

# COMMUNICATING SUCCESS IN AN URBAN PUBLIC LIBRARY

KAITLIN OSBORNE  
VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY



Running Head: COMMUNICATING SUCCESS IN AN URBAN PUBLIC LIBRARY:  
IDENTIFYING VALUE ALIGNMENTS BETWEEN HOBOKEN PUBLIC LIBRARY AND  
HOBOKEN LIBRARY CARDHOLDERS

Communicating Success in an Urban Public Library:  
Identifying Value Alignments between Hoboken Public Library  
and Hoboken Library Cardholders

Kaitlin Osborne  
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Capstone Advisor: Michael Neel, PhD

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### *Historical Context*

Almost 187 years since the first modern public library was established in the United States, there are now over 9,000 public library branches scattered throughout the country (ALA A. L., 2019). As a result of rapid technology changes over the last thirty years, critics of these institutions have predicted the public library's slow decline and even their eventual extinction by 2020 ("End of story? Public libraries", 2004). However, studies by Pew Research Center have shown that library visits by adults 16 and older reached a peak at 53% in 2012 before leveling off to 48% in 2016 (Horrigan, 2016). Public libraries' commitment to inclusivity, along with their persistent ability to adapt to changing times, have helped them maintain a vital role in society (Howard, 2019). This commitment has also put pressure on them to become all things to all people, typically without budgetary increases to reflect their expanding scope of work.

As public libraries strive to meet the needs of their patrons, they are also expected to ensure that taxpayer money is being spent effectively and efficiently. In addition to the average librarian's core job responsibilities, they now typically find themselves responsible for tracking assessment outcomes that can be used to demonstrate a branch's return on investment (ROI) to the general public and their funding body (Matthews, 2010). Although such work can be time consuming, exhibiting progress along certain ROI dimensions can potentially translate to increased cardholder numbers and subsequently budgetary allocations. While attracting new patrons can help a branch demonstrate year-over-year growth, libraries must also ensure that existing cardholders are satisfied and that their needs are being met.

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### *Problem of Practice*

Hoboken Public Library (HPL) is located in Hoboken, New Jersey and currently serves a population of just under 53,000 individuals. Initial conversations with the Library Director and staff in January 2020 helped to identify a problem of practice related to cardholder satisfaction. The staff of HPL recognize that the role of a public library has changed dramatically in the last 10-20 years. The library's marketing materials proudly proclaim, "What started as a lending library for books is now a high-tech center of service and innovation." According to HPL's most recent strategic plan, its expanding responsibilities include, but are not limited to, promoting digital literacy and improving opportunities to work, study, and gather at the library (HPL H. P., 2017). With so many competing priorities, the HPL staff voiced concerns over not knowing whether their current offerings are appropriately meeting the expectations of their cardholders.

This project sought to help the HPL team better understand what cardholders expect from the library and whether they are satisfied with the services and programming it currently provides. The study design is grounded in a conceptual framework of expectation confirmation theory which defines customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction as whether a customer's service encounter met their expectation (Oliver, 1977). It also relies on a definition of value, specifically service value, identified by Cronin et al (1997) to understand how patrons develop an overall assessment of a service's utility when deciding whether or not to continue using it. The project was guided by the following research questions:

1. How does the HPL staff define their value to the Hoboken cardholder community?
2. What do cardholders value about HPL?
3. Given the responses to questions 1 and 2, how are these values aligned or misaligned?

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4. With HPL's current practices in mind, what are their most effective strategies for communicating the identified value alignments from question 3?

This study relied on a sequential, mixed methods approach to answer the research questions. First, structured interviews were conducted with six key members of the HPL staff to identify how individuals intimately connected with the library define and perceive the library's value to the cardholder community. Using techniques established by Ryan and Bernard (2003), their responses were analyzed to identify common themes related to the library's existing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. These themes became the basis for an electronic survey that was designed by the researcher and deployed to all cardholders 18 years of age or older. In the final round of analysis, survey responses from cardholders were compared with those of the HPL staff to identify overlaps, as well as gaps, in the staff's assessment of the library's offerings.

### *Key Findings*

**Finding 1: The HPL staff's ability to provide value to cardholders is defined and bound by the library's physical space.**

HPL's 2017 Space Assessment recommended a 166% increase in the library's physical footprint in order to adequately serve a population of Hoboken's size. During interviews with the HPL staff, space was the only theme mentioned by all interviewees. In some instances, "space" referred to a rehabilitation of existing sections within the main branch and in other cases it included opportunities to develop satellite HPL branches throughout town. Creating satellite branches was viewed as a way to make the library more visible and accessible to all individuals in the community. Growing available square footage at the main location was described as an opportunity to expand the library's physical collection and its calendar for in-person

programming; two other elements of value that the HPL staff identified. Ultimately, physical space and the ability to provide an expanded physical presence was described as the main mechanism through which the library provides value to its cardholders.

**Finding 2: The cardholder community desires an expanded focus on core library services including borrowing and Inter-Library Loans.**

Overall, 97% of survey respondents view the library as a Very Important/Important asset to the Hoboken community and they believe that core services like Borrowing and Inter-Library Loans (ILL) should remain at the forefront of the library's priorities. Almost 95% of respondents listed borrowing materials as either Very Important or Important and close to 87% had a similar response for the importance of Inter-Library Loans. In addition to focusing on the library's physical collection, open-ended survey responses indicated that cardholders would like HPL to expand their eBook and audio book offerings. Of the 21% of comments that mentioned borrowing materials and ILL offerings, 51% included a reference to expanding either the eBook or audio book collections.

**Finding 3: Cardholders and the HPL team recognize the library's collection and staff as two of its greatest mechanisms for providing value to the Hoboken community.**

Interview and survey responses suggest that the HPL team and cardholders are aligned in recognizing the importance of maintaining and growing the library's collection. While programming and access to technology have been a key focus of the library team, cardholders did not place a similar emphasis on these offerings. Rather, survey responses emphasized that borrowing remains HPL's largest value add to the community. Cardholders also recognized the



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value that the HPL staff provide to the library's offerings. Over 68% of survey respondents indicated that having access to a library staff member is important to them when using the library. These cardholder responses aligned with the sentiments and enthusiasm that individuals from the HPL team expressed about their roles during their interviews.

### **Finding 4: Survey responses indicate that the newsletter and website are the library's most impactful means of communicating with cardholders.**

Members of the HPL staff mentioned a desire to improve external communications when discussing opportunities for growth at the library. As they consistently strive to innovate and develop new offerings for their cardholders, the staff want to ensure that they are promoting their efforts as effectively as possible. Survey responses indicate the majority of cardholders rely on the HPL newsletter (67.6%) and website (47%) for their information and updates.

### *Recommendations*

These findings helped inform the following recommendations that provide a series of actionable next steps for capitalizing on the library's existing strengths to better demonstrate their value to the cardholder community.

### **Recommendation 1: Implement a series of continuous quality improvement practices to maximize service quality to HPL's cardholder community.**

Researchers from the Office of Planning, Training, and Institutional Research (OPTIR) at Villanova University developed a series of continuous improvement methods that HPL staff can use as a model for enhancing process-specific service quality for patrons (Stein et al, 2008).

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While OPTIR's work ultimately identified nine proposed techniques, they recommend that libraries adopt only those that are most beneficial to their competencies and budgets. With this in mind, HPL should focus on developing the following five methods: Quality Walks, Focus Groups, Patron Surveys, Transactional Data, and Suggestions from Staff.

### **Recommendation 2: Conduct a needs assessment of eBook and audio book users.**

Open-ended survey responses indicated that cardholders would like to see expanded eBook and audio book offerings. Since HPL currently has an extensive catalog for these resources, additional feedback from patrons would help inform whether cardholders feel that existing offerings are insufficient or whether they are unaware of the resources that are available to them.

### **Recommendation 3: Create segmented newsletters to increase engagement and educate cardholders about the library's collection.**

The goal of segmenting the newsletter emails will be to educate target populations about offerings that align with their interests. By segmenting their newsletter audience, research suggests that HPL can improve their median click rates by up to 2% (DeAnna, 2017).

### **Recommendation 4: Critically examine the existing library website and engage with cardholders to identify areas for improvement.**

In addition to the newsletter, survey respondents indicated that the library website is a crucial determinant of if and how they interact with the library. Nielsen and Loranger (2006) suggest that websites have as little as 25-35 seconds to convince users that the information they

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are looking for is available. To ensure that the HPL website incorporates tenets of user centered design, the team should conduct a heuristic evaluation of their existing site to identify areas for improvement.

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## INTRODUCTION

Hoboken Public Library (HPL) is located in Hoboken, New Jersey, a city which covers 2.01 square miles along the Hudson River. Largely known for its shipbuilding history and importance as a dock for German shipping vessels, Hoboken has been home to a number of household name companies including Lipton Tea, Maxwell House, and Hostess. Additionally, the Tootsie Roll, zipper and ice cream all got their start in Hoboken's industrial stronghold (Hartman & Lewis, 2003). Toward the 1950s, as air travel and cargo ships began to dominate trade routes, Hoboken's waterfront became less favorable and ultimately fell into a state of disrepair. It wasn't until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century when Hoboken began to see a population resurgence thanks to its close proximity to Manhattan.

Established under the New Jersey General Library Act of 1884, HPL is the third oldest library in New Jersey. Constructed originally as a public library and manual training school by prominent local architect Albert Beyer, portions of the library's building continued to be used as a school until 2003 (Hintz, 2019). The library's mission is to "connect people with each other, ideas, and opportunities to support lifelong learning, personal growth, and community development" (HPL, 2018). As a community, Hoboken's population of 52,677 individuals includes 25,182 household with a median age range of 31.6 and a median household income of \$147,620. The community is 80% white, 16% Hispanic, and 3% Black (USCB, 2019). At present, about 37% of Hoboken's households use HPL's resources which include circulation desk activities, meeting spaces, maker spaces, children's events, and quiet study areas.

The focus of this study coalesced as a result of initial conversations with HPL's Library Director and staff. These exploratory discussions, which occurred in the early Spring of 2020 prior to the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic, covered a number of topics including the

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desire to increase readership, overcome the national narrative of library obsolescence, and even transform the library into a public workshare space. Ultimately, these conversations shared a common thread - the need to better understand what cardholders wanted from HPL. Identifying cardholder priorities would be important for shaping the future of the library's programming strategy but it could also be crucial for aiding in fundraising as part of HPL's Capital Master Plan.

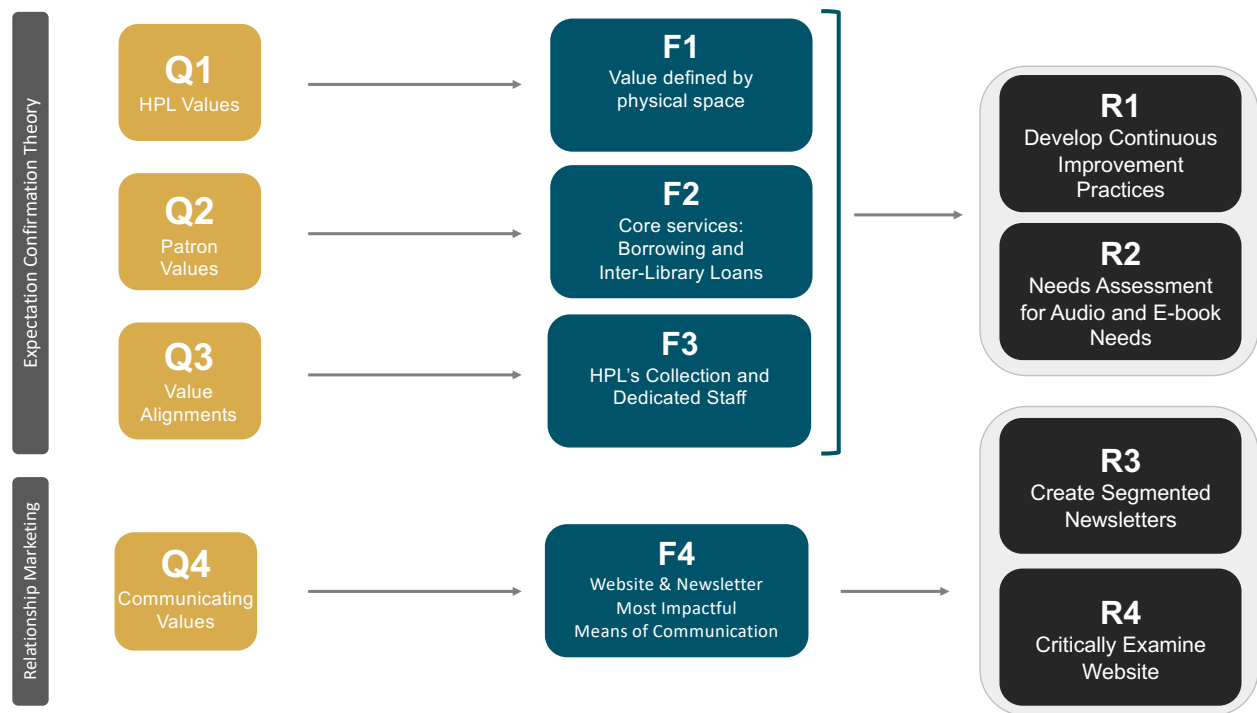
As a municipal library, HPL is funded through the New Jersey State Library Code which uses local property values as the metric for appropriating funds. In Hoboken, the local government provides \$.33 for every \$1,000 of equalized property value in order to operate the library (Sitrin, 2016). While this funding structure has allowed the library to expand significantly over the last 10-15 years, its physical footprint is still small for the population that it serves. HPL conducted a Space Assessment in 2017 as part of their Capital Master Planning process. The main branch currently contains 20,132 gross square feet of space with about 13,665 square feet of usable space. By comparison, the Space Assessment found that HPL should have 53,500 square feet of gross space and 43,566 square feet of usable area in order to adequately serve a population of Hoboken's size (Hintz, 2019). These recommendations dictate a 166% increase in the library's physical footprint to accommodate new spatial resources (e.g., meeting rooms) as well as expanded print and non-print collections. While the library plans to use grant funding to cover significant portions of the facility's upgrades, they will also rely on private donations and community fundraising campaigns to make up the difference.

