St. Paul Public Library Youth Engagement Project

RECOMMENDATIONS

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Project Overview

Process

In the fall of 2021, St. Paul Public Library (SPPL) initiated a youth engagement project to hear from young people and gather their input on the renovation and future design of three libraries: Hamline Midway, Hayden Heights, and Riverview. SPPL hired the Youth Leadership Initiative (YLI) to design and manage a community engagement process. Together YLI and SPPL staff including Right Track interns co-designed the questions and co-facilitated focus groups lasting 1.5 hours. The size of each focus group was between 10-15 participants. Focus group participants expressed appreciation for the focus group process:

- Liked the set up
- Asked for ideas
- Feelings were heard
- Collaborating
- Not too much pressure to participate
- There was no wrong answer just people's opinions
- We got to share our opinions. Not forced.

The YLI team and SPPL staff together reviewed the data collected and engaged in meaning making of the data collected. Library staff identified youth participants and conducted 1:1 interviews with youth who could not attend the focus group. Forty-six youth were recruited and provided a $45 Visa gift card as an incentive for participating in this project. Snacks were also provided.

General Youth Experience

Teens are busy, however they do come to the library for books, to study and to hang out with friends. There are many things teens like about the library including book collection, comfortable places to sit, study areas, and staff. They appreciate having access to computers, the calming space, and volunteering opportunities. Teens have noticed that specific spaces designated for them are limited and libraries seem to cater to younger children. All of these libraries are older and have spaces that are not adequate to meet current and emerging needs. Below are program and services recommendations and important considerations for remodeling SPPL buildings from the perspective of young people.
Demographics of Youth Participants

**Zipcodes Represented**

- 55108: 2.8%
- 55102: 4.1%
- 55130: 6.2%
- 55117: 8.3%
- 55106: 14.5%
- 55119: 18.6%
- 56104: 18.6%
- 55107: 18.6%

**Schools Represented**

- Unknown: 2.1%
- Johnson High School: 4.3%
- Central High School: 4.3%
- Humboldt High School: 4.3%
- Highland Park Senior: 2.1%
- River's Edge Academy: 4.3%
- Twin Cities Academy: 19.1%
- Open World Learning: 44.7%
Grades Represented

- 12th Grade: 17.0%
- 11th Grade: 2.1%
- 10th Grade: 34.0%
- 9th Grade: 19.1%
- 8th Grade: 21.3%
- 5th Grade: 2.1%

Gender Breakdown

- Male: 36.2%
- Female: 51.1%
- Non-binary: 6.4%
- Unknown: 6.4%
Race Representation

- Multiracial: 21.7%
- Asian: 17.4%
- Black or African: 15.2%
- Hispanic or Latino: 6.5%
- White or Caucasian: 39.1%

Multiracial breakdowns include:
- American Indian
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Vietnamese
- White or Caucasian
- Hispanic or Latino
- Puerto Rican
Recommendations by Category

A. Building Renovation Recommendations
   - Expand space to accommodate a variety of needs
   - Make the library more vibrant, comfortable and welcoming
   - Reconfigure existing layout to increase access and usability

B. Programs and Services Recommendations
   - Create more teen-specific programming
   - Improve marketing of what is going on at the library.
   - Increase library collection for teens

C. Access Recommendations
   - Expand hours
   - Improve marketing of what is going on at the library
   - Provide book delivery for those who can’t get to the library
   - Remove barriers to transportation

D. Youth Engagement Recommendations
   - Provide ongoing opportunity for youth input and feedback
   - Create opportunities for youth to learn and hear from each other
Recommendation Details by Category

A. Building Renovation Recommendations

Expand space to accommodate a variety of needs
- Teen designated space
- Open areas, cozy spaces, quiet study spaces, spaces where youth can be louder
- Provide study areas. Individual and small group study rooms are a must.
- Ensure that materials are accessible for people with different needs (people in wheelchairs, shorter folks, older folks), meaning that shelves can’t be too low or too high.
- Maintain the historic character of the space.
- Preserve the outdoor space.
- Incorporate a variety of open and enclosed spaces.
- Keep the historic look and uniqueness of the Carnegie Library.
- Have a cafe, eating space, or a room set up for youth to have meals or after school snacks.
- Want space where community members can reserve and use.
- Build additional study room spaces for studying needs
- Want to spend time with other youth - establish a space for recreation, getting together, self expression, celebration, and learning

