



BIGELOW FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY

COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUPS

SUMMARY REPORT 2023

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS = 22

- Focus Group #1 (12/14/22 7:00-8:30 pm) = 8
- Focus Group #2 (1/14/23 10:00-1:30 am) = 6
- Focus Group #3 (1/19/23 7:00-8:30 pm) = 8

1. WHAT ARE THE VERY FIRST THREE WORDS YOU THINK OF WHEN YOU THINK OF THE LIBRARY?



- Access
- Answers
- Antiquated
- Books (5)
- Challenging
- Children
- Cluttered
- Comfortable
- Community (2)
- Cozy
- Cramped
- Crowded
- Dark
- Difficult
- Entertainment
- Events (2)

- Free
- Free Stuff
- Free Printing/Faxing
- Friendly (4)
- Fun
- Good Public Resource (4)
- Great Programs
- Great Time
- Happiness
- Helpful (3)
- Historical
- I Love It
- Inaccessible Physically
- Library
- Limited
- Needs More Cats
- Old
- Online Resources
- Opportunity
- Outdated
- Outreach
- Overcrowded
- People (2)
- Place to Get Books
- Programs
- Quirky in a Positive Way
- Small
- Warm
- Welcoming (5)

2. THE LIBRARY IS CONSIDERING WHAT IT CAN DO TO UPDATE ITS BRAND—TO IMPROVE HOW WE CONVEY WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO. WE WANT TO BE MORE IDENTIFIABLE. WE WANT TO KNOW HOW WE CAN WE UPDATE OUR IMAGE AND THE VOICE AND TONE OF OUR MESSAGING TO BE MORE DISTINCTIVE.

WHAT 3 COLORS DO YOU ASSOCIATE WITH THE LIBRARY? WHICH ARE MOST APPEALING?

- **Blue-Based Combinations (9)**
 - Aqua-Teal (soothing, living)-Rust (warm, like brick)
 - Blues (soothing, light blue or sky blue)
 - Blue-Brown-Grey
 - Blue-Green-Yellow (2)
 - Blue-Green-Yellow (goldenrod)
 - Blue/Green-Blue-and Grey or Silver
 - Blue-Orange-Red (all light colors)
 - Blue (open)-White-Yellow (help)
 - Blue Bright Colors
- **Brown-Based Combinations (6)**
 - Autumn (something that grows), Gold (brilliant, sunshiny thing)-White
 - Brown-Bronze-Gold - Rich Colors
 - Brown-Gold-White
 - Brown (wood)-Red (brick)-Teal/Blue (soothing/calming)
 - Reddish Brown-Creamy Yellow
 - Rich Brown (woodwork)-Green (stone)-Brassy Gold/Yellow (railings)
- **Gold-Based Combinations (5)**
 - Gold-Green-Yellow
 - Gold-Silver-Teal
 - Rich Golden Hues
 - Maroon-Rich Golden Colors
 - Yellow (warmth)
- **Black-Based Combinations (2)**
 - Black-Gold-White
 - Black-Industrial Green-Taupe

MISC. COLOR FEEDBACK AND IDEAS:

- Industrial grey is smothering. It feels cramped.
- Modernize the logo using blue and green. It should be a little less heavy-handed.
- Feels dark and cramped.

IF OUR LIBRARY WAS AN ANIMAL, WHAT WOULD IT BE AND WHY?

- **Dog (5):** Always there. A constant companion. || Retriever: Librarians retrieve. || Scottish Terrier || Mix Dog: Something new. Gathers information. || Wooly Dog-St. Bernard: Dog is there in an emergency.
- **Owl (3):** Books
- **Squirrel (3):** Eating an acorn and sitting on a book. Goes with the park. || Collects lots of stuff.
- **Bear (2):** Bear: Dark like a cave. || General bear
- **Cat (2):** Fluffy Cat: Hangs out in bookstores. || Wild Cat

- **Groundhog/Woodchuck (2):** Hard worker and underground. People don't think about them.
- **Tree (2):** Close to the park. || A tree trunk is solid. Has Many branches. Tree has a strong center.
- **Amoeba:** It moves and splits. It doesn't have firm edges.
- **Capybara:** Quirky. Wants to be more involved. Gets along with all animals. The Library should be inclusive, like a capybara.
- **Chipmunk:** Collects lots of stuff.
- **Cloud:** It's an entity that draws things in and sends them out.
- **Dragon:** Treasure hoard.
- **Elephant:** Never forgets.
- **Griffin:** A big golden griffin.
- **Lion:** Classic.
- **Magpie:** Collects objects. The library has the stuff.

