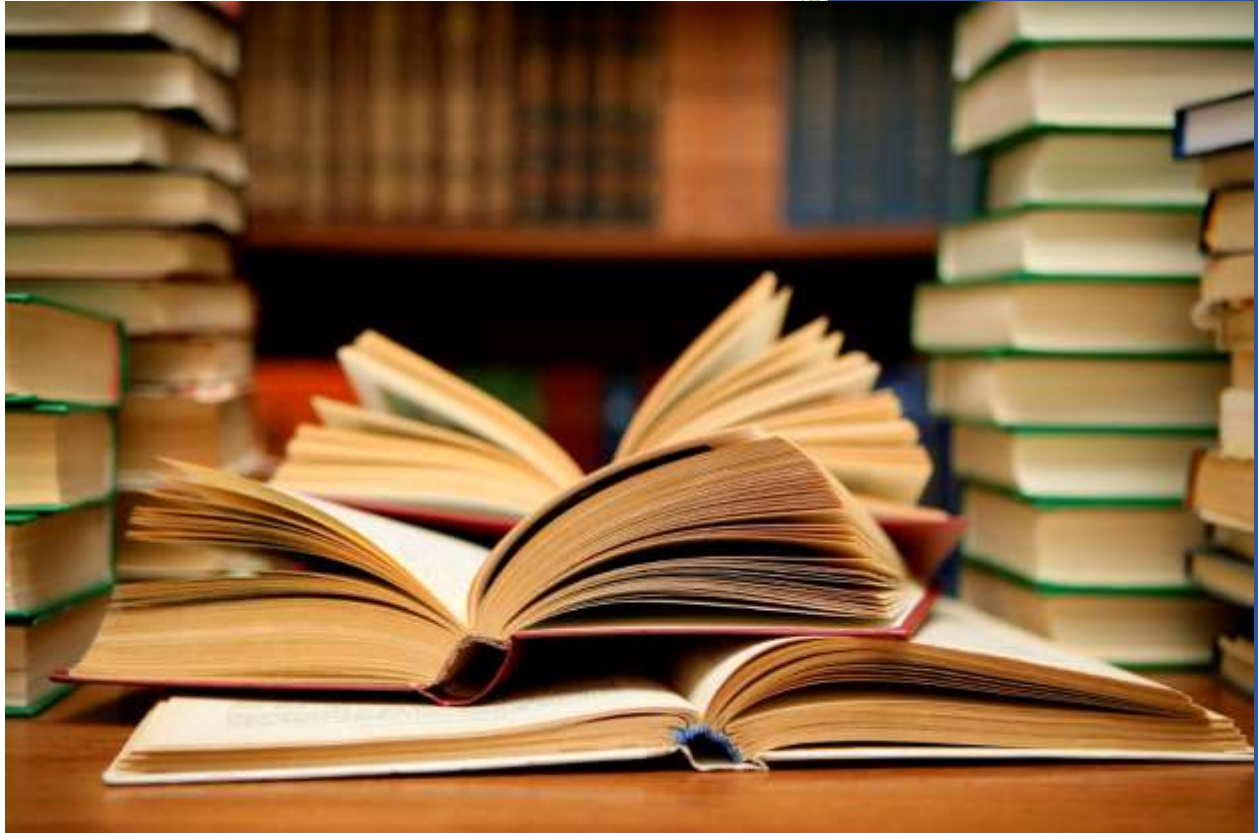


Pueblo City-County Library District Focus Group Report



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Overview

In March 2015, Richard Male and Associates had the pleasure of conducting five Focus Groups as part of the Pueblo City-County Library District's (PCCLD) strategic planning process. The five pre-selected focus groups were: 1) Readers; 2) Leaders/Partners; 3) Donors/Funders; 4) Families; and 5) Non-believers.

The focus groups were well-attended (7-9 participants per group), with the exception of the Non-Believers group. According to library staff, there was a low response rate for these individuals, which coincides with their lack of engagement with PCCLD. Therefore, several Readers were asked to participate in this group, and thus data reflects two Reader groups and a total of four different Focus Group types, rather than the originally intended five. RMA suggests attempting to survey the Non-Believers as another way of engaging them and capturing their feedback.

The five participating focus groups were as follows:

- Readers #1
- Readers #2
- Leaders/Partners
- Donors/Funders
- Families

Over the course of two days (March 3 and March 4, 2015), RMA facilitated five focus group sessions, each lasting 90 minutes. The sessions were hosted in the Rawlings' Library conference space and meals were provided at each session. Overall, engagement was very high across all groups, with many participants offering feedback and recommendations as well as being highly inquisitive about the Library's strategic plan. RMA recommends providing the focus group participants with a two-page summary of the focus group results and/or the strategic planning process as way of reinforcing their engagement and commitment to PCCLD.