Make the library more vibrant, comfortable and welcoming
- Make sure the new design uses a lot of color, not just beige, and have more windows for natural lighting.
- Create more seating areas that use comfortable furniture.
- Invest in comfortable furniture - add variety: high tables and chairs are appreciated but regular tables are also a good consideration.
- Have artwork and murals around the library. In particular, bring into existence art that reflects the community in the neighborhood.
- Wooden rollercoaster bead maze things, like they have at doctors offices. More hands on activities, like fidget toys, kinetic sand, for more ages than kids.
- Cultivate a cozy atmosphere and aesthetics.

Reconfigure existing layout to increase usability and safety
- Expand the building to accommodate comfortable seating, study rooms, and teen space.
- The outside book return should be in a more obvious location not hidden in the back.
- Library open on sundays, good time for working on homework.
- Downstairs spaces are currently underutilized and labeled “creepy” with water damage on the walls. If the downstairs area is for public use, it needs to be more welcoming.
- Design space so that staff can monitor easily.
- Add a place to put personal belongings (lockers/cubbies)
- Add a charging station or more places to plug in phones
- Assure safety through strategic camera placement in the building and make sure proper lighting outdoors
- Establish a unique identity about the branch - for example, there’s a Snoopy statue and a wall-sized mural at Rice St Branch

B. Programs and Services Recommendations

Create more teen-specific programming
- Interactive, hands-on activities for teenagers
- Tutoring and homework help/free homework supplies
- More marketing for the activities (visual in teen space)
- GSA or LGBTQ+ programming
- Advertise teen programs in a more obvious way
  - Through bulletin boards/signs
- Create programs and activities for teens, ages 10-13 year olds as well as older teens, teens transitioning into young adults, and for families such as arts and craft classes, technology, family movie nights, book clubs, budgeting/credit class, and volunteering opportunities.
- Offer more resources for school work (supplies for projects, tutoring, homework help)
- Offer more teen programs and services.

Increase library collection for teens
- Books and movies are important
- Have interesting collections of materials
- Want to read more serious, challenging books and currently have to go to the adult section. “Lots of old guys” hang out there. Feel like they’re being watched, that people are surprised they’re in the adult section
- Different themes for sections, more fun, make it more interesting to look at
- Understand that books remain a primary reason for teens to visit the library.

C. Access Recommendations

Improve marketing of what is going on at the library
- Don’t know a lot about what is going on. Need to figure out how to get information to them.
  - Plan a systematic way to get the word out, communications that work for teens, calendar
  - Updated bulletin board to encompass events, programs, volunteer opportunities, calendar
- Collaborate with local educators to inform teens about library programs and services.
- Better inform teens about programs and services.
Consider expanding hours
- Open on Sundays - it's a good time to do homework
- Open later rather than earlier in the day.
- Sometimes I go to the library and it is closed when I need it.
- Ability to get books or resources 24/7, maybe a hold locker

Remove barriers to transportation
- Provide more bike racks
- Provide bus tokens
- Provide more parking

D. Youth Engagement Recommendations
Provide ongoing opportunities for youth input and feedback about the library
- Youth overwhelmingly mentioned how they appreciated the opportunity to share their thoughts in the focus groups.
- They liked that they could share their ideas about design
- They appreciated hearing how other people used the library
- They felt good knowing their opinion matters
- Youth were glad that the library was getting ideas from the people that will be actually using the library
- The teens expressed that it was great that you are reaching out to see what they want instead of guessing
- Youth were pleased you were considering their opinions and learning what people want about renovation
- They stated is was nice to express their opinions about how their library should be renovated
- Youth appreciated that we took ideas from them

Create opportunities for youth to learn and hear from each other
- Youth liked sharing their thoughts and hearing from other youth.
- They enjoyed hearing other people's ideas that they hadn't even thought about.
- They learned more about the library.
- They felt it was great to hear everyone's ideas.
- Nice to talk, share ideas, and express our opinions.
- They enjoyed learning what people thought.
Recommendation Details by Library

Hamline Midway Library

**Summary:** The teens appreciate the books and how helpful and enthusiastic staff are. What keeps them from going to the library are their busy schedules, transportation challenges, lack of variety of new books, and it can get boring. Teens would like more quiet study spaces, a teen designated space and large windows. The basement was mentioned as being “creepy.”

