and how they determine where to draw the line
- Ability to perform required duties with available resources and technology
- ECRL's commitment to EDIA
- Satisfaction with compensation
- Comfort with delivering public health initiatives
- Priority services and the vision for ECRL in the future

The survey was completed by 17 out of 22 staff members.

Bilateral Discussions

ATN completed bilateral discussion planning for municipal officials and other partners. This task will be activated by a warm introductory email from ECRL

Outgoing Board Feedback

Resource Allocation and Asset Management

During initial Board engagement, when asked about the allocation of resources and the decision-making process, members believed that the values of the community should be reflected within the funding formula. There was comment regarding a shift away from the equal distribution model in recent years and toward providing service aligned with municipal contributions. Branch hours and the impact of funding on the ability to provide quality client service were also noted.

In discussing proactive asset management, it was suggested that regular maintenance considerations be incorporated in financial planning to prevent service quality degradation. Members also considered the importance of accessibility and environmental sustainability.

The Board acknowledged that additional funding could allow the prioritization of additional staffing and therefore extended open hours, which could further enable more volunteer-based programming and community partnerships.

Outgoing Board Feedback

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility (EDIA)

Board members were in favour of making a strong public commitment to EDIA programming and use of space that reflected this promise. Suggestions included displaying local and Indigenous art in libraries and the potential for such materials to rotate through branches. Members emphasized that EDIA should inform Board composition as well as staffing and talent attraction for the branches. The Board believed that ECRL services must also increasingly include support for growing newcomer populations.

ECRL into the Future

The ECRL Board emphasized the libraries' role in community well-being and were supportive of innovations like enabling access to virtual health services. Members also noted that space making was important, particularly for youth, and looked to models from other jurisdictions that could inform these tasks.

Public Engagement

Priority Services – Dotmocracy Results

In ranking their highest priorities for library services, offerings and types of support, the communities determined the most important to be:

1. Access to technology and the internet (14 points)
2. Physical library collection including books, DVDs, audiobooks, and the library of things (13 points)
3. Online catalogue for tracking borrowing (9 points)
4. Ability to suggest new books or materials for purchase (9 points)
5. Online e-resources (8 points)

The services for the dotmocracy station were grouped according to related features between each, including groups like online or tech-based services, "traditional" library services like book borrowing and a library membership, or ancillary services like health products and resources. Participants' preference for those traditional services or tech services were noted, as opposed to other ancillary services. However, several participants expressed an interest or passion for food security and appreciated seeing this profiled in the offerings.

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Public Engagement

Physical versus Digital Materials

Respondents were asked to rank the importance of several library offerings, including having access to materials in physical format as well as digital format. Results overwhelmingly demonstrated that library users value physical books and other materials, with 97% of participants ranking physical materials of high (32%) or very high (65%) importance.

While sentiments regarding physical books were common, the value of flexibility in digital materials and an appreciation for the variety of options offered by ECRL was noted. Participants in the survey largely ranked this of average (26%), high (24%), or very high (21%) importance, while verbal feedback gathered through discussion at these sessions reflected similar thinking.

It should also be noted that those who participated in the paper survey that was offered in branches may have an inherent preference for physical materials and attendance in the library space.

Public Engagement

Welcoming and Friendly Spaces

The common theme among the most highly utilized images in the Visioning Station was the desire for welcoming, friendly, and diverse spaces.

Figure 1 (top) to the right was the most highly selected photo. The comments typically revolved around a focus on multicultural activities and resources, a wide range of accessible options, and a place where people can be themselves in a safe, equitable, and free space.

Notably, Figure 2 (middle) was most commonly used to reflect participants' feelings of ECRL locations being welcoming and friendly. While some identified this as something they value in their library generally, many had complimentary comments about approachability of current staff.

The third figure (bottom) reflected sentiments of a place for family and community. While many participants understood that not all ECRL spaces could support community events or gatherings, "third spaces" were still a feature in high demand.

