VT Public Libraries - A Good Return on Investment

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Acknowledgments

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Background and Context

The purpose of this report is to evaluate the value of Vermont's public libraries and to develop findings and recommendations regarding the actual and perceived values of holdings and services provided to the public by these libraries. The meaning of the term value can take many forms and this report presents findings on both actual and estimated monetary value of library holdings as well as perceived value from the community through the use of a qualitative survey.

The work of this report comes from the Vermont Certified Public Managers (VCPM) course at the Vermont Center for Achievement in Public Service, a division of the Department of Human Services. The Vermont Department of Libraries applied for the services of the VCPM to research the value of public libraries within the state. In this application, Jason Broughton, the Commissioner of Libraries, conveyed a few basic questions and principals to the VCPM team to complete this task which are as follows:

> *"The Vermont Department of Libraries seeks to answer the following questions:*
> > *(1) What is the value-add of library services to Vermonters in financial terms?*
> > *(2) What are the economic implications for Vermonters and the Department of Libraries?*
>
> *Success will look like the following:*
> *Return on Investment (ROI) is one of the vital parameters to examine the importance of libraries. ROI is a medium to validate the existing system of spending money in the libraries and justifying method for future plans. Enormous funds are spent on building libraries to achieve institutions' missions. Public institutions provide a variety of resources in the libraries to provide quality services to users in getting better returns from them. It also underlines the connection between public library and the Vermont Department of Libraries and its services to libraries. The research could be utilized to promote public library data to Vermonters about the value of having a library within the community along with the valuation of resources, products, and platforms."*

This report depicts the landscape of Vermont's public libraries including general holdings, technology, and services with estimates of their financial value. An analysis of these findings conveys the economic implications for both Vermonters and the Department of Libraries. A key component of this report is a survey which was offered to Vermonters that asked a series of basic questions regarding awareness and utilization of existing library services. This survey is very telling regarding the perceived value of municipal libraries and the services offered. This report also briefly discusses the effects of bias and limitations of the survey results which should be considered.

How to Use This Report

This report describes techniques that public libraries can utilize to determine their value to their community – both in terms of actual dollars and perceived value. The organization of this report is such that methods are presented first, followed by results, and finally recommendations. Libraries should use the sections of this report that are most applicable to their given situation and supplement with local or library specific data whenever available for the most accurate assessment of value. The Department of Libraries can use some figures directly from this report for characterizing the value of the public library system and draw upon the results of the survey for an assessment of the general understanding, feelings, and attitudes about public libraries throughout the state.

Report Limitations

This report does not consider all the factors that communities may want to include in an assessment of their individual library but does include a broad range of topics for consideration. The incorporation of local data beyond what is presented here can be significant in describing an individual library's value. This report utilizes data collected from a statewide survey created and conducted by the VCPM Library Services Team for this project. Survey bias and limitations regarding the findings of this survey must be acknowledged to better understand and incorporate the findings. These biases Include, but are not limited to, the following:

- The results do not include feedback from those without internet services or the homeless.
- There is a significant youth element missing as the results include only one respondent under age 18, although the survey did not preclude participation by those younger than 18 years of age.
- The results do not reflect that many working families cannot prioritize the time required to complete or focus on an online survey.
- Results are expected to be received from respondents who are typically in-favor of library services rather than those disinterested in libraries. The disinterested portion of the public could very likely be those who could benefit most from library services.
- The results do not account for common "acquiescence bias" where respondents simply answer positively or "yes" to all questions.

Methodology

Estimating the value of physical and digital holdings

Research for this section included article, book, and report reviews, internet searches, and in-person interviews.

An accurate estimate of the value a library's holdings is critical to an overall estimate of the value of the library. The easiest and likely most common way to estimate the monetary value of physical holdings at a library is to use the value provided by a Library Management System (LMS) (Brennan). A Library Management System is a service, usually a web-based subscription service, that libraries use to manage their holdings. For the purposes of this section, physical holdings are defined as books and other tangible reference materials that can be borrowed and removed from a library or reviewed at a library.

Library Management Systems often include a means of tracking circulation of physical holdings, a system for communicating with library users, and an inventory of the library's holdings (Brennan). Library Management Systems have been in existence for many years (Breeding) and are now commonplace, even in Vermont (Brennan).