MISC. ANIMAL FEEDBACK: Does not want to use an owl. An owl is too old.

3. HOW DO YOU USE THE LIBRARY'S ONLINE RESOURCES AND PRESENCE (WEBSITE, FACEBOOK, ETC.)?

LIBRARY WEBSITE FEEDBACK AND IDEAS:

- **Website Visitors (18):**
 - Visit Frequency: Some weekly, bi-weekly, and frequent ("often") visitors.
 - Mostly looking for events on the site. Uses Libby. Her visits to the site are very focused.
 - She's a superficial Library user and website user. Uses CW MARS to order items and reserves museum passes.
 - She goes directly to CW MARS or OverDrive.
 - Uses it once a week to order books online.
- **Positive Feedback (3):**
 - Easy to use for finding programs.
 - Easy to use and navigate.
 - A bi-weekly visitor said it isn't fancy, but it gets the job done.
- **Critical Feedback (14):**
 - It's not easy to use, nor is it user-friendly. The CW MARS layout is bad; its navigation isn't clear.
 - The website is mid-range. It isn't super slick. Some links aren't stable/live. She just uses the catalog and calendar.
 - The website isn't memorable.
 - It's full of information but also full of words—lots of text and links. It can be tedious to navigate. Libby is a little easier to use. It has a cleaner user interface.

- The site isn't user-friendly and is outdated. She doesn't use it because she finds it frustrating.
- Gets lost on the site. Can't find Libby on the website.
- The site isn't mobile-friendly on the iPhone. It's frustrating to find anything. It's difficult to navigate. The e-search function doesn't work correctly, and the calendar is outdated. She cannot find anything.
- She uses the online catalog and has reserved museum passes, but the process to reserve museum passes is unappealing. She isn't interested in other information. Thinks the photos are terrible.
- It's difficult to use the Library's website. She uses Facebook to learn about upcoming programs/events. There's too much clicking to get to what she wants on the website. She bypasses BFPL's website and uses the Libby application directly for audiobooks.
- The site's not user-friendly. It offers good, free online resources (e.g., music, movies), but the site's difficult to navigate, so you can't find the website resources easily.
- So hard to navigate.
- It's the worst library website she uses.
- She gets lost—can't get to Libby from the website.
- While it's easy to navigate, it feels antiquated. Step it up. It could be modernized. Current web capabilities are higher end than the Library's current site offers.
- **Website Content Enhancement Ideas (8):**
 - Add information about BFPL on the CWMARS application.
 - Update the website's photos weekly.
 - Improve the catalog.
 - Librarian recommendations for what to read next. Already available through the catalog.
 - Offer Library information via a mobile application that's streamlined for use on a smartphone.
 - Rotate the content.
 - Content should be condensed into fewer headers.
 - Highlight how to become a friend and promote one event at a time. Put the information front and center.
- **Website Functionality and Navigation Improvement Ideas (7):**
 - Bring everything up to date.
 - Some navigation could be more obvious if the site used a bigger font.
 - Currently, there's a lot of useful information on the site, but the website's search function should be refreshed and streamlined.
 - Add a "How To" menu with video instructions to help website visitors navigate the site.
 - Improve how information is presented.
 - Update the calendar to present a monthly view of upcoming events.
 - The website should be high functioning.