Public Engagement

Extended Hours / Flexible Access

Many members of the public expressed a desire for extended or after-hours flexibility. Some noted that hours can be challenging for working parents who do not get off work in time to attend. Others noted that expensive or inconvenient transportation in some areas can create an additional barrier when hours are limited.

Almost 40% of public survey participants indicated that expanded library hours (if funding were not a consideration) was of very high importance. One in ten (12%) felt extended hours were of low or very low importance. On a similar note, just under half (45%) felt that the ability to access the library after hours was of either high or very high importance.

One respondent noted that expanded library hours would be priority *if* funding were not a consideration, as many participants were cautious of the extra requirement that this would place on staff in the absence of additional sufficient funding to contribute the necessary resources.

Public Engagement

Public Communication

Many conversations revolved around today's difficulty in communicating with the public and ensuring that news of events and offerings is shared.

Public feedback in the survey tended toward physical communications like printed posters in libraries (62%) and other community locations (56%). Also receiving support from over half of respondents was updates on the ECRL website (53%), followed by social media (44%).

The requirement for the use of multiple forms of communication was also much discussed among session participants. The need for diverse communication was highlighted by the range of comments received, with one participant commenting that social media use is a must, while yet another participant encouraged the ECRL not to rely solely on Facebook.

The most prevalent communication suggestion written into the "Other" space was an opt-in email list, where community members may provide consent to receive communication through email. One in five (20%) respondents proposed this approach unprompted.

Public Engagement

Discussion Regarding the New Library

While many sentiments were echoed throughout various conversations, including strong desire to see libraries as welcoming third spaces, a connection was also drawn between the library and visitor information centre (VIC) expected to be housed together when the new ECRL location opens in Whycocomagh. During this conversation, participants discussed the ability to overlap services to create efficiencies and cross promote the library when patrons visit the VIC.

Shared initiatives between library locations was also suggested as a possibility for bringing additional live community programming to communities while facing resource limitations. Activities like Celtic music sessions and winter sports were raised as ideas to bring together people of all ages, facilitated using community connections and library equipment.

Libraries as inclusive and welcoming spaces was further emphasized and echoed throughout these conversations, where participants suggested including concepts like low sensory hours, optional lights off, and more services for individuals who are hearing impaired.

Public Engagement

Discussion Regarding the New Library (cont.)

Session attendees felt that open hours between 11am and 7pm would be the most helpful for their community, also noting that snow clearing in the morning is a consideration in the winter, and that there is a significant contingent of homeschooled children in the area who may benefit from the library through the day.

Participants also raised the importance of having dedicated Mi'kmaw and Indigenous materials, noting a close community partnership with Waycobah First Nation and opportunities for the facilitation of knowledge sharing between schools.

To ensure communication with the community and gain critical feedback in its first year, participants suggested regular/quarterly community meetings for the public, as well as the use of local champions who can garner community support.

Finally, attendees mentioned the kitchen within the Whycocomagh facility and suggested that if it were available for use, it may present opportunities to introduce additional food security initiatives.

Public Engagement

Closing Thoughts from Public Engagement

While many noted the importance of public health resources and the benefit of increased availability, three in five (62%) respondents were either neutral (38%) or considered it to be a low (6%) or very low (18%) priority for library offerings.

The prevailing public sentiment was that the ECRL is on the right track in their prioritization of physical books and other materials, as well as their initiatives toward increased flexibility. Among these highlights were thoughtful responses and recommendations regarding what more they would like to see from the ECRL. Some notable suggestions included multiple requests for magazines and light reading for youth, a large smart TV for movie nights (requiring careful consideration of space constraints and resource/staff support), and collaboration with the historical society to expand availability of their collection.

It is important to note that due to funding and resource limitations, each location is restricted in what they are able to accomplish without further government and community support. Lending to this complication, while understandable and admirable, is the goal for each location to offer similar or identical products, services, and events, while varying greatly in space allowance, regional population and community need.