To understand whether the HPL team and the community are on the same page in terms of programming expectations and needs, this study sought to identify value alignments between these two populations. The work was ultimately guided by the following research questions:

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1. How does the HPL staff define their value to the Hoboken cardholder community?
2. What do cardholders value about HPL?
3. Given the responses to questions 1 and 2, how are these values aligned or misaligned?
4. With HPL's current practices in mind, what are their most effective strategies for communicating the identified value alignments from question 3?

The following roadmap can be used as a guide for understanding the linkages between the study's research questions, findings, and recommendations.



*Figure 1: Study roadmap providing a link between research questions, findings, and recommendations as well as their respective conceptual frameworks.*

### ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

The main branch of the Hoboken Public Library is located just south of the town's midpoint at 500 Park Avenue. Under the leadership of its current Director, who has been with HPL since 2001, the library has grown tremendously. Over the last ten years, the library has seen a 50% increase in circulation and in 2019 alone they welcomed 215,446 visitors (HPL, 2019). The library offers programming for individuals of all ages in the community, including story times, technology classes, and career workshops. In addition to their main branch, HPL has also developed a number of satellite locations to spread their services throughout the community. Their secondary location, the Grand Street Branch, was founded in 2016 and is a full-service library located in Hoboken's Multi Service Center. In 2019, HPL opened The Learning Center located in the Southwest corner of Hoboken which serves younger patrons and their caregivers after school and on Saturday afternoons. Lastly, the library began using a BookBike in 2019 to lend books, share Wi-Fi and issue library cards throughout the community (HPL, 2020).

At the start of their most recent strategic planning process in 2016, the library conducted focus groups with 130 members of the community and received survey feedback from another 1,800 individuals. The information and feedback gathered during this period helped to inform their current Strategic Plan which extends through 2021. The Plan provides a series of objectives aimed at helping HPL achieve three main goals:

1. Develop service models that reimagine the role of the Hoboken Public Library
2. Restore parts of the Hoboken Public Library facility to preserve the past, celebrate the present, and create the future
3. Provide Library infrastructure to transform the Hoboken Public Library

### IDENTIFYING A PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

An initial meeting with the HPL Director and four key staff members took place in early 2020. During this conversation, the library team covered a number of existing issues that they would like to address if given additional time and resources. These included ways in which HPL could overcome the national narrative that public libraries will soon be obsolete. As part of this conversation, they discussed a desire to better communicate their successes to the Hoboken community, including new initiatives and programming that they developed over the last 10-15 years. Secondly, they discussed their desire to increase library readership. Are there specific groups in Hoboken that they should target in order to increase their numbers? Lastly, the team explained the need to demonstrate their value in order to successfully fundraise for their Capital Master Plan.

This conversation raised a number of individual questions that are closely tied to discrete objectives of the current Strategic Plan. However, collectively, they spoke to a broader desire for the team to be able to better define and communicate their value to the community. Aside from focus group and survey feedback received during the strategic planning processes, the team does not have a mechanism in place for ensuring that progress along their priorities is meeting the needs of their cardholders. In March 2019, the Marketing Department sought to establish a metrics-based system that could be used to systematically evaluate programs and obtain customer feedback. Their efforts utilized a paper-based survey that was provided to all event attendees and over the course of the year, 202 surveys were completed and returned. While the number of returned surveys was relatively small compared to the number of individuals who participated in programming in 2019 (about .6%), the team recognized the potential benefits of such a process.



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Exploratory conversation with the HPL team, as well as a review of their past efforts helped to ultimately inform the following problem of practice: The Hoboken Public Library team does not know how well their current programming strategy is meeting the needs and expectations of library cardholders.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Public libraries are under unique and increasing pressure to secure adequate funding from their municipal governments (Beckett, 2016). A 2009 report released by the American Library Association (ALA) shows that 69.2% of public libraries in FY 2008 and 67.7% in FY 2009 saw little or no meaningful increases in operating budgets (Davis, 2009). In New Jersey, almost nine million residents receive library services through about 300 public library administrations and approximately 94% of their funding is raised through property taxes (NJL, 2014). A 2007 New Jersey Library Association sponsored research project surveyed state residents about the perceived value of public libraries. The research found that the majority of respondents saw positive impacts from their local public libraries and considered funding of public libraries to be a good use of money (Beckett, 2014). To ensure that they remain favorable in the eyes of their constituents, many libraries rely on self-advocacy in order to maintain or improve their funding levels. The ALA's Office for Library Advocacy provides training and support on a variety of issues including resources for librarians to advocate on behalf of their institutions at the state and local levels (Beckett 2014).

An essential component of advocacy involves a librarian's ability to demonstrate the value that their library provides to the community (Beckett 2014). Value as a concept is present and defined differently throughout a number of fields including economics and philosophy. In business, marketing theory describes a system that is based on the exchange of value. Browne (2011) uses this idea and the term "value proposition" to explain how libraries provide information and information services to their constituents (Browne, 2011). However, since library services are not exchanged as private goods, this idea does not directly map to the public library setting. Halpin et al (2015) argue that while aspects of marketing theory (referred to here

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as “consumer value theory”) have not historically been explored in the library setting, a multi-dimensional approach to conceptualizing value should be used (Halpin et al, 2015). Their research suggests that since library users constitute a heterogeneous group, with different needs and expectations, their perceptions of value are likely to be similarly disparate (Halpin et al, 2015).

Attempts to define and communicate value in a public library setting are not new. Missingham (2005) argues that applications of different approaches have waxed and waned with the development of theories across the humanities and social sciences (Missingham, 2005). In many cases, libraries use a mix of methods depending on the context of their environment or the particular purpose of their assessment (e.g., budget requests). Missingham argues that the history of defining value in public libraries can be summarized in three waves: efficiency, financial return, and the balance scorecard. The efficiency wave included a form of output-oriented studies that were undertaken to demonstrate operating efficiency in managing human and material resources. The second wave, financial return, focused on providing dollar amounts to funding organizations in order to demonstrate success. The most recent wave started in the 90s and sought to broaden the definition of value and widen the scope of the library’s stakeholders. Studies conducted during this time period focused on return on investment (ROI) as well as contingent value.

This paper draws heavily from the work of Cram (1999) when discussing library valuation as it provides a foundation for examining individual libraries in a local context. Cram argues that libraries have no inherent objective value, rather they create value by leveraging intangible assets in ways that add value and create benefits (Cram, 1999). Her work emphasizes that the primary purpose of measuring library value must be to gauge how well an individual

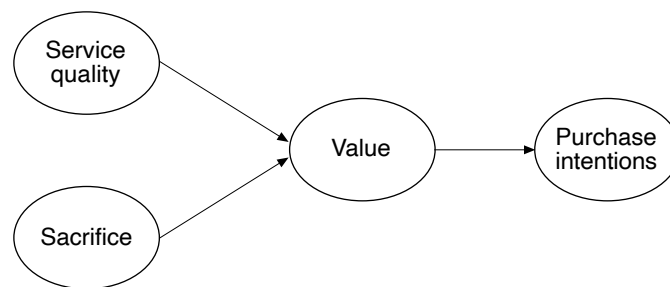
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library is doing rather than to compare it to others. The site-specificity of this conception is an important feature that allows for focusing on a local library and its connection to the local community. Since the needs of the HPL team exist at the individual library level rather than more broadly in the context of a library system (i.e., macro level), it was important to select frameworks that ground the research within this scope.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### *Expectation Confirmation Theory*

The frameworks used to ground this investigation are pulled from the marketing literature and have a basis in Expectation Confirmation Theory. Expectation confirmation, first defined by Oliver (1977), defines customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction as the result of comparing a service quality encounter with what a customer initially expected. Cronin (1997) expands on the idea of service quality as what a consumer is seeking to “get” versus that which they are willing to “give”. In her model, she defines the “give” factor as a sacrifice which can be monetary in nature or non-monetary if a consumer is giving up time or other psychological costs. When weighing service quality and sacrifice, consumers establish an idea of value based on the tradeoff between these two dimensions. In this context, Zeithaml (1988) defines value as a “consumer’s overall assessment of the utility of a product.”



*Figure 2: Emphasis on value as determinant of patron behavior in expectation confirmation theory (Cronin,1997)*

The results of Cronin’s empirical study suggest that service value is the most important factor for strategic decision-makers to examine when trying to understand a consumer’s purchase intention. As a result, service providers must take into account both the benefits of their service as well as the costs that a potential consumer will be incurring. Ladhari and Morales (2007)

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extend Cronin's framing of perceived service quality and value to the context of Canadian public libraries. They argue that library administrators are faced with unique challenges because of intense competition in the information service market. As a result, they suggest that administrators must improve their consumer knowledge as well as their performance in providing services in order to satisfy library users. Their work suggests a connection between service quality and the relationships that library administrators make with their patrons.

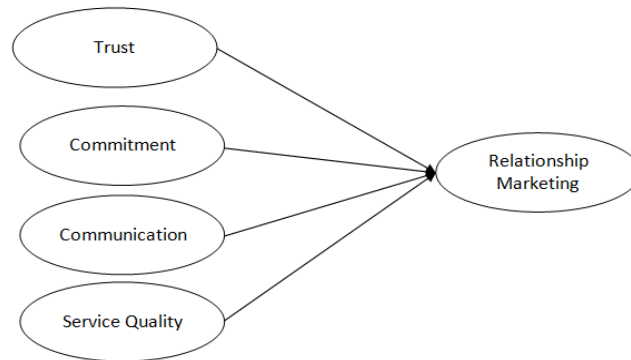
### *Relationship Marketing*

Relationship marketing first formally defined by Berry (1995), shifted the focus of service marketing from acquiring new customers to maintaining and enhancing existing customer service relationships. According to Berry, attraction of new customers should be viewed only as an intermediary step in the marketing process. While relationship marketing is an outgrowth of the well-established field of service marketing, it differs because of its focus on relationship building with existing customers. Relationship marketing, Berry argues, allows service providers to become more knowledgeable about the customer's requirements and needs. He suggests that knowledge of the customer, combined with social rapport built over a series of service encounters, can help facilitate the customizing of services to a customer's specifications.

Aka, Kehinde and Ogunnaike (2016), expand on Berry's work to create a model for identifying the determinants of relationship marketing. They suggest that trust, commitment communication and service quality are the major determinants of successful relationship marketing. These first two components are the foundation of commitment-trust theory which was introduced by Morgan and Hunt (1994). Trust refers to the ability of a party to rely on the actions of another – in the case of relationship marketing, it is the consumer relying on the service

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provider. Commitment is defined by Rauyruen and Miller (2007) as an implicit or explicit pledge of relational continuity between two partners. Lastly, Aka, Kehinde and Ogunnaike suggest that relationship marketing relies on individual and personalized communication as well as the ability to deliver high-quality service that will in turn result in satisfied customers.



*Figure 3: Service Quality as an input of the Relationship Marketing framework (Aka, Kehinde, Ogunnaike, 2016).*

For the purposes of this study, value was defined using Zeithaml's framework for expectation confirmation theory. In her work, Zeithaml describes value as the consumer's (i.e., cardholder's) overall assessment of the utility of a product. In this case the products being examined were the individual offerings that HPL provides as well as the cardholder's overall assessment of the library. Cronin (1997) expands on this definition of value by breaking it into two main components: service quality and sacrifice.

Sacrifice, which can incorporate tangible costs such as the money saved by visiting the library, provides an interesting avenue for research. However, since it can also incorporate less tangible costs such as effort and risk assumptions, it can be more difficult to measure. (Cronin, 1997). As a result, this study focused on measuring service quality using cardholder's ratings of importance and satisfaction. These two measures will help the library to identify the relevance of

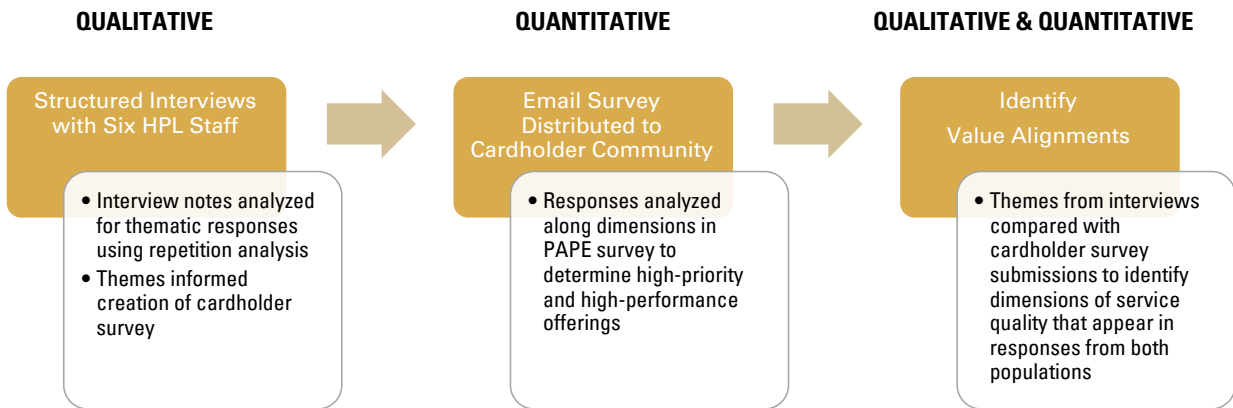
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existing offerings and their service quality by using cardholder's collective judgements based on previous encounters (Matthews, 2004). Since service quality is also an important component of relationship marketing, these two measurements will also the inform how successful the library is at maintaining strong relationships with existing cardholders.



**STUDY DESIGN**

This study relied on a sequential, mixed methods approach to address its research goals. Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) define mixed methods research as the collection, analysis and mixing of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. In this project, data collection and analysis took place sequentially allowing qualitative inputs to inform the creation of a quantitative survey instrument. The figure below summarizes the timeline of data collection and analysis.