In addition to the functions listed above, many LMS include the ability to run reports to determine the value of the holdings at a library. When calculating the monetary value of the physical holdings of a library, the library management system will generally use the assigned value of the title in their system. The assigned value is usually the publisher's recommended list price for the item, which many libraries also use as the replacement value of a title, although some libraries do account for depreciation of

holdings' value over time (Brennan). Running a report through an LMS makes for a fast, easy, and defensible means of calculating the value of physical holdings that can be incorporated into an annual report or used for other means.

Since there are so many different LMSs, this report will not attempt to describe the specific steps for each system in detail, but rather focus on the use of this general technique as the recommended approach for quantifying the value of physical and some digital holdings for use in an annual report, budget, or bond vote justification. Public libraries should contact their LMS vendor if they have questions about running a report to determine the monetary value of their collection.

Depending on the type of LMS used, the estimation of the value of digital holdings may be achieved in a similar manner as physical holdings (Breeding) or may need to be determined separately. Digital holdings may take the form of audiobooks, ebooks and magazines, podcasts, movies, and music that are accessed virtually rather than physically. For the purposes of this report we will focus on the value of audiobooks and ebooks when making recommendations for determining value.

The method used in this report to determine the value of audiobooks and ebooks was to request the financial investment of the collection available from the Green Mountain Library Consortium (GMLC) from OverDrive, the provider of the titles to the GMLC. Other methods that were considered for libraries that are either not a member of the GMLC or have private collections that expand upon what is provided by a consortium are discussed in more detail in the results section of the report, but since 142 of the 183 public libraries in Vermont are members of the Green Mountain Library Consortium, the values presented in the results section should work for the majority of the public libraries in the state.

The financial investment for both ebooks and audiobooks available with membership in the Green Mountain Library Consortium are provided in the results section of this report. The dollar amounts presented represent the financial investment for the collection available when the inquiry was made (March 2020), and doesn't necessarily include all of the other ancillary benefits of GMLC membership like cost savings through avoided cost of collection development (selecting materials), cataloging, managing circulation, and the facilities needed to manage the collection. A value is not estimated for those ancillary benefits, but the reader should be aware of the other positive financial implications of membership with GMLC. Further, since the GMLC collection is fluid and the availability of titles evolves over time, the most accurate representation of investment would be one that was determined for the time-period one is interested in. The Team recommends converting the GMLC investment into an estimate of value by assuming a 1:1 return for the amount of money invested by the Green Mountain Library Consortium in developing their collection. That is, the dollar amount invested by the GMLC may be reported as the estimated value of the titles in the shared collection, on the date that the data was acquired.

For the alternative methods, including for libraries that have expanded collections, the first method is to use a comparable value from one of several companies that provide audiobooks such as Audible, Kobo, Nook, Google Play Books, or Apple Books. This can be time consuming as it requires researching the value of each title on at least one platform. Therefore, rather than trying to determine the actual value of each title, we suggest a conservative average value in the results section. The second method is to apply the monthly subscription cost for audiobook services to the number of regular audiobook users the library has, this is also discussed further in the results section below.

Estimating the value of programs and services

In addition to physical and digital offerings, many libraries also provide a host of programs and services that provide benefit to their community. These range from children's story hours and craft activities to the use of computers and internet access for all ages of a community's population. The programs and services considered in this report include adult, youth, and children's programs, the borrowing of park and museum passes, the use of meeting rooms, and computer/internet access. There are many other services that individual libraries may provide, such as afterschool care for school-age children, but these appeared to be the most common programs and services available in most of the libraries in the state. If a library believes that they have other programs and services that provide a significant value to their community, they may consider using local data to incorporate them into their overall value calculation.

Initial values for library programs and services were taken from a Library Use Calculator created by the Chelmsford Public Library in Massachusetts. These values were then checked against a librarian in Vermont for their reasonableness and adjusted based on feedback and local knowledge. The team presents figures in the recommendations section of the report that we believe are appropriate for Vermont and that libraries may choose to utilize for their own valuations.