Municipal and Community Partners

General Library Use and Needs

Municipal representatives consistently stressed that while the Eastern Counties Regional Library (ECRL) continues to deliver basic services (such as book lending and technology access), they felt these core operations no longer meet the full range of community needs. Interviewees see the library as having potential to be a dynamic community hub - a "cornerstone" that would offer innovative programming, extended operating hours, and more inviting, multipurpose spaces. Municipal representatives expressed frustration that the traditional, rules-based operating model restricts ideas such as using community rooms for after-hours programming or leveraging volunteers to expand service. Informants perceived that many community members, including those who park outside libraries to access the internet - are being underserved by what they perceive as a static service model.

- "Our dream is to have libraries serve as the cornerstones of our communities... dynamic spaces where programming can happen, where people can spend time, and where it's more than just the materials available."

- "There are people parking and accessing the services but not going into the building. That signals a real disconnect between what the library offers and what the community truly needs."

- "One of the biggest things is aligning operating hours with community realities. If a library is only open during traditional hours, then it might as well be closed for working families and students."

Municipal and Community Partners

Board of Directors

The role of the Board of Directors emerged as a critical - yet challenging - element of ECRL's governance. Municipal representatives expressed concern that Board members are largely appointed for reasons other than being selected for their willingness to champion bold improvements. It is worth noting that the municipal councils are responsible for appointing a representative to the ECRL Board and that all Board appointees have an equal vote on the Board.

Municipal officials perceive much of the Board's activity as focused on financial oversight, ensuring that ECRL stays within its budget - rather than promoting a strategic vision and innovation. This approach, combined with a perceived lack of proactive communication, has left municipal partners feeling sidelined and frustrated with the overall decision-making process.

- "Our Board composition has always been by appointment. It seems Board members are mainly there to protect current funding levels instead of pushing new community-driven initiatives."

- "I don't see a positive relationship with our municipal units. The Board doesn't engage with our ideas, it's more about 'no, don't ask for more,' than about supporting progress."

- "There's a missed opportunity here for the Board to be more visionary. It should be about advancing the role of libraries, not merely policing spending."

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Municipal and Community Partners

Municipal Partnerships

Municipalities are not only key funders of ECRL but also critical partners whose expertise and local insight could shape better service delivery. However, many municipal representatives felt that they are not sufficiently involved in decision-making. They expressed a strong desire for more substantive, two-way communication that goes beyond formal reports and brief updates. When asked about collaboration, several informants believe that the current practices do not foster genuine partnerships, leaving municipal leaders to explain unmet expectations and missed opportunities for joint programming and innovation.

- "There's a wall around every idea before it even gets off the ground."

- "Municipal support is there, but it's stifled by an environment where our ideas aren't asked for or taken seriously. There's so much potential if we could engage in meaningful dialogue."

- "If we could have more direct, deliberative conversations with ECRL's leadership, we might see opportunities to co-deliver the kind of innovative programming our communities need."

Municipal and Community Partners

Ensuring Access for All Community Members

Accessibility was a prominent concern in discussions about the library's role in the community - both in terms of access to public library services and the accessibility of the space. Informants felt current operational hours, space restrictions, and a lack of flexible programming limit access for many vulnerable groups – for example, families whose schedules do not match library hours or residents who have few resources at home. There was also a desire for updated technology and redesigned, inviting physical spaces - rather than keeping community members at arm's length. As noted previously for context, Municipal units are responsible for providing library facilities and furnishings. Concerns extend beyond physical and scheduling barriers to the desire for the library to enhance outreach efforts to marginalized and less-connected groups.

- "There are people parking out front just to use the internet. That's a clear sign that our service model isn't fully accessible or welcoming. We need to create a space that invites everyone in."

- "If the library isn't open when people are free – before or after work, on weekends – it fails to meet the real needs of our residents, particularly those who rely on it as a vital community resource."

- "We see a missed opportunity in not modifying spaces to be more inclusive. A better-designed community room, for instance, could serve as a hub for people with disabilities or for low-income residents who rely on public access."

Municipal and Community Partners

Strategic Planning: Future, Vision & Ambition

In conversations about the future, municipal representatives unanimously called for a strategic plan that moves beyond incremental operational refinements. They envision a library that plays an innovative and expansive role in community life, serving as a modern "third space" where residents can learn, interact, and engage across various facets (education, technology, recreation, and culture). Municipal representatives felt that the current process is constrained by a conservative culture along with an emphasis on fiscal limitations. Municipal partners wish to see bold ideas that not only secure additional funding but also fundamentally reimagine how ECRL serves its diverse community.