From the overall data analysis, RMA extrapolated themes that emerged across groups and that reflect future growth opportunities for PCCLD. Additionally, we have included participant suggestions that arose from some of the themes and reflect not only the participants' feedback, but also tactical steps that the library may consider as it moves ahead.

The seven major themes that emerged during the focus groups are as follows:

1. Creating Young Readers
2. Enhancing Marketing and Communication Tools
3. Balancing Book Reduction and Media Expansion
4. Providing Targeted Collections
5. Augmenting Adult Programming and Book Clubs
6. Promoting the Library as Vital "Community Hub"
7. Increasing Fundraising Awareness and Strategies

Discussed below are each of the 7 themes and some of the associated quotes from varying participants. The goal is to highlight major themes while providing both the narrative and context in which they were shared by the focus groups.

Theme 1: Creating Young Readers

Across all but one focus group conversation, *Create Young Readers* was both the first priority voiced by focus group participants, as well as rated a “Top 5” library service priority by all five focus groups. There was a general feeling that this Service Response is central to the library’s work and is a need the library is successfully fulfilling. The second most prominent Service Area was *Satisfy Curiosity: Lifelong Learning*, which was also identified as a Top 5 priority by every focus group.

>Youth Reading is Family Reading<

Related to this theme, the Families focus group, in particular, commented that they would like to see more programming for children between baby/toddler and pre-school/kindergarten. There was overall consensus that there was a gap of programs available to this particular age group. Participants also stated that they would like for current children’s programming to be more inclusive of all the children present, regardless of age. Group members shared that the entire family unit often attends the youngest child’s reading programs. For example, one mother suggested, “We read together as a family. So if one child receives a prize for reading, we would like for all children to receive a prize for reading.” This theme highlights the sentiment that families believe reading is a family-wide, shared activity, and they would like for the Library to integrate this philosophy into their youth-based programming.

Theme 2: Enhancing Marketing and Communication Tools

While pre-determined questions about communication and marketing were elicited later in the focus group script, the topic was raised early on in the conversation by participants in nearly every focus group, indicating it was of high priority. Participants said they generally learned of programming, events, and new technology offerings through word-of-mouth, but felt the library could have greater impact if more people were made aware of events and online tools.

Participants had a range of suggestions for improving communication and marketing. E-newsletters and Facebook posts were repeatedly suggested as the easiest and most effective strategies to implement. For example, participants suggested both Facebook and E-newsletters could be used to share program scheduling, calendar of event updates, and special event announcements. Overall, participants welcomed discussion around the

"I'm not usually a newsletter person but I get and read it because it's useful info. I would like to get email; it's easier to disseminate."

- Focus Group Participant

opportunity to be in communication and contact with the Library more often and would appreciate using varying forms of technology as a method for enhancing communication.

Theme 3: Balancing Book Reduction and Media Expansion

Although the pre-determined questions about collections were focused on new offerings such as seeds and laptops, many participants shared concerns about recent book reductions in the libraries. Speculations on the reasons for book reductions varied and included assumptions such as: 1) the need for new acquisitions (particularly digital); 2) the need to spread out the collection across new libraries; and 3) the need for leadership to lower total number of books in

"Even if they're not buying new books, they could leave the ones they have."

-Focus Group Participant

order to artificially raise statistics on the ratio of books in circulation. It was apparent that if the Library's intended reasons for the book reduction had been shared with constituents, they were not trusted or unclear. Although the diversification of material type (particularly digital media) was appreciated, decreasing printed materials and increasing digital materials were not considered to be sufficiently meeting adult readers' needs.

Several participants across focus groups also agreed that front-facing displays of books to children and DVDs to adults were appropriate, but felt that non-fiction, in particular, was an area that did not benefit from or need as many front-facing displays. Participants in Readers #1 (who were selected based on their high use of the collections) were very adamant in their displeasure at what they viewed as over-weeding of collections across all genres, and several shared that their concerns were echoed by other library stakeholders not present in the focus groups.

Readers #1 participants suggested that at the Rawlings location there was plenty of space for most of the printed materials to remain (particularly for non-fiction and periodicals) alongside new acquisitions. Group members shared a general feeling that many books were worth keeping, even if they were not popular. Reasons for retaining "dusty" books included local history; topic and format (i.e. cookbooks, craft diagrams not ideal for e-books, etc.); and because their mere presence in the library could encourage readers to explore books beyond popular offerings.

Overall, all groups expressed that while they appreciated the increase in available digital media, they wanted a more balanced offering of books/printed materials and digital materials/collections.

"A walk through the stacks shows the interest of our culture. I commend the library on their work with new media, but it shouldn't be prominent. My best joy is sitting down in a chair and picking up a great book. Holding it. The immediacy of that. A great library is still focused on books."