LIBRARY FACEBOOK PAGE FEEDBACK AND IDEAS:

- **Facebook Page Visitors:** Three participants in one focus group visit the Facebook page, but most visit rarely (or never).
- **Positive Feedback (1):** It pops up on her Facebook feed. Seems fine. There's lots of information.
- **Critical Feedback (3):**
 - The Facebook page needs an overhaul.
 - She follows several pages associated with the Library, but a children's event wasn't on the kids' Facebook page.
 - There are too many posts.
- **What are You Looking For on the Library's Facebook Page? Event Information (2):** Event information and interactivity with librarians. | | Information regarding upcoming events, reminders of events, and keeping track of events.
- **Facebook Page Content Enhancement Ideas (13):**
 - **Share/Promote Events (8):**
 - Would like to see more events promoted with repeat reminders.
 - Promote events more consistently.
 - Learn how the Facebook algorithm works to improve the promotion of Library events.
 - Book an event, create a Facebook event, and then post an event reminder.
 - At the beginning of the week, post the calendar for the next two weeks.
 - Post more consistently but streamline the content to focus on sharing event information.
 - Promote an event two weeks in advance.
 - Create a Facebook event, not just a post.
 - **Enhance Content (5):**
 - Post more consistently and streamline the types of content shared.
 - Check out Wowbrary as an example and share events, funny memes, quotes, and images. It would be valuable.
 - Share fewer library memes.
 - Streamline the content.
 - Share a mix of content and identify different ways to engage people on the page.

SUGGESTIONS FOR OTHER SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS:

- Instagram
- TikTok (2): TikTok is teen-friendly (e.g., Fowlerville District Library @fowlervillelibrary)
- Twitter is family-friendly.

MISC. FEEDBACK: The email newsletter is really good. Likes the direct links to events.

4. LET'S IMAGINE THE IDEAL LIBRARY BUILDING—THE LIBRARY OF YOUR DREAMS. IF MONEY WAS NO OBJECT—WHAT WOULD YOUR IDEAL LIBRARY SPACE OFFER?

INTERIOR IMPROVEMENTS (60):

- **Offer Private Study Rooms (9):** Private study rooms (2) || Soundproof instrument practice rooms.
- **Comfortable Spaces to Read/Relax (8):** Comfy chairs in a comfy reading area will encourage longer visits || Light-filled, sunny room with comfy chairs || More room to relax with comfortable places to sit || Places that are cozy to read || Private spaces for quiet reading areas (not out in the open) || Spaces to read—private areas || Spacious reading room.
- **Enhance Lighting (6):** Increase light || Improve task lighting || More natural light (e.g., bigger skylights)
- **More Meeting/Event Space (6):** Add more meeting rooms || Gathering rooms || More space for events || Offer incredible meeting spaces || Private small meeting rooms.
- **Improve Restrooms (5):** ADA-accessible bathrooms on every floor || Nice bathrooms || Decent bathrooms.
- **Increase Space/Library Size (5):** Adequate space || Lots of spaces to discover (e.g., comfortable nooks) || More space, in general || More and bigger rooms || Space for book sales.
- **Enhance Appearance/Organization (4):** Add art || Add plants || Currently too cluttered-not inviting. Too old. || Visually appealing
- **Improve Accessibility (4):** Better elevator || Be physically accessible.
- **Improve Furniture/Fixtures (3):** Add adaptable shelving—shelves that can be moved || Art displays || More display areas.
- **Misc. Unique Ideas (10):** Create a dedicated teen room (2) || Add fireplace || Offer a computer center with better, updated computers. || Offer space for sensory-sensitive children with managed lighting, minimized sounds, and good airflow—a place to go that is less stimulating. || Open spiral staircase || Reduce noise. Sound carries from the desk to the reading room. || Small coffeeshop/café || Something fun for kids in their own space

EXTERIOR IMPROVEMENTS (4): Add parking (2) || Add a garden || Create a second entrance without stairs.

MISC. UNIQUE IDEAS (2): Balance the historic and modern elements of the building. || Physical space should be well-stocked, bright, welcoming, and comfortable.

MISC. RELATED FEEDBACK (5):

- Agree with everything already said.
- The children's department is fantastic.
- Currently, just picking up materials and leaving.
- Likes going to the Library.

- The Library should represent the town. It should make a stronger impression. The current Library is quaint, but not enough. It should keep up with the town and the town's image.

WOULD THE COMMUNITY SUPPORT A NEW LIBRARY?

- All 8 participants in the December 14, 2022, focus group support a new library (8)
- About 50% of the community would support a new library. Currently, there's a huge focus on the High Street project.
- A new library construction project would not necessarily have a lot of residents' support.
- A minority of residents would support a new library.
- **IDEA:** Talk with Marlborough Public Library to learn how they gained their community's support for their library building project.