*Figure 4: Representation of sequential, mixed methods approach that guided each phase of the study.*

This study design was chosen to accommodate inputs from two important HPL constituents: the library staff and the cardholder community. Since the scale and scope of these two groups differed greatly, a single method of data collection would not have been appropriate or feasible. While longform interviews were possible with a core group of six library employees, this data collection format would have been impossible with 11,000+ cardholders. Utilizing a quantitative survey approach for the community allowed for a larger audience to provide feedback.

### **METHODS AND ANALYSIS**

#### *Interviews with the HPL Team*

Staff from the library were chosen as interview participants by the researcher in December 2019 based on preliminary conversations with the Library Director. The Director is responsible for overseeing the library's day-to-day operations, including its 44 staff, and its progress toward completion of strategic planning goals. The Director also regularly interacts with internal and external constituents including the library staff, the Hoboken community, and external stakeholders such as the Mayor's Office. They work closely with a team of five individuals to maintain existing programming and to develop new initiatives. Each member of this team works with different segments of the Hoboken community and as a result, they have unique insight into how value may be defined by their target population. Their positions within the library are:

1. Outreach Coordinator
2. Head of Adult Circulation
3. Children's Librarian
4. Marketing Director
5. Adult Programming/Emergency Technology Coordinator

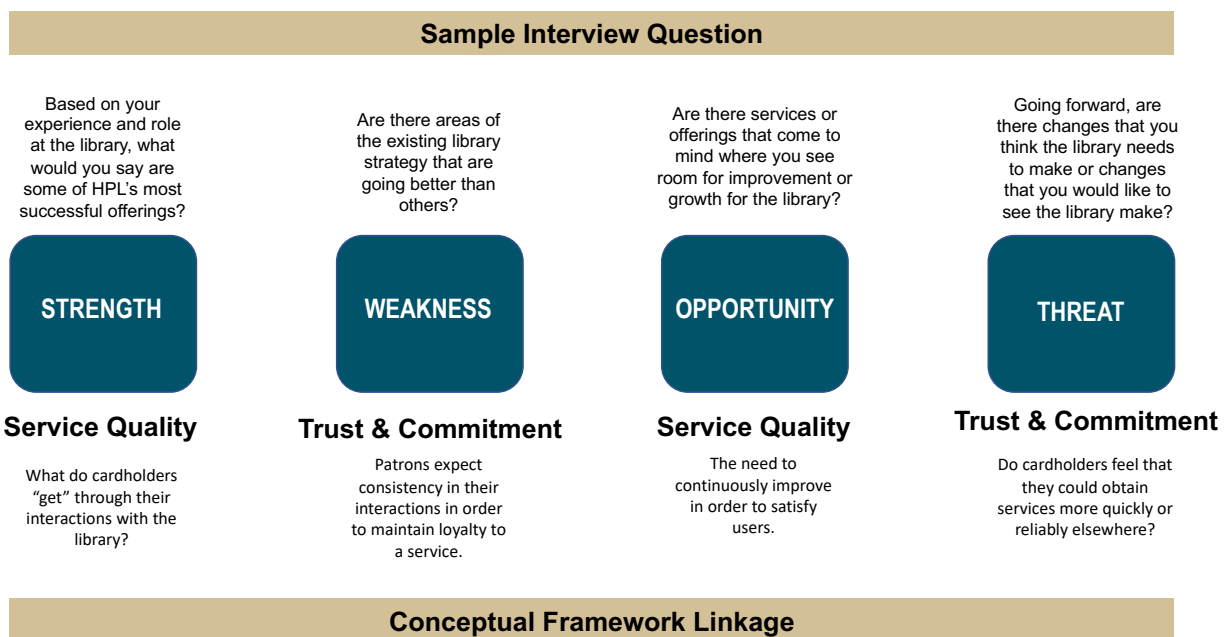
Interviews with these individuals took place from June through August of 2020. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews took place remotely either via Zoom or over the phone. Each interviewee participated in at least one, 60-minute interview, and two members of the library team participated in secondary sessions for elaboration and clarity.

All interviewees were asked questions from a script that was developed by the researcher for the purposes of this study. A copy of the script can be found in the Appendix. The questions were adapted from a SWOT analysis resource made available through ALA's Frontline

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Advocacy Toolkit (ALA, 2021). SWOT analyses provide a framework for helping organizations assess their strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, and threats from the perspective of the consumer. Using a SWOT approach provided a scaffolded means of addressing both the sacrifice and service quality components of expectation confirmation theory. Does the library team feel that cardholders are getting what they want for what they are giving up? If so, what are examples and indicators that these interactions are going well? If not, where does the team see room for growth?

The SWOT framework also helped to identify strategies that the team has in place to address the dimensions of relationship marketing: trust, commitment, communication and service quality. What strategies does the team currently have in place to ensure that they remain responsive to the needs of existing cardholders? Examples of the alignment between interview questions and their linkage to the relevant conceptual framework can be found in the table below.



*Figure 5: Relationship between sample interview questions and their respective SWOT dimension and conceptual framework.*

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Interviews were not recorded, but the researcher maintained robust notes for each session. Additional individuals from within the Hoboken community were originally also intended as interviewees as part of this study. The Library Director suggested that these community partners participate because of the collaborative role that they play in helping to connect HPL's offerings with different constituents. However, scheduling delays related to the pandemic ultimately precluded these sessions from taking place. Additional information about this design shortcoming will be provided during the discussion of limitations.

### *Analysis: Identifying Interview Themes*

Following the interviews, responses from each session were analyzed for themes using a repetition analysis method (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). This approach relies on recording the number of times that individual concepts occur in a piece of text. Concepts are defined as a basic unit of analysis in qualitative research that help to name phenomena within raw data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990 ). The more times that a concept occurs within a piece of text, the more likely that it is a theme. For the purposes of this study, themes were identified using an inductive approach. Concepts that were mentioned more than once per interview (i.e., repetitions) were first highlighted and recorded in MS Excel. Repetitions were then compared across interviews and any repetitions that appeared in at least two interviews were noted.

Themes were used as labels to help name and organize these repetitions. In some instances, the theme served as a direct reference to something that an interviewee said. In others, the theme helped to capture a broader, more abstract sentiment. The following responses do not represent direct quotes from staff. They have been constructed to illustrate how sample repetitions were ultimately categorized and assigned to a theme. Interviewee 1 directly refers to a

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need for more physical space while Interviewee 2 uses examples that indicate a need for more space. Both of these responses would ultimately be categorized under the same theme.

Sample Repetition: Theme – More Physical Space	
<b>Interviewee Response 1</b>	<i>“We need physical space to accomplish our goals...we have to grow our footprint in town.”</i>
<b>Interviewee Response 2</b>	<i>“More room to hold our collection would be great. Having expanded facilities for programming would also help expand our offerings.”</i>

*Table 1: Sample interviewee responses to demonstrate theme development*

Themes were recorded and attached to a SWOT dimension based on which question the interviewees were responding to when the concept was mentioned. Repetition of a strength dimension has been interpreted as an offering that the HPL team is currently prioritizing because they believe it brings value to the community. Repetitions identified as opportunities or threats were interpreted as offerings that the team believes they should focus on in the future. In some cases, they believe that a failure to focus on these offerings could translate to a loss of cardholders. For example, without more space to develop additional programming and an expanding collection, members of the staff worry that cardholders will turn to local bookstores or Amazon to fulfill their needs.

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### *Survey Design*

Themes identified during the interview analysis informed the dimensions used to create an electronic cardholder survey (Appendix B). The survey design was adapted from a priority and performance evaluation (PAPE) method used by Matthews (2004) in his work measuring library effectiveness. PAPE surveys can help identify cardholders' overall evaluations of a library's utility by measuring how well the library is currently performing along different dimensions. It also asks cardholders to indicate the priority that they feel the library should be giving to individual offerings.

A PAPE survey design was used because its outputs directly address this study's problem of practice. Priority rankings help inform which current offerings cardholders deem most important while the performance rankings determine satisfaction. Comparing cardholder survey responses to the staff interviews can help inform whether the HPL team and cardholder community are in agreement. If their answers differ, it could indicate that the two populations have different ideas of what cardholders are seeking to "get" from the library. If HPL is not delivering along this dimension of service quality, cardholders' intentions of using the library could suffer.

The table below provides the survey dimensions and their related theme(s). In most cases, the survey dimensions were re-named to better reflect language used on the HPL website or in sample PAPE surveys from Matthews (2004). All dimensions also included supplemental text to ensure that respondents knew what they were being asked (e.g., "Collection Offerings includes books, DVDs, music, and newspapers"). Using Matthews' work as a guide, the order of the priority and performance dimensions was altered between survey segments. This was done intentionally to force respondents to carefully read and score each library service.

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Survey Dimension	Associated Theme(s)
<b>Borrowing Materials/Collection Offerings</b>	Library Collection
<b>Inter-Library Loan</b>	Library Collection
<b>Physical Library Space</b>	More Physical Space
<b>Access to Library Staff During Visit</b>	Dedicated Professional Staff
<b>Programming</b>	Programming for Children and Teens, Experiential Programming, Community Relationships
<b>Technology Access</b>	Accessibility
<b>Delivery Services</b>	Accessibility, More Physical Space
<b>Research Assistance from Librarians</b>	Dedicated Professional Staff
<b>Online Services</b>	Accessibility

*Table 2: Cardholder survey dimensions and their associated themes.*

The survey used a five-point Likert scale to measure cardholders’ priority ratings from “Very Important” to “Very Unimportant” and their performance ratings from “Very Satisfied” to “Very Dissatisfied”. All responses were collected anonymously, and participants were not asked to provide any identifying information. However, there were a series of questions designed to better understand certain demographics of survey respondents. These questions included asking respondents to provide their age range and their general location in town. Such questions were incorporated to segment responses based on populations of interest to the HPL team. The survey was delivered via email to all cardholders 18+ in the library’s customer relationship management (CRM) system who currently receive the library’s electronic newsletter (N= 11,701). A summary of the survey metrics can be found in the table below.

	Sends	Opens	Open Rate	Clicks	Click Rate
<b>Initial Send</b>	11,701	3,467	30%	453	13%
<b>Reminder</b>	8,191	993	12%	89	9%

*Table 3: Summary of metrics for HPL cardholder survey.*

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The survey was initially deployed on Thursday, September 10, 2020 with a reminder delivered on Wednesday, September 16, 2020. The researcher designed the survey using Google Forms and it was sent using HPL's marketing platform, Constant Contact. The survey yielded 472 responses and had an open rate of 29.6% on the initial mailing. Research by Campaign Monitor (2020) indicates that non-profits tend to have about a 25% open rate on their marketing messages, suggesting that the survey email performed well in terms of open rate.

However, the survey achieved only a 4% response rate. There are a number of possible reasons for this including general email fatigue, the message timing coinciding with the start of the school year, and finally societal disruptions due to the pandemic. Initially, the survey was scheduled to be deployed during the summer so that the researcher and library staff could advertise and solicit responses during in-person library events. However, these plans were ultimately derailed due to social distancing and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Additional implications of the low response rate will be considered in the limitations section of this paper.

### *Analysis: Survey Responses*

A summary of survey responses for each question can be found in Appendix C. Since the HPL team hopes to ultimately return to in-person programming, participants were asked to provide responses that reflected their patronage habits prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. While only 4% of cardholders who received the survey submitted responses, 31.8% of respondents said that they visit the library weekly and 35.2% visit monthly. These numbers suggest that over half of respondents are frequent users of the library's services. This instilled confidence in their ability to provide informed feedback. Additionally, 82% of respondents indicated that they do



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not share their library card with anyone (e.g., family members or roommates) suggesting the majority of responses account for individual cardholder feedback rather than that of households.

Survey responses were analyzed using frequency distribution tables in Microsoft Excel. For questions five and six, which referred to the performance and priority rankings respectively, responses were sorted from most satisfied to least satisfied and most important to least important. Stacked bar charts representing these figures ultimately helped create a visual breakdown of how respondents scored individual dimensions along these two measures.

The survey concluded with an open-ended question that asked cardholders if there were any resources or services that they wished the library could improve or develop. This question was intended to account for any existing service quality dimensions that may have been accidentally omitted and to capture any new dimensions that the community is seeking.

Approximately 36% of respondents provided a comment. As with the interview responses, the open-ended comments were analyzed for themes using a repetition analysis method (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). Each comment was read and assigned a broad concept as a label. For example, comments that referenced the website or an HPL app were grouped together as references to technology. Once all comments had been read, repetitive concepts were grouped together under themes. In some instances, comments included references to more than one theme. As a result, the number of themes recorded exceeded the total number of comments.

### *Analysis: Identifying Value Alignments*

After separately analyzing the responses to both the HPL interviews and the electronic survey, the results were compared to identify areas of agreement and disagreement between the two populations. Any survey dimension that was mentioned by multiple interviewees ( $\geq 3$ ) and

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that was ranked as  $\geq 50\%$  Very Important/Important by the cardholder community was considered an instance where the library team and cardholders were in agreement. These thresholds were chosen because they accounted for at least half of the individuals in each population.

**FINDINGS**

**Finding 1: The HPL staff’s ability to provide value to cardholders is defined and bound by the library’s physical space.**

During interviews with the HPL staff, the most frequently identified concept was the need for additional physical space. This repetition appeared in conversations with all six interviewees. Other repetitions included fundraising for the capital plan, developing programming for teens, and growing connections with local schools. The table below provides a summary of the identified themes and how many interviewees mentioned them.