**Recommendations:**
- Make sure the new design uses a lot of color and has more windows for natural lighting.
- We need spaces that cater to different needs: open areas, cozy spaces, quiet study spaces/rooms, loud space and a designated teen space. Individual and small group study rooms are a must.
- We need more comfortable seating areas.
- Offer more resources for school work (supplies for projects, tutoring, homework help)
- Ensure that materials are accessible for people with different needs (people in wheelchairs, shorter folks, older folks) - that means that shelves can’t be too low or too high.
- The outside book return should be in a more obvious location not hidden in the back.
- If we are remodeling then we need to have a plan for the downstairs space. Having one floor open to the public, but not staffed means that the downstairs is “creepy and underutilized.” If the downstairs area is for public use, it needs to be more welcoming.
- Create more teen-specific programs.
  - Interactive, hands-on activities for teenagers
  - Tutoring and homework help/free homework supplies
  - More marketing for the activities (visual in teen space)
  - GSA or LGBTQ+ programming
- Advertise teen programs in a more obvious way such as through bulletin boards/signs.
- Add a place to put personal belongings (lockers/cubbies).
- Add a charging station or more places to plug in phones.
- We need a bigger building to accommodate comfortable seating, study rooms, teen space, etc.
- Ability to get books or resources 24/7, maybe a hold locker.
- Open on Sundays because it’s a good time to do homework.
- Open later rather than earlier in the day.
- Provide more bike racks.
- Provide bus tokens.
- Provide more parking.
Hayden Heights Library

Summary: Teens go to the library because they like getting new books and it is a quiet place to study and do homework - they can concentrate better at the library. It is also a safe place for teens to hang out with friends. Teens really appreciate the cool staff, the teen designated space which is separated from the younger kids, and the high chairs and tables. They also like the spaciousness, computer access, comfy chairs in the kids section, and volunteer opportunities. What keeps teens from going to the library are their busy schedules including work and sports, other obligations at home, transportation challenges, lack of options of books and movies, weather, and COVID. Although there is a specific teen area, it is too small. More could be done for teens, to prepare teens for life after high school, to engage the full family.

Recommendations:

- Create programs and activities for teens, ages 10-13 year olds as well as older teens, teens transitioning into young adults, and for families such as arts and craft classes, technology, family movie nights, book clubs, budgeting/credit class, and volunteering opportunities.
- Plan a systematic way to get the word out such as a calendar or bulletin board with events, programs, volunteer opportunities. Make sure the communication strategy works for teens.
- Establish a unique identity about the branch. For example, there's a Snoopy statue and a wall sized mural at Rice St Branch.
- Build additional study room spaces for studying needs. Youth want quiet study spaces. Studying and school work is important.
- Expand ways that teens can be in groups and spend time with other youth. Establish a space for recreation, getting together, self expression, celebration, and learning.
- More variety of seating areas and comfortable furniture.
- Improve the teen designated area with larger tables for group work and more comfortable seats.
- Increase library collection for teens. Books and movies are important.
- Bring into existence art work or mural that reflects the community in the neighborhood.
- Make sure the library is accessible such as providing bus tokens.
- Assure safety through strategic camera placement in the building.
- Make sure there is proper lighting outdoors (teens’ mode of transport is to walk to library).
- Provide space for eating such as a designated room, vending machines, or a cafe.
Riverview Library

Summary: Teens report that books remain a primary reason for their visits to the library and stress the uniqueness of the Carnegie Library. They appreciate the book collection, helpful and friendly staff, having a quiet place to study, being surrounded by books, and the library’s closeness to their school.

Recommendations:

- Cultivate a cozy atmosphere through comfortable furniture and aesthetics.
- Create a designated teen area.
- Provide study areas.
- Collaborate with local educators to inform teens about library programs and services.
- Maintain the historic character of the space.
- Preserve the outdoor space.
- Offer more teen programs and services.
- Better inform teens about programs and services.
- Incorporate a variety of open and enclosed spaces.
- Continue providing a platform for youth feedback.