- "There are so many exciting possibilities if we can move past a culture of 'no' and actually embrace what the community could have: a library that's a hub for learning, social interaction, and civic engagement."

- "Libraries are a key part of growing and stabilizing our population. The strategic plan must reflect bold visions that transform our facilities from mere book repositories to vibrant, community-centric spaces."

- "We need a plan that's not just about more hours or technology upgrades, but one that redefines the library as a dynamic, innovative force in our communities."

Municipal and Community Partners

ECRL Leadership

Discussions provided insights on opportunities to enhance ECRL leadership. Municipal representatives felt that ECRL leadership could be overly risk-averse, dismissive of new ideas, and resistant to change. Officials felt that this outlook limits innovative thinking, while impacting relationships with both the Board and the municipalities. Municipal representatives wished that leadership would more actively engage with or inspire staff, to avoid leaving community needs unmet and the library's role diminished.

- "ECRL is failing to build partnerships."

- "Even when community ideas are discussed, the response is always 'no' - a reflection of a leadership culture that seems stuck in the past."

- "There's been no real shift from that 'no culture' even after years of discussion."

Municipal and Community Partners

Organizational Culture and Internal Communication

Beyond policies and leadership styles, many participants expressed reservations with the internal ECRL culture they characterized as a "culture of no." Participants felt that this mindset discourages creative exploration and stifles both internal dialogue and external partnerships. Informants suggested that this conservative culture affects staff morale and limits the ability to innovate and take initiative, even when there are enthusiastic individuals on staff. A call was made for a cultural shift that would place greater value on open communication, innovative thinking, and internal empowerment.

- "It was like playing whack-a-mole with people's dreams. Every time someone had a new idea; it got shot down immediately."

- "Many of us feel that there's no space for creativity. It's all about following rules and maintaining the status quo, rather than reaching out and engaging with fresh ideas."

Municipal and Community Partners

Funding, Resource Allocation, and Innovation

A recurring theme centered around the allocation of funding across ECRL. Municipal representatives perceived that a disproportionate share of resources goes to central administration and head office staffing at the expense of community-based programming and facility improvements. They believed that if additional funding were tied to clear, measurable outcomes (e.g., increased open hours, improved programming, or innovative community partnerships), municipal partners might be more inclined to invest further. Interest in a new funding model that supports innovation and responsiveness to community needs was a strong theme.

- "Fifty percent of the budget goes to head office staffing and only a fraction is available for direct community services. That inverted relationship needs to change if we're serious about innovation."

- "We might be willing to invest more, but only if we see a tangible business case for expanding services, creating dynamic programming, and truly unlocking the library's potential."