Theme	Number of Staff Mentions	SWOT Dimensions
<b>More Physical Space</b>	6	Weakness/Threat
<b>Library Collection Community Relationships Better External Communication</b>	4	Strength Strength Opportunity
<b>Dedicated Professional Staff Programming for Children and Teens Growth Mindset Connections with Schools Accessibility</b>	3	Strength Opportunities Strength Weakness/Opportunity Weakness/Opportunity
<b>Additional Capital Funding More Experiential Programming Better Internal Communication</b>	2	Opportunity/Threat Opportunity Weakness

*Table 4: Number of interviewees who mentioned individual themes. Each theme was recorded along with its respective SWOT dimension based on the question that was asked.*

In some instances, “space” referred to a rehabilitation of existing portions of the main branch and in other cases it included opportunities to develop satellite HPL branches throughout town. Growing available square footage at the main location was described as critical for expanding the library’s physical collection and its calendar for in-person programming. These

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comments referred to opportunities for restoring space on the library's third floor which is currently not in use. According to HPL's 2017 Space Assessment, renovation of the third floor would ultimately allow the library to reimagine the Children's Library, the Teen Center, and a Program/Technology Room (Hintz, 2019).

Expanding HPL's footprint by growing into the community was another way that space was mentioned. Staff mentioned creating satellite branches as a way to make the library more visible and accessible to all individuals in the community. At present, the main branch and the Grand Street branch provide service to individuals who live in the middle or south quadrants of town. There is currently no library representation in uptown Hoboken. Staff felt that identifying a location for an uptown branch would be crucial for improving accessibility as well as engagement with cardholders. Ultimately, space and the ability to provide an expanded physical presence was described as the main mechanism through which the library staff believe that they provide value to cardholders.

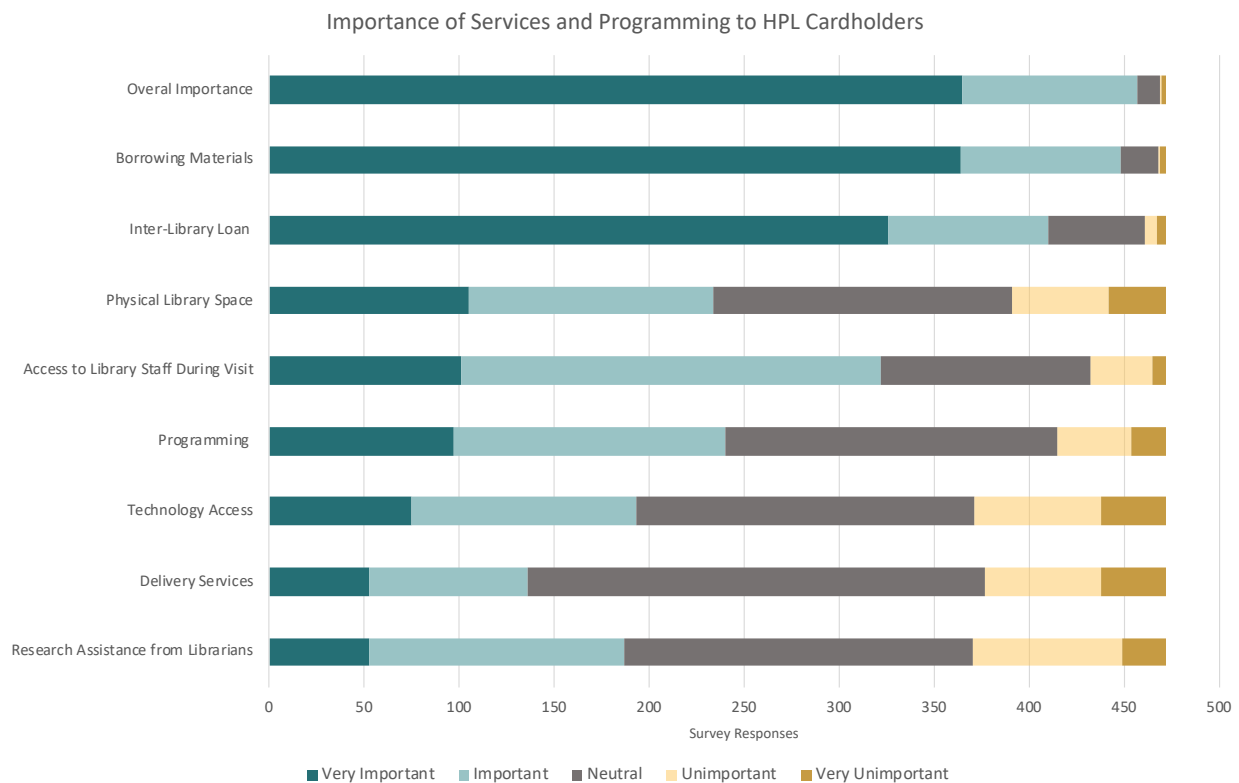
Conversations surrounding space were frequently mentioned in response to questions related to the library's weaknesses or opportunities for growth. They also typically coincided with mentions of the library's collection; another prevalent theme mentioned across four interviews. HPL's collection has quadrupled in the last 15-20 years (Ryazanksy, 2019), however staff worry that their offerings may be falling short of what cardholders need. One staff member mentioned the threats that HPL feels from retailers like Amazon and local bookstores, especially in a location where residents have disposable incomes. Unless the library can meet a cardholder's needs quickly, they may look elsewhere. These interview responses suggest that the HPL staff recognize the important role that their lending services currently provide. However,

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while they are proud of how far these services have come, they also believe that their continued success is contingent on being able to provide more.

### **Finding 2: The cardholder community desires an expanded focus on core library services including Borrowing and Inter-Library Loans.**

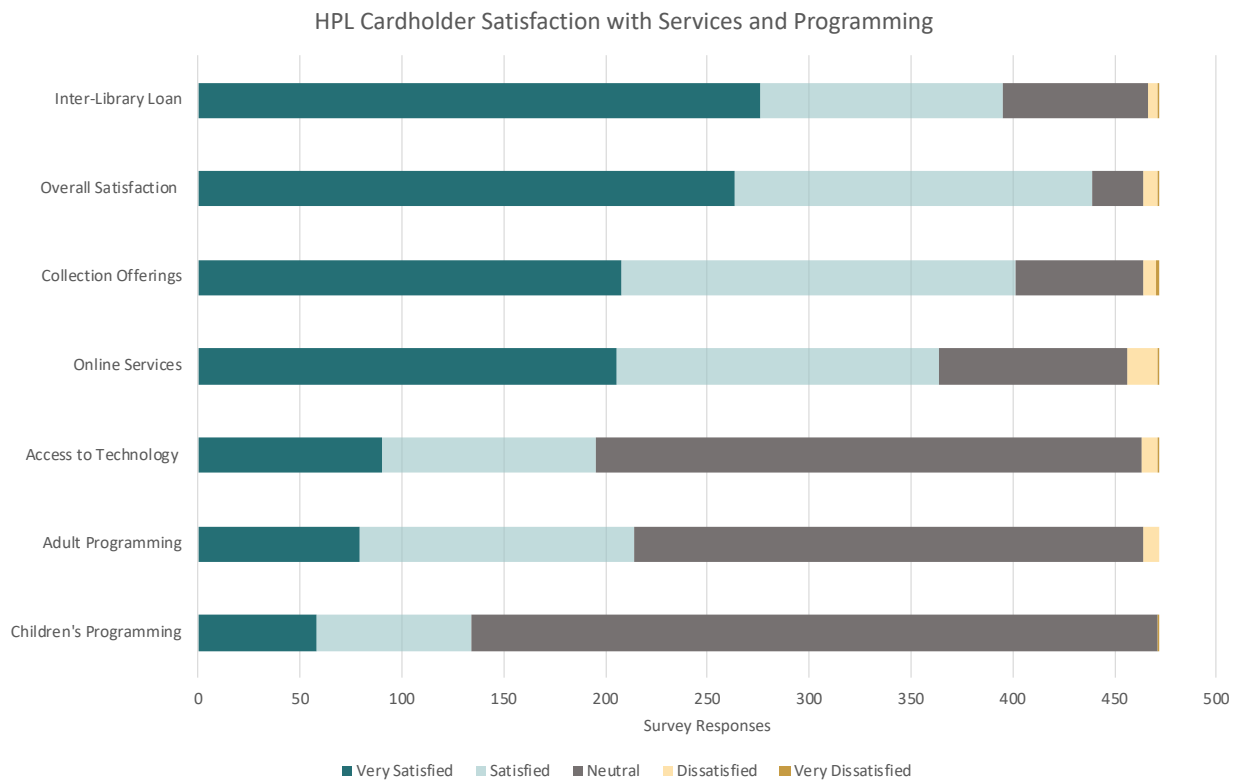
Importance was used as the metric for measuring how cardholders prioritize individual library services. Overall, 97% of respondents indicated that the library is a Very Important/Important asset to the Hoboken community, and they believe that core services like Borrowing Materials and Inter-Library Loans should remain at the forefront of the library's priorities. Research Assistance from Librarians, Delivery Services, and Technology Access were ranked as least important.



*Figure 6: Importance of individual HPL services and programs to cardholders based on email survey responses.*

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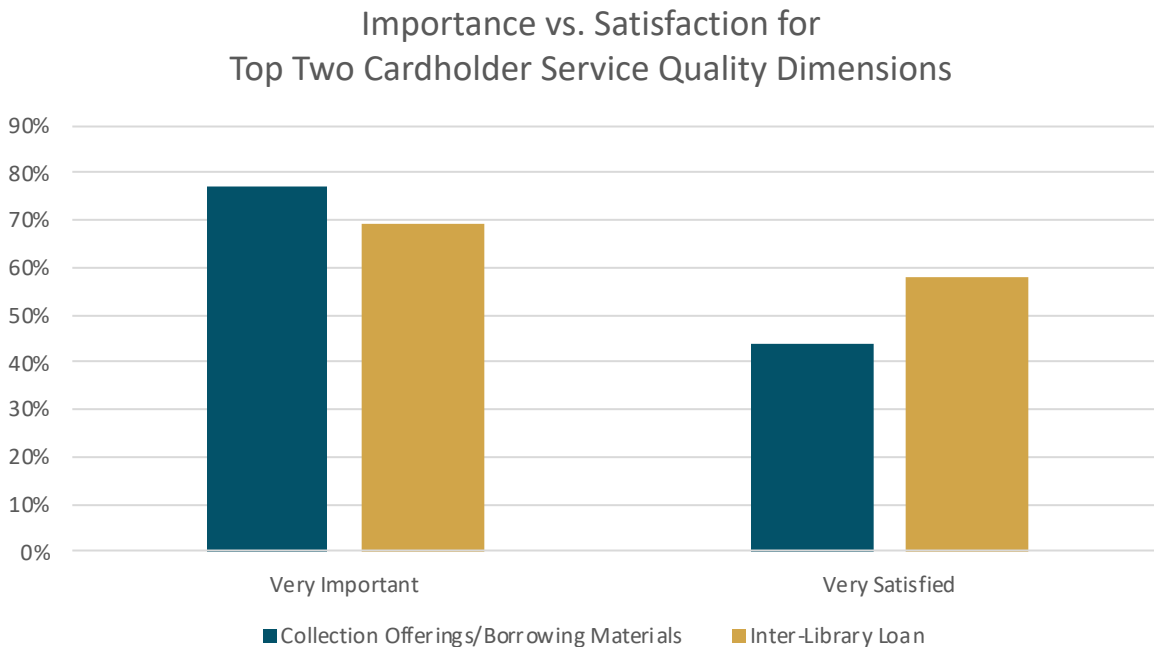
Satisfaction was used as the metric for gauging how well cardholders believe the library is performing. For brevity, a number of the priority dimensions were omitted in the performance section (e.g., Research Assistance from Librarians, Delivery Services). In future iterations of this work, maintaining a one-to-one connection between priority and performance measures would assist with data analysis. A summary of responses shown in the figure below indicate that cardholders are largely satisfied with the library's existing services and programming.



*Figure 7: HPL cardholder satisfaction with individual services and programs based on email survey responses.*

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About 77% of respondents listed borrowing materials as Very Important and 69% had a similar response for the importance of Inter-Library Loans. Along these two dimensions, respondents were Very Satisfied 58% and 44% of the time respectively. The figure below provides a summary of these metrics.



*Figure 8: Importance and satisfaction ratings for “Collection/Borrowing Materials” and “Inter-Library Loan”.*

While the percentage of respondents who answered Very Satisfied for these two library services hovered close to the 50% mark, in both cases the cumulative satisfaction ratings (i.e., Very Satisfied + Satisfied) were above 80%. In general, dissatisfaction counts were low across all dimensions (< 5%). However, when survey respondents were asked what changes they would like to see at HPL in order to make the library’s work more impactful, almost 61% of respondents said they would like to see additional circulation offerings, including more books,

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eBooks, movies, and music. These numbers suggest that there may be room for growth and improvement in current borrowing and loaning practices.

Approximately 36% of survey respondents provided feedback in the form of open-ended comments. Thematic analysis of these comments indicated that the library’s collection and programming were the two most frequently mentioned concepts. Sample comments along with each theme can be found below.

Theme	Number of Comments	Sample Comment
<b>Collection</b>	52	<i>“Additional inter library loans and wider circulation and access to books”</i>
<b>Programming</b>	31	<i>“More adult programming that includes technical skill building. There are MANY teen coding classes and groups but NOTHING for adults. Adults get coloring book classes. Teens get coding. Adults wishing to change careers are left high and dry.”</i>
<b>Logistics</b>	26	<i>“Make less current nonfiction books more easily available, have to climb up a rickety set of stairs.”</i>
<b>Space</b>	16	<i>“There is no uptown branch which would be helpful. Even the pop-up location was downtown.”</i>
<b>Technology</b>	10	<i>“Update the website :)”</i>
<b>School</b>	5	<i>“Stronger partnership with Hoboken Public School reading suggestions/leveling/curriculum”</i>
<b>Research</b>	4	<i>“I really would like access to research data based [sic]- pro quest, science direct etc”</i>

Table 5: Frequency table demonstrating how often individual themes were mentioned in the open-ended survey comment section.