- Focus Group Participant

Theme 4: Providing Targeted Collections

>Curriculum Collections<

In every focus group, suggestions were made for how to better serve library constituents with regards to specific requirements such as age, student status, book club membership, etc. In particular, the Leaders/Partners group commented that they would like for the Pueblo City-County Library District to partner with grade schools and colleges to parallel its collections with student curriculum. There was large consensus among many of the groups that the library should increase its effort to ensure books and other materials which are on students' required lists are being offered at the Library across all locations and thus helping students fulfill their school-based reading requirements.

>Program-Based Collections<

Families and Readers groups also suggested the library consider providing multiple copies of books likely to be used by interest groups and community classes. For example, several focus group participants stated that they would be interested in leading community interest groups – from book clubs to discussion groups to knitting classes – at the library, if the Library would be willing to advertise to the community, i.e. through the library newsletter or bulletin, and assist in providing the necessary resources, i.e. materials, to implement such classes.

Theme 5: Augmenting Adult Programming and Book Clubs

Particularly among the Families and Readers focus groups, additional suggestions for adult programming and adult book clubs were made. The Families group, which was entirely comprised of moms, said they would like a “Moms Day Out” program – a mother-focused discussion group that would meet at the same time as the regularly scheduled children's programming. The Family group included several leaders who had strong influence and informal power, who could be utilized to help organize and promote more parent-based programming, particularly as many participants stated they were unaware of many of the programs being offered in the library. The groups also suggested that programs for all age ranges be offered simultaneously, so the entire family could be engaged in library activities at the same time.

Additionally, the Readers groups made recommendations in regards to providing both online and physical space for Book Club meetings and announcements. For example, they recommended both an online and a physical board where Book Clubs could make announcements. The group also suggested that the library continue to provide a physical space for the groups to meet. They also requested that multiple copies of popular material be available so that all Book Club members could fulfill their reading list through the library.

Theme 6: Promoting the Library as Vital “Community Hub”

Participants loved their libraries for more than just the collections. They saw them as “a place where everyone is equal,” “a stronghold in the community,” and “a vital community resource.” The library has the opportunity to build on this strength by making the physical and meeting spaces even more conducive to constituent relationship-building.

For example, across many of the focus groups who utilized the library regularly, comments around creating more comfortable seating and lounge areas were widely expressed; as well as creating more communal, informal meeting spaces where conversations could be fostered.

“I love All Pueblo Reads. It’s not just a private engagement with books and computers. It’s how we celebrate culture and build community.”

-Focus Group Participant

Overall there was a strong desire for the library to play an increasing lead community role, offering not only books, technology and resources, but also providing a space where neighbors, family and friends come together to celebrate, discuss, and participate in each other’s shared interests.

Theme 7: Increasing Fundraising Awareness and Strategies

There was a general lack of knowledge about the donor opportunities available to patrons of the library, such as wills and bequests, etc. It was suggested that PCCLD consider developing a long-term fundraising strategy, which specifically solicits memorial gifts, wills and bequests, and other similar giving strategies. Such a plan would provide current and future donors with the necessary information for making and preparing their gifts. Additionally, many of the participants across all focus groups expressed interest in this type of giving.

The Donors/Funders focus group also indicated that there was limited follow-up and recognition when contributions were made. The suggestion was made for the Library to launch a quarterly e-newsletter tailored specifically for funders that recognizes and thanks donors for their contributions; provides updates on programs and projects that may have been funded by the donors; highlights District growth (i.e. new locations); and announces upcoming special events. The Donors/Funders group commented that they take great pride in both their contributions and their library. The Pueblo City-County Library District has the tremendous opportunity to capitalize on their constituents’ emotional and financial investment interests.

Conclusion

The focus group discussions reinforced the stakeholders' deep respect for the library's role in the community and their commitment to continuing to enhance library programs, presence, and community impact. As such, we strongly encourage PCCLD to share a summary of focus groups themes and provide an opportunity for additional feedback.

Additionally, the focus groups should be considered one component of the strategic planning process. The themes that emerged from this subset of focus groups may potentially complement themes that surface from other data collection methods, such as surveys, one-on-one interviews and other tactics currently being utilized by PCCLD's strategic planning team. Therefore, operational action items should not be based solely on one element of the strategic planning process but rather from the comprehensive findings of all external and internal data-collection approaches.

In the next five years, the library has the opportunity to strategically capitalize on its strong relationship with constituents by improving communications, finding a compromise on collection offerings, providing additional opportunities for user-driven programming, and balancing the community's needs for digital technology and printed material.

We sincerely enjoyed working with the PCCLD staff and believe the information gathered from the focus groups will be essential as the Library continues expanding its programmatic impact and fostering community engagement.