Results of the Staff Survey
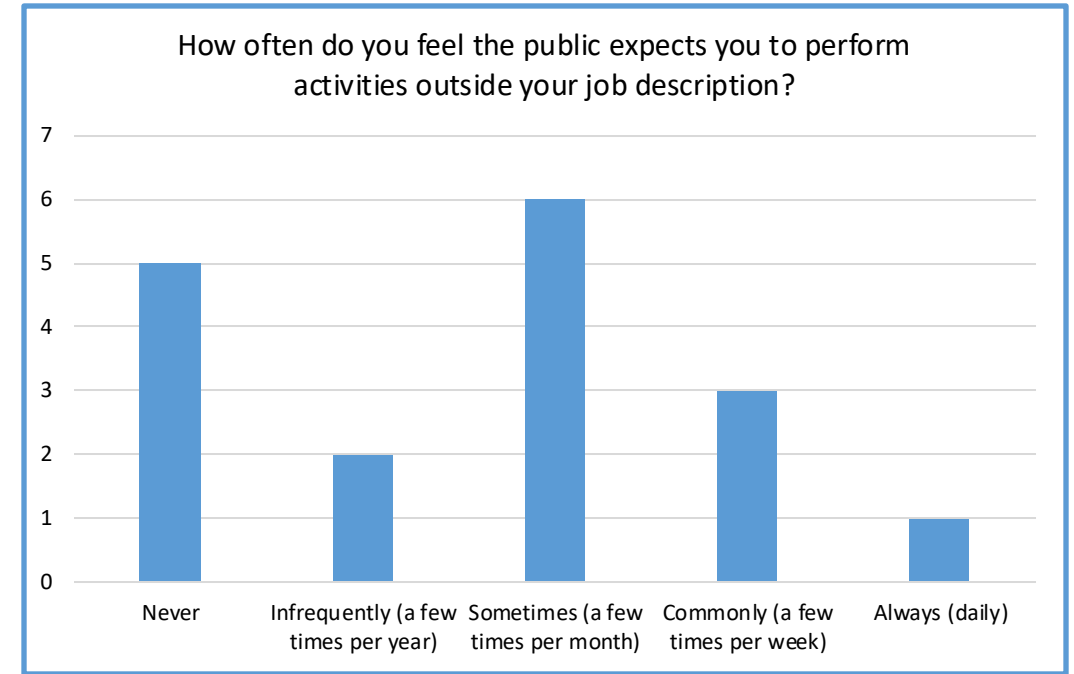
General Considerations and Job Duties

The first category of questions for staff, and management related to their sentiments about their job and responsibilities.

Question 1

When asked how often the public requested activities outside of their job description, one responded daily, three indicated a few times per week, while the most common answer (n=6) was that such requests were heard a few times per month. On the other hand, five reported never hearing requests for activities outside of their job description, while the remaining two said infrequently.

To follow up, respondents were asked which requests they heard most often. Multiple responses indicated that some library users will request that their book borrowing be tracked by staff, and that they continue to opt out of self-service for offerings like book holds or printing in favour of having staff assist. One mentioned even being contacted on days off to have holds placed. Other similar activities outlined in the survey responses included library users requesting help with online purchases, gift card redemptions, setting up their devices, or requesting a significant number of materials for holds.

How often do you feel the public expects you to perform activities outside your job description?

Bar chart values:
- Never: 5
- Infrequently (a few times per year): 2
- Sometimes (a few times per month): 6
- Commonly (a few times per week): 3
- Always (daily): 1

Results of the Staff Survey

General Considerations and Job Duties (cont.)

Respondents also mentioned the expectation that library staff should hold information for various community organizations (hours, directions, community offers, government applications) when they are not responsible for knowing or presenting that information. One comment highlighted an expectation to watch parents' children while they run errands. Further, comments indicated a necessity for branches to be able to be more self-sufficient in their decision making.

Question 2 asked staff and management how they determine where to draw the line between assisting the public and the limits of their position.

Some participants reported that they take perspective by asking themselves whether the request is an action that could be done for all users or is a reasonable request when balanced with their pay. Others determine what is unreasonable by whether it would break a rule or what they would be comfortable putting into a closing email for their supervisor. A few indicated that they typically involve technology but to help but draw the line when the request is outside of their extended knowledge. In some cases, survey respondents indicated that the amount of time a request takes is often a consideration (i.e., beyond ten minutes is more likely to be declined). In one case, a participant reported that they will offer to assist users with services like technology but will not take the action for them.

Results of the Staff Survey

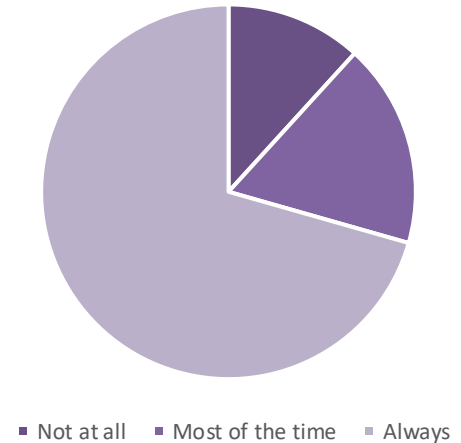## General Considerations and Job Duties (cont.)