MISC. UNRELATED IDEAS (5):

- Offer a stack of recommendations by staff.
- More books
- Offer tons of events for kids and adults
- Need updated computers with MS Office applications.
- Offer multimedia to borrow and use there.

5. HOW CAN THE LIBRARY'S CURRENT PHYSICAL SPACE BE IMPROVED?

IF YOU COULD ONLY CHANGE ONE THING ABOUT THE LIBRARY'S PHYSICAL SPACE OR LOCATION, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

INTERIOR IMPROVEMENT IDEAS (22):

- **Improve Accessibility (10):** Improve ADA accessibility. The space is too cramped. || Improve the Library's accessibility. For example, the reference/circulation desk is easy to find, which is helpful, but the desk is too high. The elevator is not obvious. || The facility is designed to help people, but the building is difficult to enter. The entrance door is heavy. Plus, there are two sets of doors as well as stairs going down and up you must walk before entering. || Physical accessibility
- **Improve Children's Room (4):** Children's area is a creepy floor. It's not warm or bright. || Move the children's space downstairs. It will be easier to access as soon as they enter. || New shelves in children's room || It's impossible to find books in the kids' area. Organize the materials more logically.
- **Optimize Space Configuration/Usage (2):** Find a way to utilize space better. Optimize the space to make it feel less cramped. || Reconfigure the space/furnishings to open it up more.
- **Create Teen Space (2):** Need a teen area || On the bottom floor, the space under the stairs could be used as an open space for teens.

- **Misc. Unique Ideas (4):** Appearance is lackluster. Everything's old. To attract people (e.g., teens/YA), improve the building's aesthetics. || Improve the functionality of the community room and increase its use. Use for more than just for special occasions. || It's a sick building. Improve humidity control and mold remediation. || Too dusty, and there's too much clutter. The children's area is the worst. Get a dumpster and throw out the clutter.

EXTERIOR IMPROVEMENT IDEAS (7):

- **Enhance Parking (5):** Parking lot not obvious.
- **Improve the Entrance (2):** Front door is medieval. Replace the front door to be more welcoming. || The entrance looks severe. Add more railing.

MISC. RELATED FEEDBACK (1): The building makes me sad.

WOULD THE LIBRARY BENEFIT FROM A MAJOR RENOVATION?

- It's a great location with on-street parking. A good architect could draft something that respects the original building but updates it to meet current needs.
- We don't lack space. We lack usage. Pursue more thoughtful use of the current space rather than a renovation. Focus on adding more open hours rather than more space.

HOW MUCH COMMUNITY SUPPORT WOULD THERE BE FOR A NEW BUILDING PROJECT?

- **Town's Competing Financial Needs (5):** Clinton has lots of costly projects to do || Council on Aging needs money for a renovation || Rumbles about the Fire Department-Police Department and middle school. The Library is at the bottom of the list. || The town is considering a new middle school and is meeting with some resistance. Integrate the Library's renovation project with the schools. Improve the relationship with local schools and do more with partnerships with schools to increase support for the Library. || Regardless of whether it's a new building or a renovation project, it will be controversial. It will take money and consideration of history, but there are lots of buildings that need work.
- Long-term residents would hesitate to support a renovation. New residents would be more likely to support it.
- It would be easier to gain support from the younger population versus seniors.
- Depends on how big the project is.
- Updates to the building would be supported.
- There would be some support. People come out for stuff.
- It's a very inclusive town. The community wouldn't necessarily support a large/grand renovation, but some improvements might be palatable.
- Elders would appreciate having a place to hang out. If the renovation would make the Library more accessible, it would help increase elders' support of the project.
- If the building were made brighter and more accessible, families would support the project so kids could hang out there.
- At town meetings, many community members focus on cost concerns, especially seniors.

- Trying to get anything done in Clinton is difficult. It will anger people no matter what you do.
- It could be an amazing project.

IDEAS TO INCREASE COMMUNITY SUPPORT OF A NEW BUILDING PROJECT (6):

- Develop a strong campaign to gain the younger population's support.
- Get the younger population to realize the importance of the Library.
- Need community outreach.
- Need a really strong Friends of the Library group.
- Raise money—pursue grants and private funding.
- Increase public awareness of the Library's facility issues and needs.

6. HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO HAVE A GOOD LIBRARY IN OUR COMMUNITY?

VERY IMPORTANT (ALL):

- The Library is a lifeline, especially when you need it. It's as important as a town hall—more important than a town hall. (4)
- She makes friends at the Library.
- Her first connections— before she even signed the mortgage—were through the Library. It's very welcoming and central to the community.
- Provides crucial community service. It's a safe place to use computers, to be warm, and for families to visit. It's open to the entire community. It's crucial; it's much more than just books.
- A great resource. It's safe, offers more than just books, and you're allowed to just be.
- The Library is just as important to the local Brazilian population.
- A good public library is very important for a town. It represents the town—the pride of the community. There's no better symbol than a good public library.
- The library should be a central, free resource for the public that's open to everyone. It's important to maintain a good library for the community.
- A library is fundamental to schools. A town without a library is lacking.
- It's very important. She doesn't own a printer but can use the Library to print. People can be there without spending money. Growing up, she spent every day after school at her library. A small town's public library is important for people who don't have the resources. It's a place with helpful people.
- It's a symbol. Books are important, but it's not just about books. It's a safe place to be—a place to do homework.
- A good public library is priceless. It's the most important community center. It's crucial to the community. It's needed for everything the library offers, like cultural exchanges, materials, events, computers, printers, fax, etc.
- A good public library is a great equalizer. It saves community members millions of dollars. Super-essential.

HOW WOULD YOU FEEL IF THE LIBRARY CLOSED TOMORROW?

- Devastated (2) and Angry
- Demoralized. Need a public library to be a welcoming community. There's no other space that welcomes everyone. Don't take it away. It's not just about the books. It's more than books.
- She would be crushed if the Library closed. She wouldn't want to live in a community without a library. It speaks poorly of the town's intellect. There wouldn't be a free gathering space or any free programs for kids.
- One participant would feel bereft. It would be like a loss of an important person. The participant would be embarrassed that the town didn't think it important to invest in community members' intellect.

MISC. RELATED FEEDBACK (2):

- We have a moral responsibility to support the public library. However, her life wouldn't change without the library. A library of this type can't provide what she needs. She uses the antiquarian society's library. She can't find what she needs in CW MARS, so she uses college libraries' resources.
- COVID-19 changed library users' behavior. For example, there was an increase in use and dependence on the Library's online resources.

WHAT COMMUNITY NEEDS DO YOU THINK A LIBRARY SHOULD HELP MEET?

- **Strengthen Relationship with the Schools (3):** Connect and partner with the schools to promote how to use the library, how to be part of the library community, etc. They need training. || Reach out to the elementary school to try to build a connection with older kids. || Pay attention to schools' calendars for kids' events. Coordinate events with the schools to avoid duplication and conflicts. Plus, you can collaborate on programs.
- **Collections - Add Materials for the Brazilian Population (2):** Need more Portuguese books. || Portuguese resources should be prioritized.
- **Enhance Community Outreach (2):** Build connections with young and old community members. || Reach out to the COA and other local organizations.
- **Expand and Improve Library Marketing (2):** Promote non-traditional offerings, like the Library of Things (e.g., borrow an instrument). || The Library is synonymous with books. To make the Library more popular when marketing its offerings, promote that it's not just about books.
- **Program Ideas (2):** Find the right mix of events || Offer arts and crafts classes for adults.
- **Misc. Unique Idea (1):** Accommodate new and different types of library usage (e.g., online resources, eBooks, etc.).

7. WHAT ISSUES WILL BE FACING THE TOWN OVER THE 4-5 YEARS THAT MAY IMPACT THE LIBRARY?

- **Partisan Politics (4):** Book banning || Clinton could face struggles || Book challenges by conservative residents. || Societal attitude toward libraries

- **Building Resource Competition (2):** Building issues (e.g., middle school) || A library renovation project would cause pushback.
- **Economic Challenges (2):** Increasing costs of operating a building (i.e., energy, cost of production). || Rising housing prices
- **Changing demographics.**
- **Environmental Challenges:** People who think “books are a waste,” including anti-library people and environmentally conscious people.
- **Ever-Changing Technology:** Technology is changing so fast. It’s important to try to stay ahead, but it’s nearly impossible. Libraries tend to be last to catch up.