Survey to gauge public feedback

To gauge public opinion and awareness of programs and services, a survey was created using Microsoft Forms. This tool was selected because of its inclusion with Microsoft Office 365 (O365) licenses and relative ease of use. A survey was created by the team and approved by the Sponsor and then advertised through existing Listservs, social media, email, and other avenues. The Consulting Team advocated for, and was granted, funding to post the survey statewide on Front Porch Forum for one week at a cost of $750. This cost included 1,000 ads covering towns in each of Front Porch Forum's 25 ad regions and ran the first week of January 2020. The questions asked in the survey are as follows:

1) In which town do you live?
2) What is your age?
3) How many people reside in your household?
4) Do you have a public library in your town?
5) Do you have a library card?
6) Please rate the following statements regarding your public municipal library: a) Public libraries are assets to their community, b) I am aware of the services provided by public libraries, c) Public libraries provide cost-savings to me/my family
7) What value do you give public libraries in Vermont?
8) On average, how many times per month do you visit a public library?
9) Were you previously aware of the range of services/programs offered at public libraries in Vermont?
10) Taking into consideration the range of services/programs, what value do you give public libraries in Vermont?
11) What are your suggestions for improving services/programs offered at your municipal library?
12) How did you hear about this survey?
13) How would you prefer to receive information about/from your municipal library?
14) Comments/Feedback

The survey utilizing Microsoft Forms was opened on December 16, 2019 and remained open through February 15, 2020. The listed town choices were identified using the listing on the Vermont official website ("Town Listing") and these towns were later linked to their respective counties per request by the Sponsor.

While much positive feedback was received, there were also reports of displeasure with the wording of the title. The initial "Your local library wants to hear from you!" was ultimately changed to "The Department of Libraries wants to hear from you" to accurately reflect the Sponsor of this project.

In addition to the choices in the survey, text responses were grouped and assigned a 'theme' into which they most closely fit. For example, a response of "be open on Sundays" would be given a theme of "Convenience of hours" for analysis purposes while comments relating to advertising or general public awareness were assigned the theme of "Outreach/Marketing".

It should be noted that this survey was not reviewed for statistical validity nor were the questions vetted through anyone other than the team, sponsor, and VCPM staff. The summary results can be found in the Appendix of this report. Due to the size, the full data set has been made available to the Sponsor in electronic format.

Results and Findings

The sections below include the results and findings for the topics covered by this report.

The value of physical and digital holdings

As described in the methods section above, an actual dollar amount for the value of physical holdings is best obtained through a library's Library Management System, and as such no values are provided here. Rather, for the most accurate valuation, an individual library should utilize their LMS to determine the value specific to the physical titles they hold in their library.

For libraries that are part of the Green Mountain Library Consortium the estimated value of the digital titles available in March 2020 provided by membership in the consortium is provided in Table 1, below:

Table 1: Estimated value of digital holdings provided by the Green Mountain Library Consortium.

Format	Number of Holdings	Value of Holdings
Ebooks	15,000	$425,000
Audiobooks	8,300	$450,000

The figures in Table 1 were provided by OverDrive as the investment by the Green Mountain Library Consortium in developing their current collection (Preyss). The figures represent the combined value of all of the shared titles available to each of the member libraries in March 2020. Some individual libraries have supplemental collections through OverDrive which add to the value of their individual holdings. These libraries should work with OverDrive to determine the value of their subset collection and add that value to those listed in Table 1, above.

If the library is not a member of the Green Mountain Library Consortium and their LMS does not calculate the value of digital holdings, we recommend assigning a title-based value for both ebooks and audiobooks based on the retail value from common digital media services such as Audible, Google Play

Books, Kobo, or Nook. Conceptually this is similar to what an LMS is doing for physical holdings. Amazon/Kindle and Barnes and Noble online each charge around $10 for most new ebooks, including bestsellers ("Where to buy ebooks"), and in our opinion this is a reasonable estimate for most recent and popular titles in ebook format. Older titles that exist in ebook format may need to be researched further, but many of these titles may have values around $3 to $5 per copy ("Where to buy ebooks"). This value can be applied to the older digital holdings as a best estimate for value and the total value can be calculated.