Notably, some respondents did indicate that users have asked them to "break rules" or to be silent when breaking rules. Finally, multiple comments also reported that staff members will respond to unreasonable requests by showing or informing library users of the guidelines they're required to follow to try to educate and further their understanding.

Question 3
Participants were asked if they feel they have the resources – whether in technology, equipment, or materials – available to perform their assigned tasks.

As indicated in the chart, thee in ten (71%) felt they *always* had the resources required and 18% responded *most of the time*. The remaining 12% felt they *do not* have the required resources to perform their duties and further indicated that this is due to an expectation to deal with issues outside of their area of expertise or without the proper resources. For example, one response provided further context that they lack a sufficient database to search for some items that library users are looking for which results in staff depending on luck.

Do you feel you have the resources (technology, equipment, materials) available to you on a regular basis that you need to perform your assigned duties?

■ Not at all   ■ Most of the time   ■ Always

Results of the Staff Survey

General Considerations and Job Duties (cont.)

Training was another commonly raised point, with staff desiring learning in certain technologies to better serve patrons. Staff also desired more explanation for changes that occur so that they can gain a thorough understanding before expecting to communication changes with library users.

Question 4
The final question in the first section asked participants what service enhancement they would prioritize, if additional financial resources became available. Respondents were able to choose between:
• Increasing and adding to collections (29%)
• Increasing resources to support extended open hours (24%)
• Increasing programming (12%); or
• Specifying their own suggestion (35%).

Multiple participants who provided their own response suggested that hiring additional staff would help alleviate pressure at branches and stabilize regional office operations. One respondent supported this by indicating that mailouts alone can be very time consuming, and that additional staff could help increase programming efforts. Wage increases were also encouraged, as well as space and equipment upgrades that could provide a cozier place to spend time.

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Results of the Staff Survey

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

The next four survey questions asked for respondents' thoughts on current and future initiatives surrounding Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (EDIA).

Question 5 asked survey participants to rate the ECRL's current commitment to EDIA through offering diverse collections, accessible and inclusive spaces, and other features. While two respondents (12%) felt this commitment was weak, 4 were neutral (24%) and 11 felt the commitment was strong (65%).

Question 6 requested that survey participants provide suggestions for other technologies, programs, or resources that could further support individuals with disabilities who use ECRL services.

Several participants echoed sentiments from earlier questions, stating that a common request they receive is from seniors for technology support. These respondents mentioned that training in certain technologies like Hoopla and Libby or having an IT person on site once a week could facilitate better support for the older cohort. Further, multiple participants noted that one or some library locations have no wheelchair accessibility door opener.

More large screen computers, as well as voice activated computers for those who are unable to or have trouble typing were suggested, while one participant noted that SamePage has contributed nicely to an expanded collection of items like large print materials.

Results of the Staff Survey

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (cont.)

Other suggestions included a designated quiet room, better signage, and further replacements for spine labels that are difficult to read.

Question 7
When asked how the ECRL can further embrace EDIA initiatives, front door accessibility was again mentioned. Additionally, a common perspective was the desire for inclusive programming that will bring people together and out of their houses, whether through community training opportunities or children and family programming.

In response to this question, several participants also indicated their satisfaction with the ECRL's current initiatives and support. Many emphasized the importance of listening to the community regarding the services that impact them, as well as communicating opportunities to the public through visibility on the website and social media.

Question 8
Finally, survey respondents were asked for any suggestions regarding strategic community partnerships with local organizations that could help better serve the region's diverse population. Respondents offered that partnerships with local literacy groups or organizations such as the Canso Library Resource Group may be beneficial in advancing these initiatives.

Results of the Staff Survey

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (cont.)

One respondent mentioned a desire for slightly more flexibility over the organization of events to fully embrace the community surrounding each library branch. Some events discussed by survey participants were book talks and author events, as well as collaboration with the French community centre and family resource centres.

Collaboration with local schools was also desired, so that libraries may be used as shared educational spaces. Partnerships with nursing homes and care homes was also mentioned. This type of partnership can enable use of library services by individuals who are not able to travel by providing them with books, movies and other materials on a monthly or biweekly basis, under an account dedicated to the home.