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Of the 21% of open-ended survey comments that mentioned borrowing materials and ILL offerings, 51% included a reference to expanding either the eBook or audio book collections:

*“In addition to more space, I wish the library had a more comprehensive catalog of books at the library. The offers[sic] are pretty sparse and I highly rely on BCCLS (the inter-library loan system). BCCLS is great though”*

*“Better access to new book release [sic]. Not enough copies in stock.”*

*“I wish the library had more space and were able to house more books and dvds and games to borrow. Their dvd and book collection is a lot smaller than many other libraries in small towns”*

### **Finding 3: Cardholders and the HPL team recognize the library’s collection and staff as two of its greatest mechanisms for providing value to the Hoboken community.**

Interview and survey data suggest that both cardholders and the HPL team recognize the importance of maintaining and growing the library’s collection. The highlighted cells in the table below indicate survey and interview dimensions that met the 50% threshold for agreement between cardholders and the HPL team.

How important are the following to you?	Very Important	Important	Neutral	Unimportant	Very Unimportant	HPL Staff Mentions
Borrowing Materials	77%	18%	4%	0%	1%	4
Inter-Library Loan	69%	18%	11%	1%	1%	4
Physical Library Space	22%	27%	33%	11%	6%	6
Access to Library Staff During Visit	21%	47%	23%	7%	1%	3
Programming	21%	30%	37%	8%	4%	3
Technology Access	16%	25%	38%	14%	7%	3
Research Assistance from Librarians	11%	28%	39%	17%	5%	3
Delivery Services	11%	18%	51%	13%	7%	2

*Table 6: Dimensions that met 50% threshold for mentions by the HPL team and cardholders.*

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Four of six HPL team members explicitly referenced HPL's collection as a strength and an area for continued focus. As referenced in Finding 2, 77% of cardholders indicated that borrowing materials is a very important service and 69% felt similarly about Inter-Library Loan offerings. Additionally, when asked what expanded services or offerings would be the most impactful to the community, 61% of respondents indicated that they would like increased circulation offerings.

Cardholders also recognized the value that the HPL staff provide to the library's offerings. Over 68% of survey respondents indicated that having access to a library staff member is important to them when using the library. This emphasis on the importance of connection with the library staff matched the sentiments and enthusiasm that individuals from the HPL team expressed when talking about their roles. One staff member made a point of noting that individuals who work in libraries do so because they love people. Another mentioned that while HPL certainly has a strong collection to boast as a strength, HPL also has what other libraries claim to have but usually don't - a dedicated professional staff.

While physical space was the most important theme identified by the HPL staff, it did not resonate as strongly with cardholders. When asked about impactful additions to the library, only 16% of respondents selected more space as their choice. It is important to note that in the survey the description used with "more space" only included satellite locations throughout Hoboken and more space at the main branch. Since expanding the library's physical collection would also require growth in physical space, this should also have been included in order to provide cardholders with a more complete representation of HPL's space constraints.

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Access to Technology and Delivery Services were mentioned by one half and one third of the library staff respectively but were ranked lowest in importance by the cardholder community. While these offerings were identified as potential opportunities for growth by the library team, the relatively low importance ranking by cardholders suggests a discrepancy in terms of how they should be prioritized. However, a limitation in the survey design could also have impacted these results.

Technology access was largely explained in terms of basic materials (e.g., printers, copiers, internet access) when it should have also incorporated newer technology initiatives like tablet rentals or the library's maker space. Additionally, HPL staff noted that "Delivery Services" may have been confusing because they could have referred to individual item delivery or bulk delivery through the Inter-Library Loan program. As a result, future iterations of this work should incorporate more thorough explanations for these two offerings.

### **Finding 4: Survey responses indicate that the newsletter and website are the library's most impactful means of communicating with cardholders.**

A key concern of the HPL team was whether they are appropriately communicating the work that they are doing to the community. A number of interviewees mentioned the need to better educate the cardholder community on the library's offerings. They suggested that cardholders may not recognize the value of the library – What do I need the library for if I have the internet?

An important component of this study was helping the HPL team identify which of their existing marketing strategies may be most impactful for communicating with cardholders. Survey submissions clearly indicated the majority of respondents rely on the HPL newsletter

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(67.6%) and website (47%) for their information. While an additional 23% of respondents included social media in their responses, only 6% are relying strictly on social media for their news or updates. These responses suggest that the HPL website and newsletter are the library's most impactful forms of marketing communication.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Results of this study indicate that cardholders recognize HPL as a high priority and high-performance resource for the community. However, responses to the electronic survey indicate that there are still opportunities for service quality growth that the HPL staff can capitalize on. The following recommendations incorporate these lessons-learned and are informed by a thorough review of the literature.

#### **Recommendation 1: Implement a series of continuous quality improvement practices to maximize service quality to HPL's cardholder community.**

Going forward, the library should build on the insights gleaned from this study by adopting a series of continuous quality improvement practices. Larson (1998) defines continuous quality improvement as, "a system for gathering all of the data related to a process, analyzing it, and developing solutions based on customers' requirements." The benefit of this approach is its focus on scale. Rather than obtaining surface-level information about all of Hoboken Public Library's programs and offerings, continuous quality improvement efforts allow the library staff to take ownership of identifying detailed strengths and areas of growth for individual processes.

The first step for HPL will be identifying a set of discrete processes for this ongoing evaluation. According to Chang (1992), a process is "any sequence of value-added tasks that are linked together to create a specific product or service output." Examples of processes that were used as part of this study might include borrowing materials and registering for children's programming. Once a set of processes has been identified, staff should be assigned ownership to one or more based on their roles within the library.

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Researchers from the Office of Planning, Training, and Institutional Research (OPTIR) at Villanova University developed a series of continuous improvement methods that HPL staff can use as a model for enhancing process-specific service quality for patrons (Stein et al, 2008). While OPTIR's work ultimately identified nine evaluative techniques, they recommend that libraries adopt only those that are most beneficial to their competencies and budgets. With this in mind, HPL should focus on developing the following five methods:

Method	Description
<b>Quality Walks</b>	A visual experience in which staff “walk” through the steps of a process as if they are the end-users. It is helpful for staff to work together so that not only those intimately familiar with a process have an opportunity to provide feedback. Quality walks can help identify recommendations that may have been overlooked during the initial process design.
<b>Focus Groups</b>	These sessions can provide staff with an opportunity to hear directly from end-users. They can be used to obtain feedback and recommendations for existing processes or to brainstorm the creation of new processes.
<b>Patron Surveys</b>	An opportunity to obtain larger-scale user feedback on individual processes. Should be coordinated across staff members to ensure that cardholders are not over-burdened with requests for information.
<b>Transactional Data</b>	Information the library is already collecting and maintaining. Can include number of items in circulation, number of new/renewed cards issues, number of participants at events. These metrics may be helpful for evaluating a process' progress over time.
<b>Suggestions from Staff</b>	Staff can and should share information throughout their continuous improvement work. This can happen informally as well as formally and may serve as an opportunity for comparing best practices.

*Table 7: Five suggested methods for developing a series of continuous quality improvement practices within HPL.*

These methods are intended to occur continuously and mimic the overall structure of a Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) Cycle which serve as the basis for general process improvement projects (Larson, 1998). In this sequence, library staff will take lessons-learned from their

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evaluation work to make small improvements to their respective processes. Once implemented, they will then begin another cycle of evaluation. This framework will help the library staff feel more connected to their respective processes and the cardholders who interact with them. Additionally, the inherent flexibility of this framework provides staff with autonomy for identifying best practices for their respective cardholder segments. It encourages them to experiment during each iteration of their cycle and can ultimately be a nice opportunity for sharing best practices.

### **Recommendation 2: Conduct a needs assessment of eBook and audio book users.**

Open-ended survey responses indicated that cardholders would like to see expanded eBook and audio book offerings. Since HPL currently has an extensive catalog for these resources, additional feedback from patrons would help inform whether cardholders feel that existing offerings are insufficient or whether they are unaware of the resources that are available to them. According to a 2015 Survey of eBook usage in Public Libraries (Romano, Girmscheid, & Genco, 2015), the number two barrier to eReading was patrons' lack of awareness of eBook resources. Additional complaints about eBooks included a lack of availability, either the library didn't carry the eBook or the wait time was too long. By conducting a needs assessment of individuals who currently utilize HPL's eBook and audio book resources, the HPL staff can better understand whether their efforts should focus on expanding their collection or educating cardholders.

The first step will be to identify eBook and audio book "power users" based on metrics available in HPL's database. Power users have previously been described in public library settings as individuals who use the full range of services that a library has to offer (Dempsey,

2005). However, in this instance power users would refer to individuals who extensively use HPL's eBook and audio book offerings. Once these individuals have been identified, the HPL team should begin their needs assessment with an electronic survey to this population. A survey will allow the team to collect feedback from a large population of cardholders at once to identify any trends in power user preferences.

The majority of existing surveys for eBook and audio book users found in the literature have been developed for academic library settings. While these may be helpful as a guide, the HPL team should create a survey that is tailored to their users. For example, academic libraries accommodate patrons that typically fall within a specific age range whereas public libraries work with patrons of all ages. Therefore, HPL's survey should include questions that segment eBook and audio book users by age range. This specificity can ultimately help the library to identify solutions that can be tailored to discrete cardholder populations.

### **Recommendation 3: Create segmented newsletters to increase engagement and educate cardholders.**

Market segmentation, an idea first introduced by Smith (1956), is the process of splitting customers, or potential customers, in a market into different groups or segments. Segmenting an audience allows an organization to tailor their outreach strategy to the specific needs and wants of a target population. This practice can be particularly powerful in email marketing to help cut through the noise and sheer volume of messages that individuals are inundated with on a daily basis. Segmenting an email-marketing list can help an organization get better click rates and overall results because the recipients will find the campaigns more relevant (MailChimp, 2017).



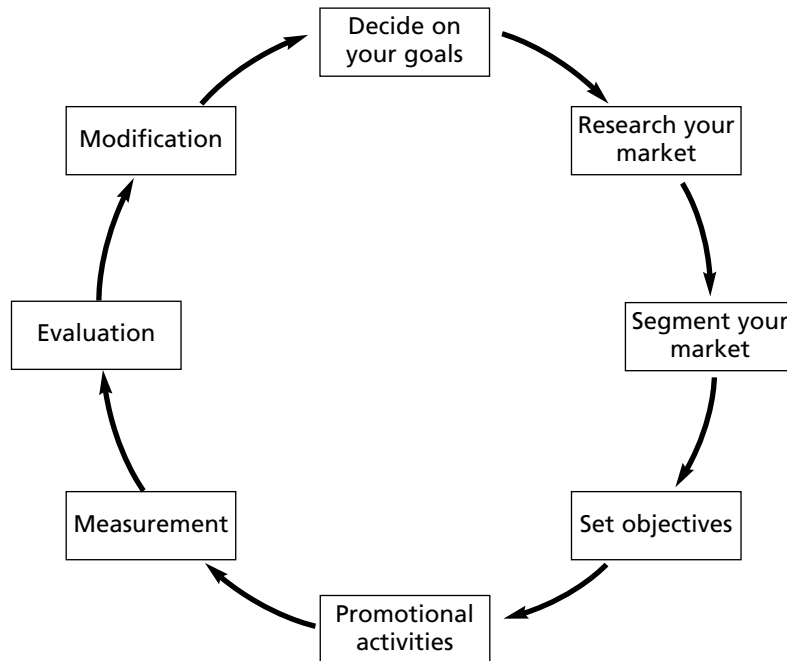
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HPL recently conducted a segmentation analysis of the Hoboken community. They created a library usage profile of their existing and potential patrons to segment cardholders based on their specific needs and wants. Through this process, they arrived at three main market segments:

1. Urban Edge: younger, up-and-coming singles living big city lifestyles located within top metropolitan statistical areas (MSA) markets – 41% of the population
2. Jet Set Urbanites: Affluent singles and couples living high-rise fashionable lives; city-style – 27% of the population
3. Striving Single Scene – Young, singles living in midwest and southern city centers – 3.5% of the population

Using these segments as a guide, the HPL team can develop a high-level overview of the information and programming needs that each population might have. The goal of segmenting the newsletter emails will be to educate target populations about offerings that align with their interests. For example, the Striving Singles demographic would likely be more interested in lifestyle classes (e.g., “How to Hang Art in Your Home”) versus programming designed for children and teens.

By segmenting their newsletter populations, research suggests that HPL can improve their median click rates by up to 2% (DeAnna, 2017). Potter (2012) stresses the importance of building segmentation into a library’s marketing habits so that it ultimately becomes part of a naturally repeating cycle. Potter’s cycle, shown below, also includes an emphasis on measurement and evaluation which tie into Recommendations 1 and 2.



*Figure 9: Potter's (2012) marketing cycle as a conceptual tool for strategically marketing a public library's offerings.*

**Recommendation 4: Critically examine the existing website and engage with cardholders to identify areas for improvement.**

In addition to the newsletter, survey respondents indicated that the library website is a crucial determinant of if and how they interact with the library. Nielsen and Loranger (2006) suggest that websites have as little as 25-35 seconds to convince users that the information they are looking for is available. A nationwide study of US academic and public libraries by Chow, Bridges, and Commander (2014), stress the importance of incorporating tenets of user centered design (UCD) into the build and maintenance of library websites.

Manzari and Trinidad-Christensen (2006) suggest using a heuristic evaluation methodology for evaluating the usability of an existing library website and identifying problems or areas for improvement. In particular, Jakob Nielsen's usability heuristics are a widely

recognized set of ten principles that can guide a review of the website’s usability (Nielsen, 1993). The principles and a brief description can be found below with a more detailed description in Appendix D.

<b>Visibility of system status</b>	Designs should keep users informed about what is going on
<b>Match between System and the Real World</b>	Use words, phrases, and concepts familiar to the user, rather than internal jargon
<b>User control and freedom</b>	Users often perform actions by mistake. They need a clearly marked “emergency exit”
<b>Consistency and Standards</b>	Users should not have to wonder whether different words, situations or actions mean the same thing
<b>Error Prevention</b>	The best designs carefully prevent problems from occurring in the first place
<b>Recognition rather than recall</b>	Minimize the user’s memory load by making elements, actions, and options visible
<b>Flexibility and efficiency of use</b>	Shortcuts – hidden from novice users – may speed up the interaction for the expert user
<b>Aesthetic and minimalist design</b>	Interfaces should not contain information which is irrelevant
<b>Help users recognize, diagnose, and recover from errors</b>	Error messages should be expressed in plain language, precisely indicate the problem, and constructively suggest a solution
<b>Help and documentation</b>	It may be necessary to provide documentation to help users complete their tasks.