For audiobooks, the method described in the Methods section suggests use of the average cost of an audiobook, or the use of the monthly cost for a subscription-based service. The current monthly cost for Audible, the most popular audiobook platform, is $14.99 (Member Benefits), whereas the average cost to purchase an audiobook is often in the $20-30 range depending on the title (Kawolczyk). For purposes of estimating the value of audiobooks in a collection, we conservatively recommend $15 per title.

An additional important finding of this research was the variety of library management systems that exist, with many tailored for specific needs (Breeding). For example, there are systems that focus specifically on small libraries (Apollo ILS by Biblionix) as well as those that serve a variety of library sizes (Verso by Autographics and Koha) (Library Systems Report). There are also several open source LMS available, such as Koha, and there are companies like Bywater that focus on providing support to those open source LMS (Breeding). These systems may be able to provide additional support for libraries seeking to determine the value of their holdings, but what we present here should be sufficient for determining an estimate of value of the largest components of a library's holdings and should be applicable to the majority of public libraries in Vermont.

Potential Value of Public Libraries to the Typical Family

Public libraries are going through many changes to keep up with the demand of the general public. Today's libraries are doing a lot more than just lending out books and offering a quiet space. In programs tailored to their communities' needs, they are offering access to a wide range of products and services that help people save money. In addition to traditional offerings such as paper books, magazines, periodical searches, and newspapers, patrons now have access to a multitude of digital offerings, internet use, movies, music, and training classes. Libraries are constantly adapting to their community's needs in very creative and innovative ways. Below is a table of services and values reflective of a typical public library. The cost figures for the library services below were sourced from the Franklin-Springboro Public Library. :

Table 2: Potential Value of Library Programs and Services.

Library Service	Value of Service	Based On
Adult Books Borrowed	$17.00	Amazon.com average price
Young Adult Books Borrowed	$12.00	Amazon.com average price
Children Books Borrowed	$17.00	Amazon.com average price
Audiobooks Borrowed	$9.95	Audible.com download average
Interlibrary Loan Requests	$25.00	Amazon.com average price plus shipping
eBooks Downloaded	$15.00	Estimated B&N/Amazon average
Magazines Read	$5.00	Estimated purchase price average
Newspapers Read	$9.50	Boston Globe subscription (outside city)
Movies Borrowed	$4.00	Estimated Netflix average
CDs Borrowed	$9.95	iTunes download album average
Music Downloaded	$1.00	iTunes download song average
Meeting Room Use (per hour)	$25.00	Estimated value
Adult Programs Attended	$15.00	Entertainment/program admission fee - estimated average per adult
Young Adult Programs Attended	$12.00	Entertainment/program admission fee - estimated average per youth
Children's Programs Attended	$7.00	Entertainment/program admission fee - estimated average per child
Museum Passes Borrowed	$20.00	Museum admission fee - estimated average for two adults
Computer Use (per hour)	$12.00	FedEx/Kinkos price
Database Searches	$19.95	Average cost for online article search
Reference Assistance	$7.00	Average library cost

Using this information as a guideline, the average family of four can easily save between $500.00 and $1,500.00 annually by electing to utilize library services rather than going to the movie theater, purchasing books and music, and attending costly training and educational programs offered elsewhere. For example, if a family of four utilized library services to annually: watch 10 movies together, read 17 adult books, 12 e-books, 5 children's books, and 12 magazines, attend 5 children's programs and 2 adult programs, and visit 2 museums rather than purchasing the equivalent products or services, the savings would sum to $1,029.00 per Table 2, above. This example does not include other beneficial library services such as reference librarian assistance with database searches, meeting room use, employment research platforms, and general internet access.

The direct value to library patrons can far exceed their per capita tax expenditure, resulting in a significant return on investment for the individual or family, as explained more in the next section of this report.

Return on Investment

The ROI of Vermont libraries in relation to consumer spending is quite good. We analyzed Vermont's median household income ($60,076) and per capita income ($33,238) (US Census) in relation to the average annual consumer expenditure for entertainment ($3,125) and food purchased away from home ($3,454) (US Bureau of Labor & Statistics). This information is conveyed in Tables 3 and 4 and Figures 1 and 2, below.