Echoed throughout public engagement conversations, staff also reflected a desire and passion for working with the food bank toward food insecurity initiatives.

Results of the Staff Survey

Compensation

To assess the staff's comfort with their compensation and work life balance, the survey asked about satisfaction with current salary as well as their comfort in requesting vacation or time away from work.

Question 9 asked respondents how satisfied they are with their current salary.

Of the 17 respondents, the lowest proportion reported being *very unsatisfied* (12%), while the highest proportion reported being *unsatisfied* (41%). On the other hand, 24% reflected *satisfaction* with their salary or wage, while the remaining 24% said they were *neither satisfied nor unsatisfied*.

Those who did not indicate satisfaction were asked what increase would meet their expectation. While results varied due to different pay structures, a common range of responses fell between 1-10% (5 responses within this range). A few indicated a dollar amount increase between $0.90 to just under $3.00 per hour, while one response indicated more generally that living wage for the area is around $20-23/hour.

On the higher end, one "very unsatisfied" respondent indicated that an increase of around 30-35% would be expected for their job description, while another clarified that they feel an increase of $10,000 would better match the job expectation.

Results of the Staff Survey

Compensation (cont.)

Question 10

Next, participants were asked if they feel they are comfortably able to take time off when needed, with 59% responding yes, and the remaining 41% saying no.

Those who felt able to take time off commented that they found ECRL to be open and accepting of time off requests and that previous experiences had provided reassurance that the workplace, management, and team was supportive. One comment noted that Payworks is easy to use and navigate.

Alternatively, of the 41% who responded no, some noted the backup of work waiting when they return as a reason they avoid taking time off. They felt that the library should be able to stay open when staff take vacation and reported feeling guilt when there is no fill available. This was identified by another respondent as a lack of necessary redundancy and staff to backfill employee vacations.

Also mentioned was the nature of the library and after-hours returns resulting in piles of books and work waiting when staff returns.

Results of the Staff Survey

Delivering Public Health Supports

To assess the comfort levels of staff and management in providing public health services mandated by the province, survey participants were asked how prepared and/or safe they feel when assisting people with public health supports.

How prepared do you feel to assist people with public health initiatives introduced at the library?
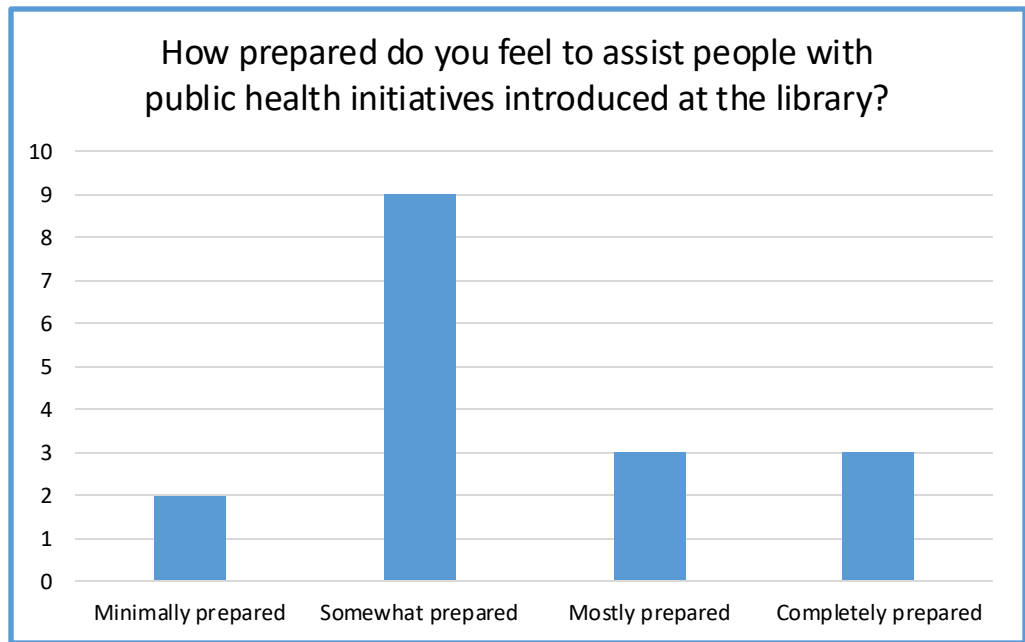
Question 11
The first question in this section asked about the feeling of preparation when assisting people with public health initiatives introduced at the library, to which 18% responded that they feel *completely prepared* while an additional 18% said they felt *mostly prepared*. The majority (53%) reported feeling *somewhat prepared*, while the remaining 12% reported only feeling *minimally prepared*.