*Table 8: Summary and description of Nielsen’s ten usability heuristics (Nielsen, 1993).*

While administrators at academic libraries have expressed frustrations that prospective users are unaware that the library’s website exists, luckily this is not a problem for HPL. Users have indicated that the website is an important resource for them. In the future, work should focus on making changes that keep users at the center of the design. Evaluation of the existing website along these principles should include individuals who are not intimately familiar with the existing website hierarchy and design.

### LIMITATIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic created a number of hurdles for this study. First, the timeline for data collection was delayed by HPL's temporary closure of the main branch in late spring 2020. Interviews with the HPL team were simultaneously postponed while the library made adjustments for operating in a virtual environment. As a result of these delays, conversations with HPL's community partners became too difficult to arrange prior to the survey deployment. Additionally, ongoing social distancing restrictions prevented the researcher and HPL team from utilizing in-person library gatherings as an opportunity to promote the cardholder survey. These delays in the initial phases of the study caused the cardholder survey to be deployed later than intended and may have ultimately impacted its efficacy. This limitation may have been particularly detrimental for soliciting feedback regarding children's offerings.

Survey analysis revealed that only 27.4% of respondents indicated they utilized the library for children's material and/or programming. Conversations with the library team during their interviews indicated that the children's library is one of the more popular aspects of the library. As a result, this percentage likely does not indicate disinterest or a general lack of need for these services. Rather, it may be a result of the study design and the timing that the survey was deployed.

This study intentionally targeted cardholders 18+ in HPL's CRM system in order to avoid complications regarding surveying minors. As a result, it excluded all individuals in 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade who hold Young Adult Library cards; the population most likely to directly utilize children's and teen's offerings. In addition to the impacts of this design choice, the timing of the survey deployment also likely played a role in limiting responses from children's library users. Due to the aforementioned timing constraints, the survey was delayed and ultimately sent to

## COMMUNICATING SUCCESS IN AN URBAN PUBLIC LIBRARY

cardholders during the first week of the fall 2020 school year. Because of the additional challenges that many families faced this year with regard to hybrid learning, it was likely an inopportune time to request cardholder feedback.

While timing may have played a role in the lack of feedback from parents regarding children's library usage, the pandemic and general email fatigue likely played a larger role in the survey's low response rate. Survey respondents in this study account for only 4% of the total cardholder population. While this is on par with response rates for non-profits, it is still an important context to keep in mind when reviewing responses. In the future, HPL should consider extending the window that their electronic surveys are open. This might help combat issues related to timing by giving respondents additional opportunities and reminders to provide input. HPL might also discuss providing cardholders with an incentive for completing the survey.

### CONCLUSION

The findings uncovered through the course of this study indicate that the HPL team and the cardholder community have similar perceptions of the library's value. They agree on many of the offerings that are currently prioritized, and overall, the cardholder community is satisfied with the service quality that the library provides. The results of the cardholder survey contain important insight into the value that library users continue to place on the library's physical collection and its Inter-Library Loan capacities. The success of these two offerings is inherently linked to physical space at the library. As the library looks to operationalize their Capital Master Plan, they should seek to leverage cardholders' demonstrated desire for increased collection offerings as a mechanism for fundraising towards their physical growth.

The HPL team already does a great job of emphasizing their desire to learn from and grow with their patrons. The library's most recent annual report describes their role as, "working with – and for – the community." A number of the findings identified in this report mirror objectives that are already featured in their current strategic plan. Hopefully the recommendations described above provide a series of actionable next steps that can help the HPL team continue their mission of connecting people with opportunities to support lifelong learning, personal growth, and community development.

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### APPENDIX A

#### *Hoboken Public Library: Interview Questions*

Opening Note: I recognize that your answers throughout this process might need to be segmented into pre-pandemic and mid- or post-pandemic. With that in mind, feel free to provide your thoughts for either timeframe. If the pandemic has influenced how you think about any of your offerings, I'd love to hear that as well.

- Can you talk me through your role again and how long you've been with HPL?
  - How has your role evolved?
- Based on your role at the library and your experience, what would you say are some of HPL's most successful offerings?
  - While you're describing your answer could you also talk me through how you're defining success?
- I've had a chance to read through HPL's first strategic plan from 2010-2015 as well as the current iteration of the plan. Were you involved in the creation of either plan?
- How do you think progress has been on the current plan?
- Are there areas that might be going better than others?
- With the strategic plan in mind, or just in general, are there services or offerings that jump to mind where you might see room for improvement for the library?
- Going forward, are there any changes that you would like to see the library make?
  - Another way of framing that might be, are there any opportunities that you see and think "oh yea we could fill that gap" or "we can own that territory" in town?

APPENDIX B: CARDHOLDER SURVEY QUESTIONS

# Hoboken Public Library (HPL) User Satisfaction Survey

Dear Hoboken Public Library Cardholder,

Thank you for your interest in providing feedback to the library!

My name is Kaitlin Osborne and I am a student in Vanderbilt University's Peabody College doctor of education (E.d.D.) program in Leadership and Learning in Organizations. I am asking you to take part in a quality improvement study being completed as part of my program's capstone requirement. My work is being conducted in collaboration with \_\_\_\_\_ Director of Hoboken Public Library, and various members of the HPL team. Your involvement will entail participating in a user satisfaction survey. Participation is optional, but your responses will help inform recommendations for future services and offerings at HPL.

The survey is anonymous and will take approximately 5 minutes to complete. It contains three sections and includes multiple choice questions as well as one open-ended question. At the end of each section, you will be prompted to select "Next" to be brought to the following page.

If you have any questions, please contact Kaitlin Osborne at [Kaitlin.Donohue@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:Kaitlin.Donohue@vanderbilt.edu). If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant, you can call the Vanderbilt Institutional Review Board at (615) 322-2918.

\* Required

## Library Use:

Please answer the following questions based on your visit and usage routines Pre-Covid.

1. Do you share a library card with anyone e.g., family member, roommate? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

No

Yes

2. Do you use your library card to access children's materials and/or programming? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

3. On average, how often do you visit the library? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Daily

Weekly

Monthly

Less than once per month

Never

4. On average, how often do you use the library's services or resources (e.g., ILL requests, downloading/streaming services) remotely? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Daily

Weekly

Monthly

Less than once per month

Never

5. How satisfied are you with each of the following library services? \*

Mark only one oval per row.

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
Collection (books, DVDs, music, newspapers etc)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children's Programming (story time)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adult Programming and Experiential Learning (cooking classes, culture club)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Online Services (website, catalog, research databases)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Inter-Library Loan (ILL)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Access to Technology (computers, printers, internet)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall, how satisfied are you with the library?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. How important are each of the following library services to you? \*

Mark only one oval per row.

	Very Important	Important	Neutral	Unimportant	Very Unimportant
Research Assistance from Librarians?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Borrowing Materials (books, DVDs, music)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Technology Access (computers, printers, internet)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Inter-Library Loan (ILL)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Programming (courses, experiential learning, story time)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Delivery Services (bookmobile)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Physical Library Space (meeting rooms, study space, maker space)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall, how important is the library to you?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. When using the library either in-person or remotely, how important is it for you to have access to a library staff member? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Very important
- Important
- Neutral
- Unimportant
- Very Unimportant

8. As HPL strives to continue meeting the needs of its patrons, which of the following additions would be most impactful for your use of the library? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- More space (e.g., satellite locations throughout Hoboken or more space at the main branch)
- Additional circulation offerings (e.g., more books, movies, and music)
- More in-person programming
- More remote/virtual programming

9. Are there any other resources/services that you wish the library could improve or develop?

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10. How do you typically find out about library news and updates? Check all that apply:

\*

*Check all that apply.*

- Library website
- Social media
- Library newsletter
- Signs around town
- Library staff

Other:  \_\_\_\_\_

**Background  
Information**

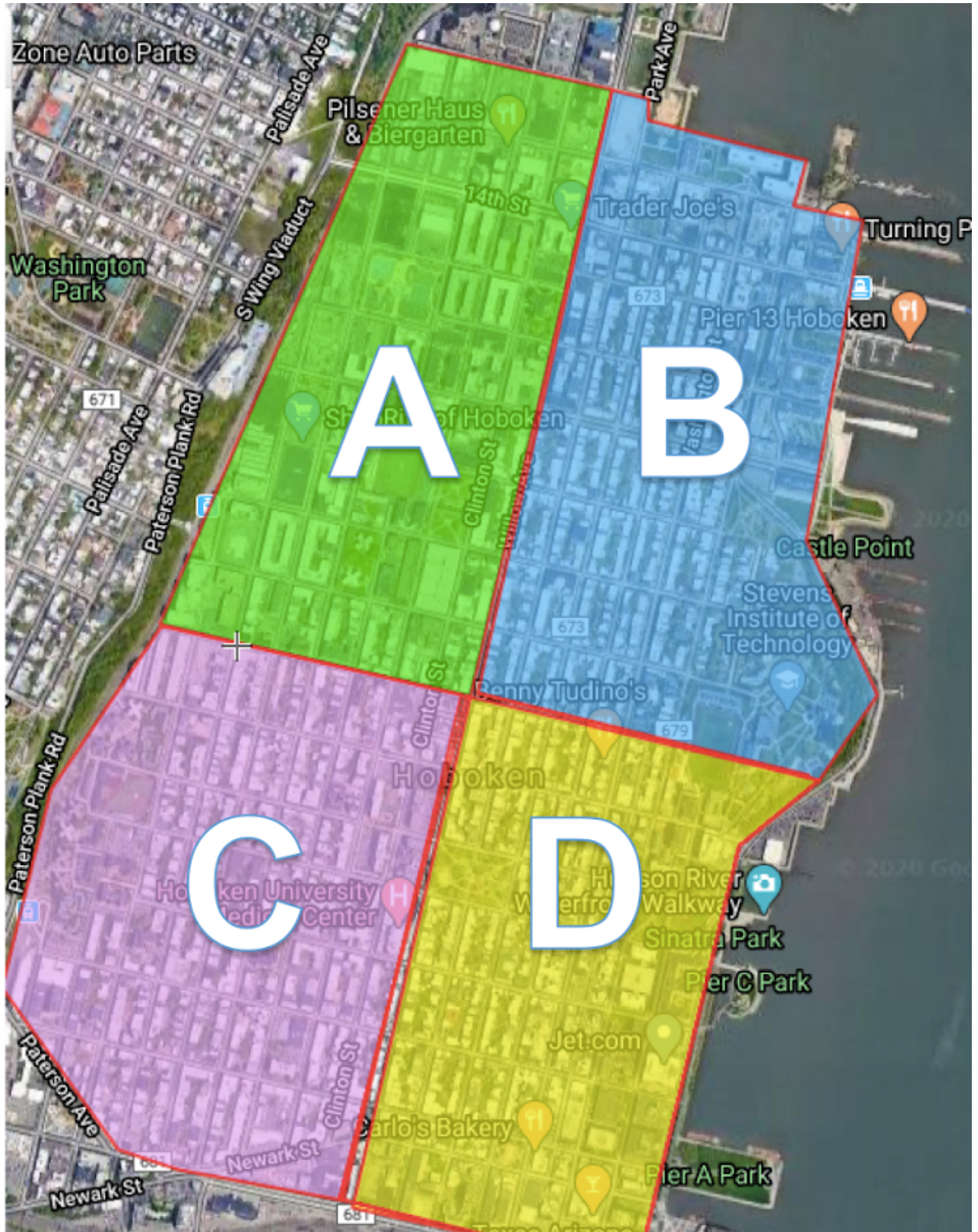
The following questions are not required but will help us to develop profiles of user groups throughout Hoboken. Your answers will be greatly appreciated!

11. How old are you?

*Mark only one oval.*

- 19-44
- 44-64
- 65+

12. Using the map below, which section of town do you live in?



Mark only one oval.