MISC. RELATED IDEAS (33):

- **Management and Operations (10):**
 - **Pursue Supplemental Funding (6):** Be aggressive about securing American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) funds || Leominster Credit Union and Clinton Savings Bank generously donate with funds (e.g., \$20k from LCU) || Pursue supplemental funding via creative fundraising initiatives with library supporters || Pursue cultural council grants || Use cannabis fees for the library || Reach out to local businesses to solicit donations for project-specific initiatives.
 - **Prepare for Political Challenges (2):** Aggressively counteract the book banning || Stay politically neutral.
 - Reach out to coordinate residents’ donations of their time and skills.
 - The Library should be a place of self-help.
- **Program Ideas (7):** Book club || Cultural programs would help draw people into the libraries-authors for kids! || Educate the community about green initiatives (e.g., easy ways to winterize your home) || Hanukkah event || Help people with homebuyer programs. || More events in Spanish or Portuguese || Offer multi-generational events.
- **Technology Ideas (6):** Add/promote links to existing services (2) || Offer access to and training on current technology devices, resources, and services (computers, scanning, etc.). (2) || Ensure Library uses current technology. || Update and streamline the interface between borrowers and the Library’s online resources. Ensure the Library’s Content Management System (CMS) operates efficiently.
- **Facility Ideas (3):** Increase the light in the facility. || Continuously improve the facility || Make renovations as green as possible. Be environmentally innovative.
- **Mission/Purpose Ideas (3):** Address multilingual community members’ needs || Focus on diversity and inclusion || Maintain presence as a place of knowledge.
- **Misc. Unique Ideas (4):** Increase resources available for Spanish and Portuguese language speakers. || Increase engagement of young people (children and new adults). || Offer more services and resources that help people financially. || People have to want to see change at the Library. People need to see value in change. Promote the benefits of the Library.

8. What could the Library do to better serve Clinton? What advice do you have?

- **Marketing Ideas (10):** The Library should increase its community outreach and participate in town events (2) || More collaborations (2) || Advertise other libraries' events || Copy ways other libraries engage community members || Develop a plan to get more people to visit the Library. || Get more people involved with the Library. || Increase advertising/marketing || Partner more with businesses and nonprofits
- **Management and Operations Ideas (9):**
 - **Review/Expand Hours (6):** Increase hours and increase open hours. Offer more evening hours, more Saturday hours, and more Sunday hours. (5) || Offer Sunday and Monday hours
 - **Misc. Unique Ideas (3):** Continually solicit community feedback. || Have a no fine day. || Use a suggestion box to collect new ideas.
- **Program Ideas (7):** Author programs || Expand programs offered || Offer more programs where people are turned away to get support for bigger space || Use central park for more programs || More pop-up library events || Offer business classes for potential business owners and course for existing business owners || Sponsor a journal/contest: The ideal library is...
- **Facility Ideas (2):** Have gender-neutral bathrooms. || If we can't add on to or enlarge the interior, hire a designer or architect to reconfigure the space to make it more usable. Create a scale model to show what it could be and ask, "How can you help us do this?"
- **Service Ideas (2):** The Library could have a notebook full of local business information (e.g., a directory of local businesses) || Review services offered at other libraries to identify new ideas.
- **Misc. Unique Ideas (2):** Expand the Interlibrary Lending program beyond CW MARS || Offer ADA-compliant technology (private meeting rooms with assistive devices/services)

MISC. FEEDBACK:

- It takes a lot of courage to ask people what they want. The Library has always been open to input. Offered compliments to the Library's staff.
- Library's mission is to be open to the community.
- Nothing is changed until you see changes. For example, with the High Street project, people will notice when it's finished.
- The Library doesn't qualify your acceptance: you don't need to buy anything, there are no age limits, and there's no discrimination. It's the last space you can visit without any expectations. You can "just be."
- The Library is welcoming to ideas and input.
- The Library offered a gender-based prize in the children's room (e.g., a girl prize or a boy prize). It should offer gender-neutral prizes.