Table 3: Annual Income and Expenditure Data for Vermont

VT Median Household Income	$ 60,076.00
Per Capita Income	$ 33,238.00
Average Spent on Entertainment	$ 3,125.00
Average Spent Eating Out	$ 3,454.00
Median Per Capita Tax for Libraries	$ 27.02

Figure 1, below, shows the same information graphically to demonstrate the magnitude of the differences between the amounts.
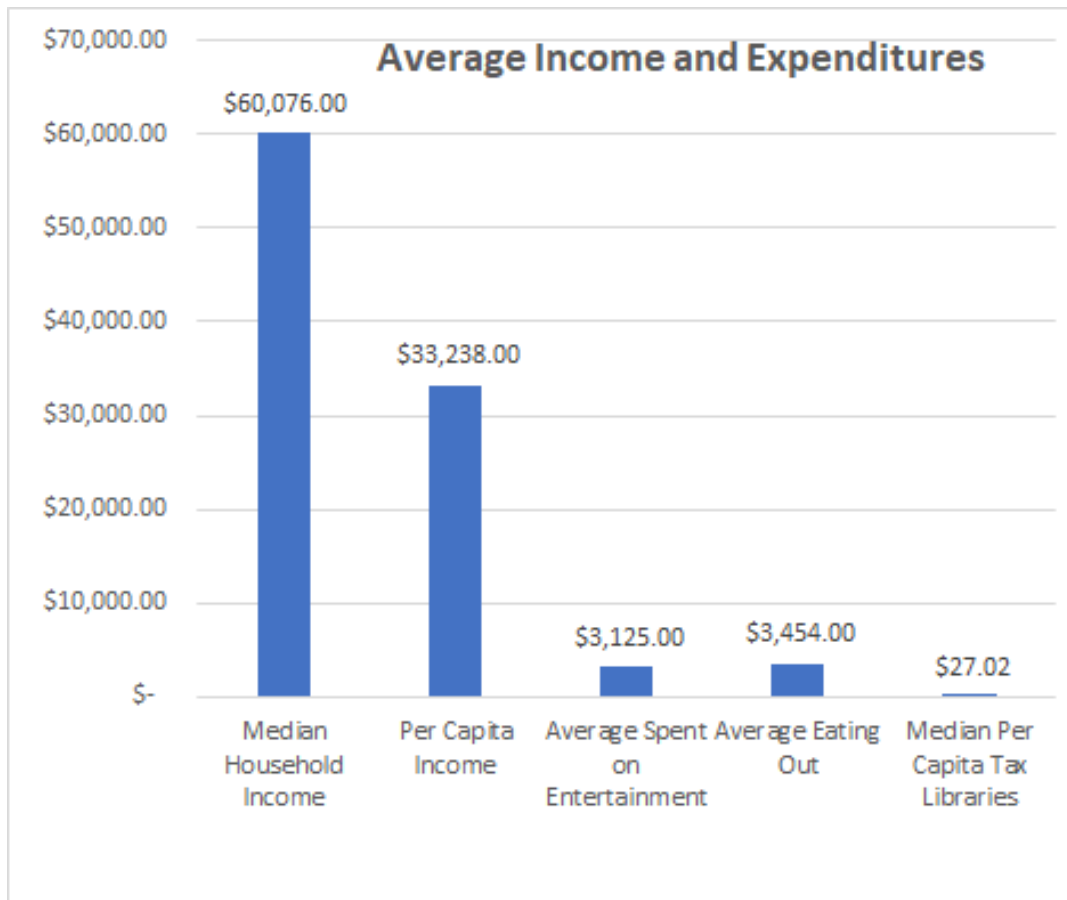

Figure 1: Income and Expenditure Data for Vermont.

Table 4 presents the amounts in Table 3 as a percentage of median household and per capita income, as well as how the median tax for libraries compares as a percentage to the amount spent on entertainment and eating out.