- Section A
- Section B
- Section C

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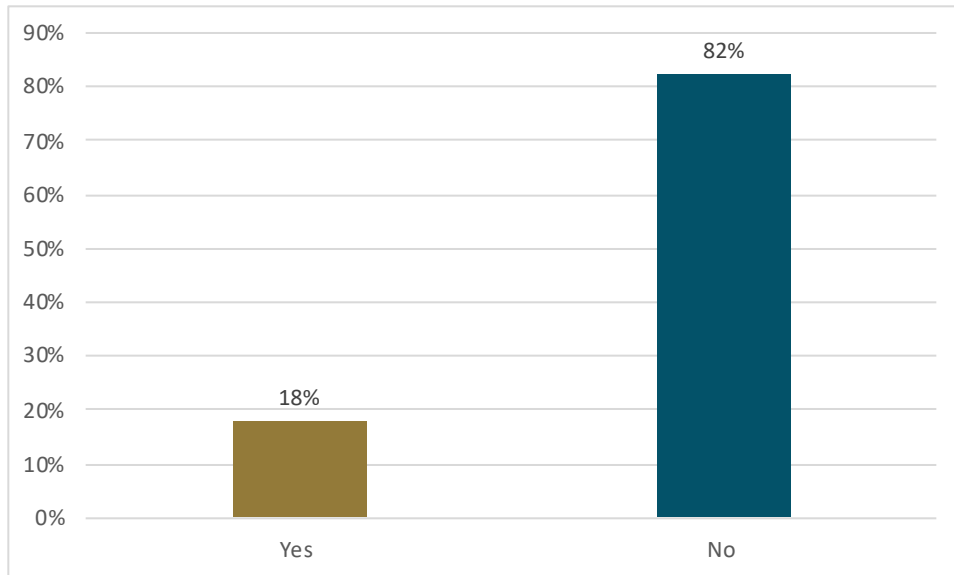
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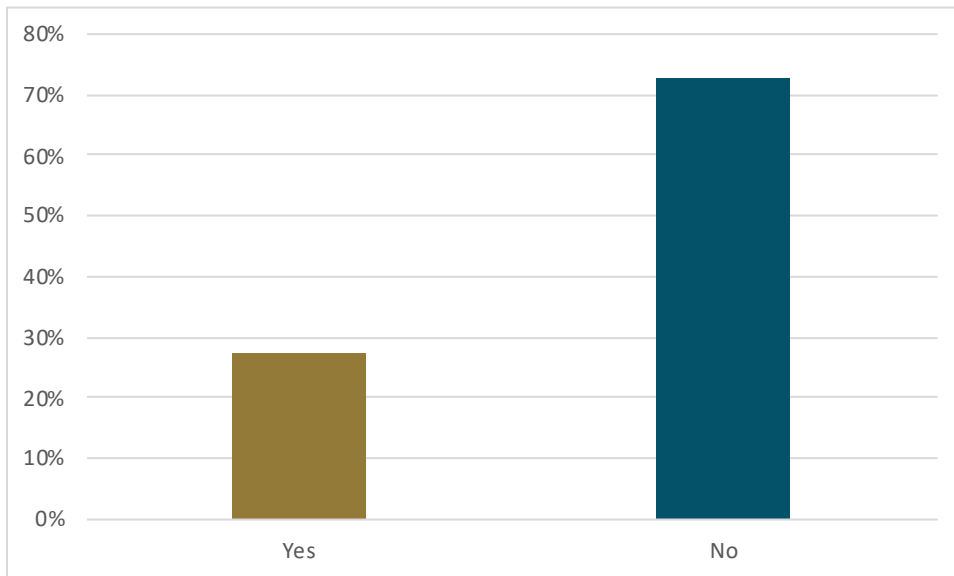
**APPENDIX C**

*Cardholder Survey Results*

1. Do you share a library card with anyone (e.g., family member, roommate)

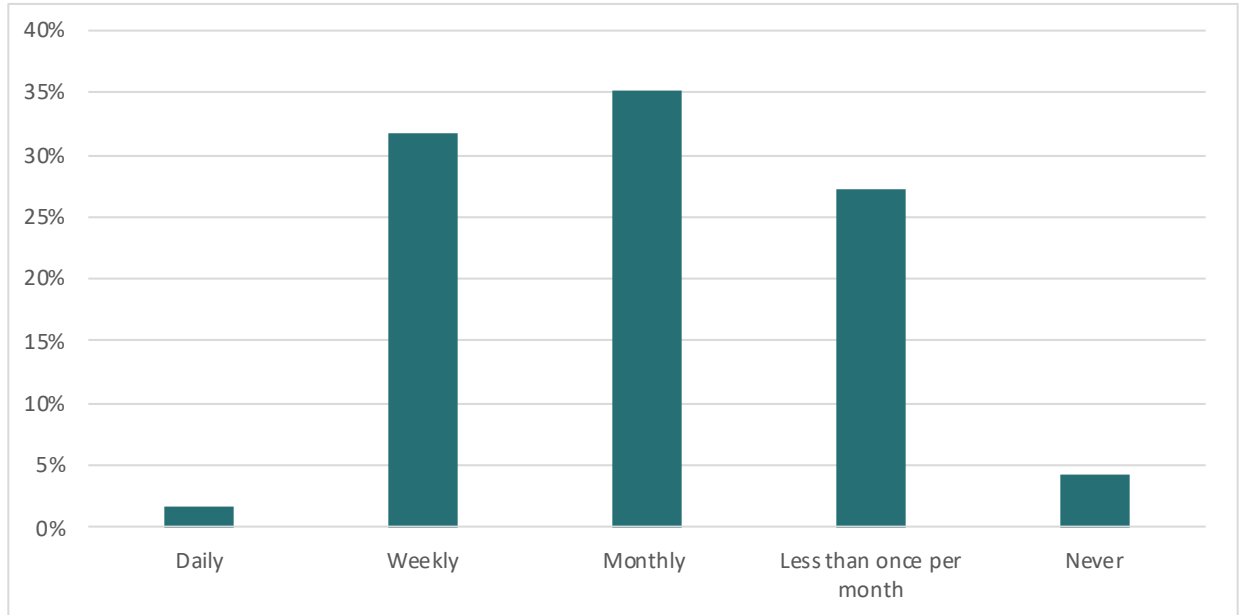


2. Do you use your library card to access children’s materials and/or programming?

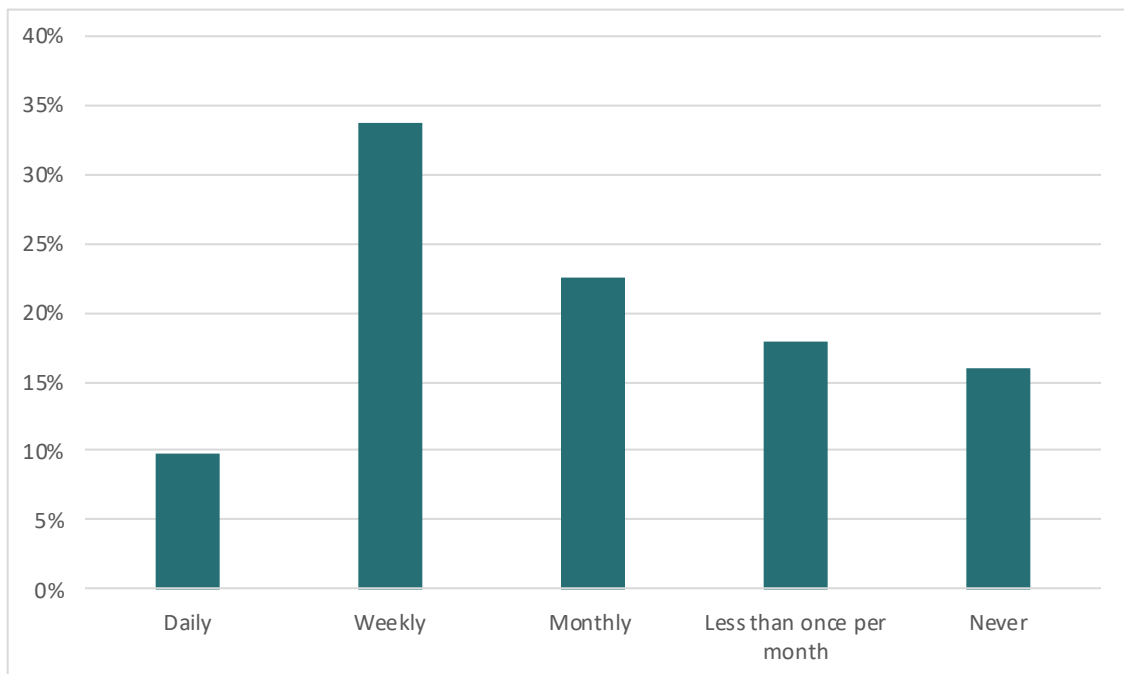


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### 3. On average, how often do you visit the library?

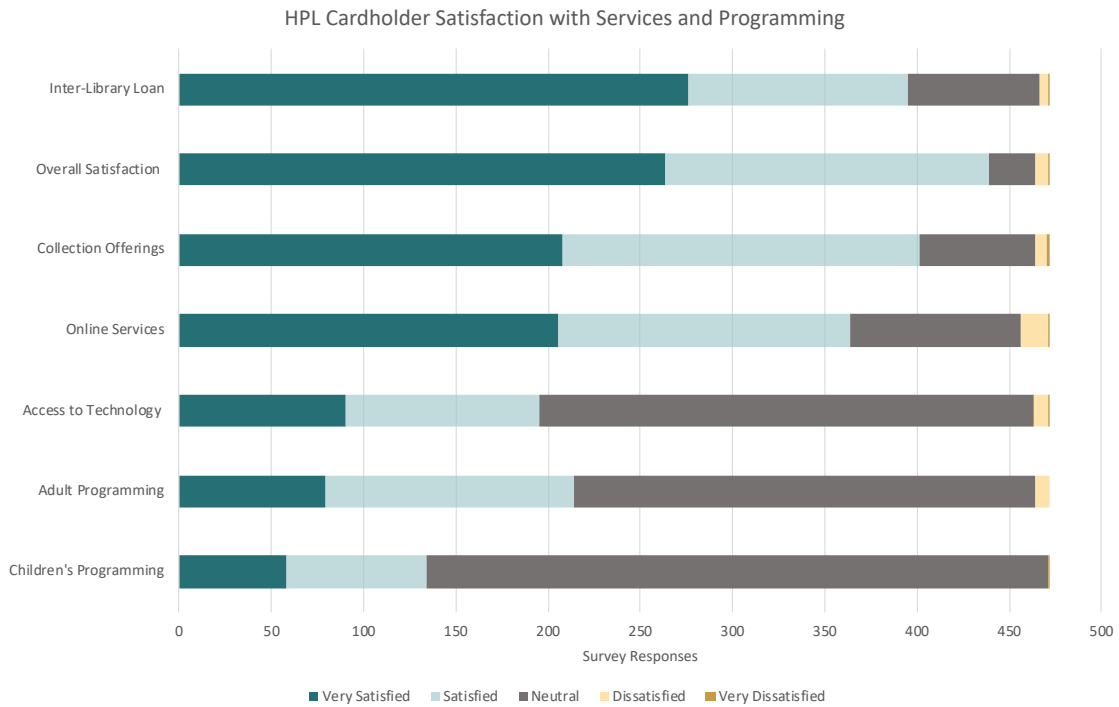


### 4. On average, how often do you use the library's services or resources (e.g., ILL requests, downloading/streaming services) remotely?

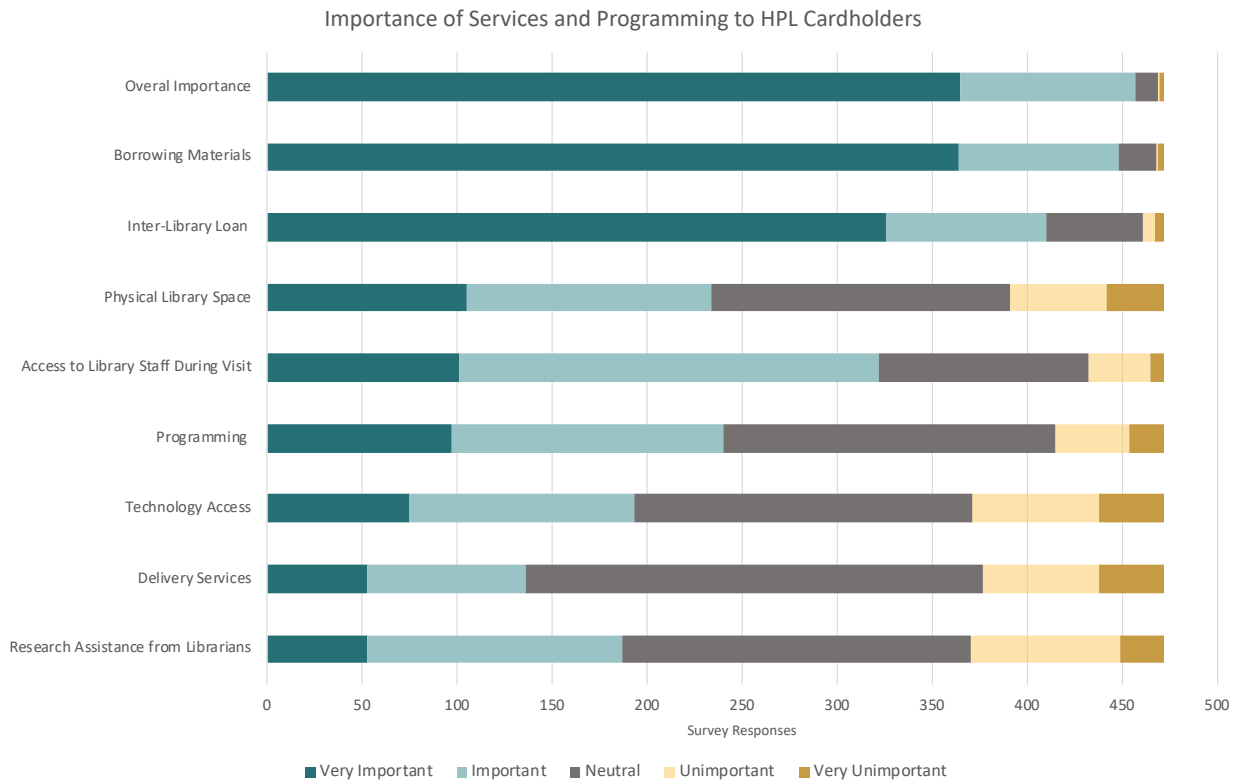


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## 5. How satisfied are you with each of the following library services?