Results of the Staff Survey

Delivering Public Health Supports (cont.)

Question 12
Similarly, survey participants were asked if they feel safe when providing these services as part of their prescribed duties, to which 65% indicated yes while 35% indicated no.

Question 13
Finally, participants were asked whether they had ever encountered an instance when they had difficulty assessing whether it was safe to assist someone or alternatively, whether they should refer to a medical professional.

Nine in ten (88%) survey participants indicated they had never struggled with this dilemma, while 12% said they had and provided further context regarding potential situations. Factors like mental health or contagious illness were raised as contentious points. Experiences with returning library users who, over time, demonstrate that they may need further health support raise concerns for staff. Potential issues include risks of physical incidences (e.g., fainting, seizure.) that they may not be able to support, or alternatively, decline in mental health resulting in potentially escalated situations. While staff express desire to support, they also recognize a lack of training or preparation for these more serious events.

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Results of the Staff Survey

ECRL in the Future

Question 14
As a final question, survey participants were asked what future they would like to create for public library services in the region, based on their knowledge of current library trends and the organization itself.

This question garnered many fruitful responses, including positive sentiments like encouragement that the library is moving in the right direction toward being open and welcoming, responsive to patrons, and supportive of the communities. While one comment noted a hope for more inclusive spaces, they also noted the great strides that had been made in this area already.

Another common thought resulting from the survey was the desire to further support seniors and their use of library services in a way that is comfortable and convenient for them. Some indicated that they didn't wish to see the library become too wholly digital and expressed that seniors should not have technology forced on them.

One respondent noted their appreciation that test kits were offered through the Covid-19 pandemic, citing libraries as central to communities, information and resources required by the public.

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Results of the Staff Survey

ECRL in the Future (cont.)

Stability in operations and staffing was also prevalently mentioned, with the hopeful result of having library hours extended in the future.

Similarly, respondents expressed great support for the library as a third space, offering diverse programming in partnership with community (resources permitting). Staff expressed their vision as a space for university students to study, for kids to high,, or to meet authors and other community members, rather than as a place to only stay momentarily.

One suggestion presented a marketing campaign to welcome people back to libraries as a reminder that there is community support available at a time when the cost of living is high, and many are restricted in what they may access.

Respondents also mentioned additions to the Library of Things, where donations may be accepted for equipment like 3D printers, personal technology devices, sewing machines, painting or art materials, among others.

Key Findings

- The love of reading featured prominently throughout engagement – traditional library services were commonly considered the top priority
- Library events or use of the library as third space was in high demand, though many engagement participants recognized space constraints; community collaborations were suggested as an option to circumvent space restrictions
  - Opportunities for community education like tech workshops for seniors or youth groups were a prevalent recommendation. Experienced and knowledgeable community members may volunteer to teach a variety of workshops
- Many community participants described the library experience as being part of their routine – this highlights the importance of communicating changes in service offerings and providing flexible options to engage in library materials to suit a variety of lifestyles
- Navigational and access issues were identified in some locations – as signage and location are not under ECRL purview. Provincial and municipality support was encouraged to address these challenges
  - While the locations are in many ways strategic and appropriate, there are factors that create conflict. For example, the requirement to buzz into the library during open hours is contrary to the concept of the library being a welcome place for community
- The community is seeking a balance between the benefits of technology and the desire to remain connected with physical books and their fellow community members

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