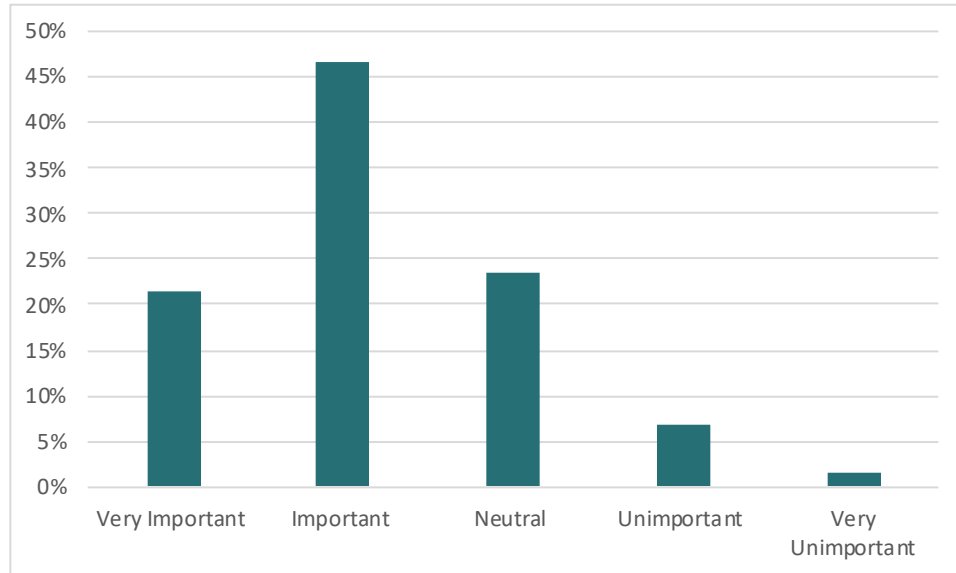


## 6. How important are each of the following library services to you?

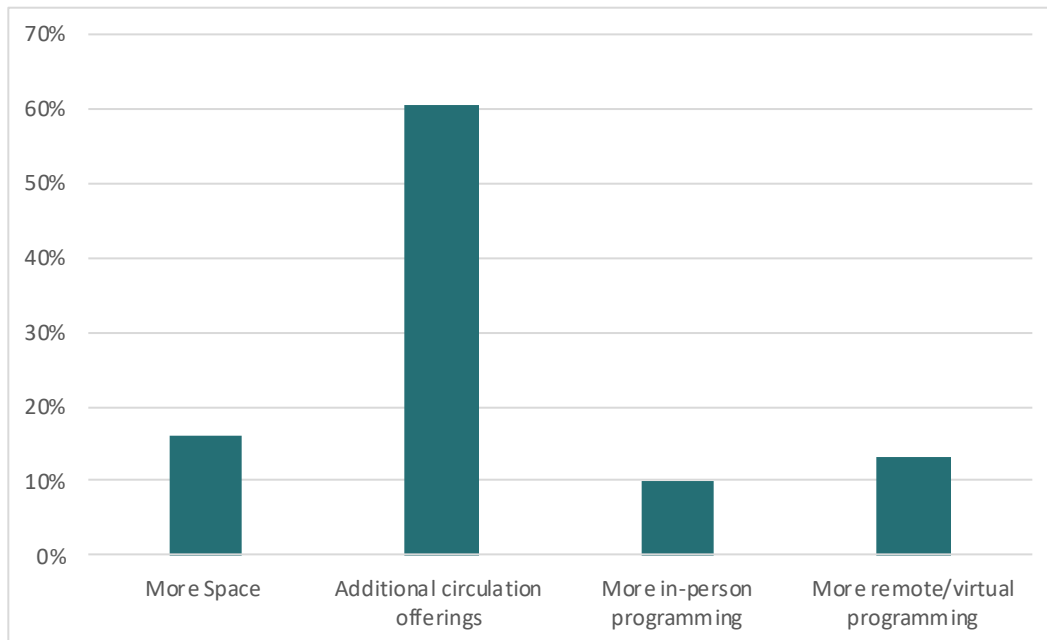


## COMMUNICATING SUCCESS IN AN URBAN PUBLIC LIBRARY

7. When using the library either in-person or remotely, how important is it for you to have access to a library staff member?



8. As HPL strives to continue meeting the needs of its patrons, which on the following additions would be most impactful for your use of the library?



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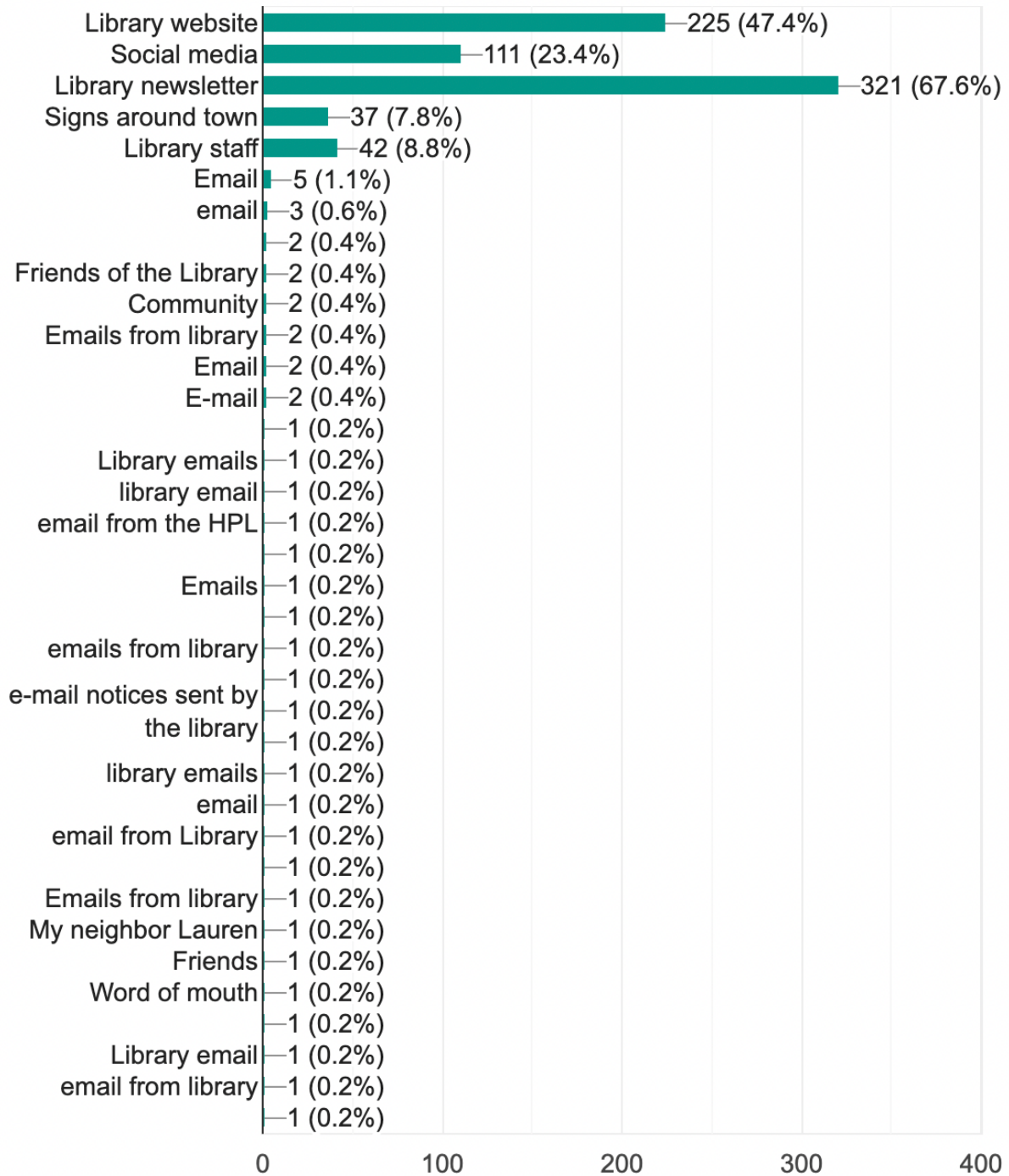
9. Are there any other resources that you wish the library could improve or develop?

Theme	Number of Comments	Sample Comment
<b>Collection</b>	52	<i>Additional inter library loans and wider circulation and access to books</i>
<b>Programming</b>	31	<i>More adult programming that includes technical skill building. There are MANY teen coding classes and groups but NOTHING for adults. Adults get coloring book classes. Teens get coding. Adults wishing to change careers are left high and dry.</i>
<b>Logistics</b>	26	<i>Make less current nonfiction books more easily available, have to climb up a rickety set of stairs.</i>
<b>Space</b>	16	<i>There is no uptown branch which would be helpful. Even the pop-up location was downtown.</i>
<b>Technology</b>	10	<i>Update the website :)</i>
<b>School</b>	5	<i>Stronger partnership with Hoboken Public School reading suggestions/leveling/curriculum</i>
<b>Research</b>	4	<i>I really would like access to research data based - pro quest, science direct etc</i>



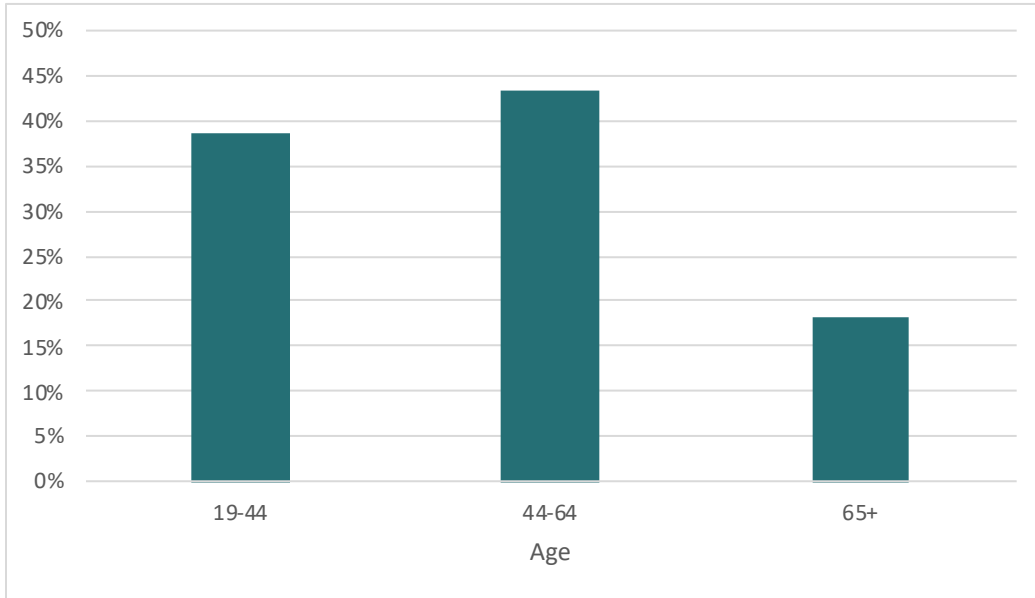
COMMUNICATING SUCCESS IN AN URBAN PUBLIC LIBRARY

10. How do you typically find out about library news and updates? Check all that apply:

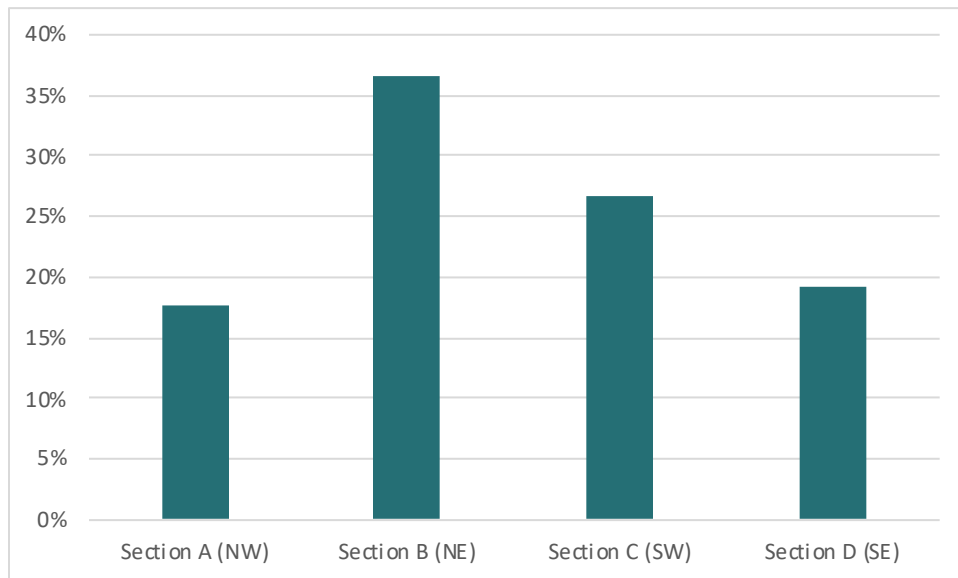


# COMMUNICATING SUCCESS IN AN URBAN PUBLIC LIBRARY

## 11. How old are you?



## 12. Using the map below, which section of town do you live in?



# Jakob's Ten Usability Heuristics

## 1 Visibility of System Status

Designs should *keep users informed* about what is going on, through appropriate, timely feedback.



Interactive mall maps have to show people where they currently are, to help them understand where to go next.

## 2 Match between System and the Real World

The design should speak the users' language. Use words, phrases, and concepts *familiar to the user*, rather than internal jargon.



Users can quickly understand which stovetop control maps to each heating element.

## 5 Error Prevention

Good error messages are important, but the best designs carefully *prevent problems* from occurring in the first place.



Guard rails on curvy mountain roads prevent drivers from falling off cliffs.

## 8 Aesthetic and Minimalist Design

Interfaces should not contain information which is irrelevant. Every extra unit of information in an interface *competes* with the relevant units of information.



A minimalist three-legged stool is still a place to sit.

## 3 User Control and Freedom

Users often perform actions by mistake. They need a clearly marked "emergency exit" to leave the unwanted action.



Just like physical spaces, digital spaces need quick "emergency" exits too.

## 6 Recognition Rather Than Recall

*Minimize the user's memory load* by making elements, actions, and options visible. Avoid making users remember information.



People are likely to correctly answer "Is Lisbon the capital of Portugal?".

## 9 Recognize, Diagnose, and Recover from Errors

Error messages should be expressed in plain language (no error codes), precisely indicate the problem, and constructively suggest a solution.



Wrong-way signs on the road remind drivers that they are heading in the wrong direction.

## 4 Consistency and Standards

Users should not have to wonder whether different words, situations, or actions mean the same thing. *Follow platform conventions.*



Check-in counters are usually located at the front of hotels, which meets expectations.

## 7 Flexibility and Efficiency of Use

Shortcuts — hidden from novice users — may *speed up the interaction* for the expert user.



Regular routes are listed on maps, but locals with more knowledge of the area can take shortcuts.

## 10 Help and Documentation

It's best if the design *doesn't need* any additional explanation. However, it may be necessary to provide documentation to help users complete their tasks.



Information kiosks at airports are easily recognizable and solve customers' problems in context and immediately.