Table 4: Average consumer expenses compared to per capita tax to support libraries

	% Household Income	% Per Capita	% Entertainment	% Eating Out
Average Spent on Entertainment	5.20%	9.40%	-	-
Average Spent Eating Out	5.75%	10.39%	-	-
Median Per Capita Tax for Libraries	0.04%	0.08%	0.86%	0.78%

We then analyzed the median household income and per capita income in relation to the per capita tax paid for libraries in four distinct categories, Large, Rural, Small & Tiny (Vermont Department of Libraries), which is shown in Table 5 and Figure 2. Figures 3 and 4, below, show median household and per capita spending as compared to taxes collected for public libraries. The Department of Libraries informally uses services population in identifying these library categories: Large has a service population of above 5000, Small between 2500 and 5000, Rural between 1000-2500, and Tiny below 1000. For example, $23.35 is the per capita tax for one of the libraries we selected from the Large category. That per capita tax figure is only 0.04% of the Vermont Median Household income and 0.07% of the Vermont Average Per Capita Income and represents only 0.75% of the Average Annual Entertainment expenditure and 0.68% of the Average Annual Eating Out expenditure. This demonstrates the extremely low impact the per capita tax has on Median and Per Capita income and is a fraction of the Entertainment and Eating Out expenditures.

Table 5: Per Capita Tax by Library Category

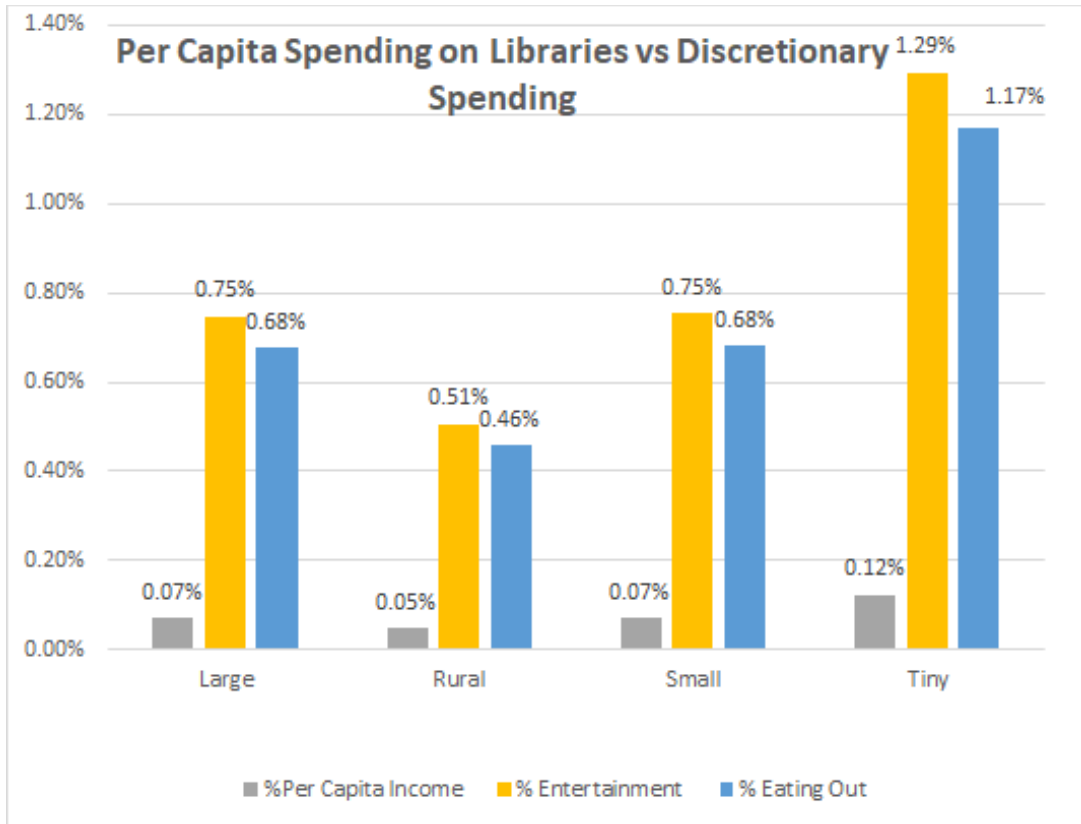| Library Category	Per Capita Tax	% Median Income	% Per Capita Income	% Entertainment	% Eating Out
Large	$ 23.35	0.04%	0.07%	0.75%	0.68%
Rural	$ 15.79	0.03%	0.05%	0.51%	0.46%
Small	$ 23.53	0.04%	0.07%	0.75%	0.68%
Tiny	$ 40.44	0.07%	0.12%	1.29%	1.17%

Figure 2: Per Capita Spending on Libraries compared to Discretionary Spending.
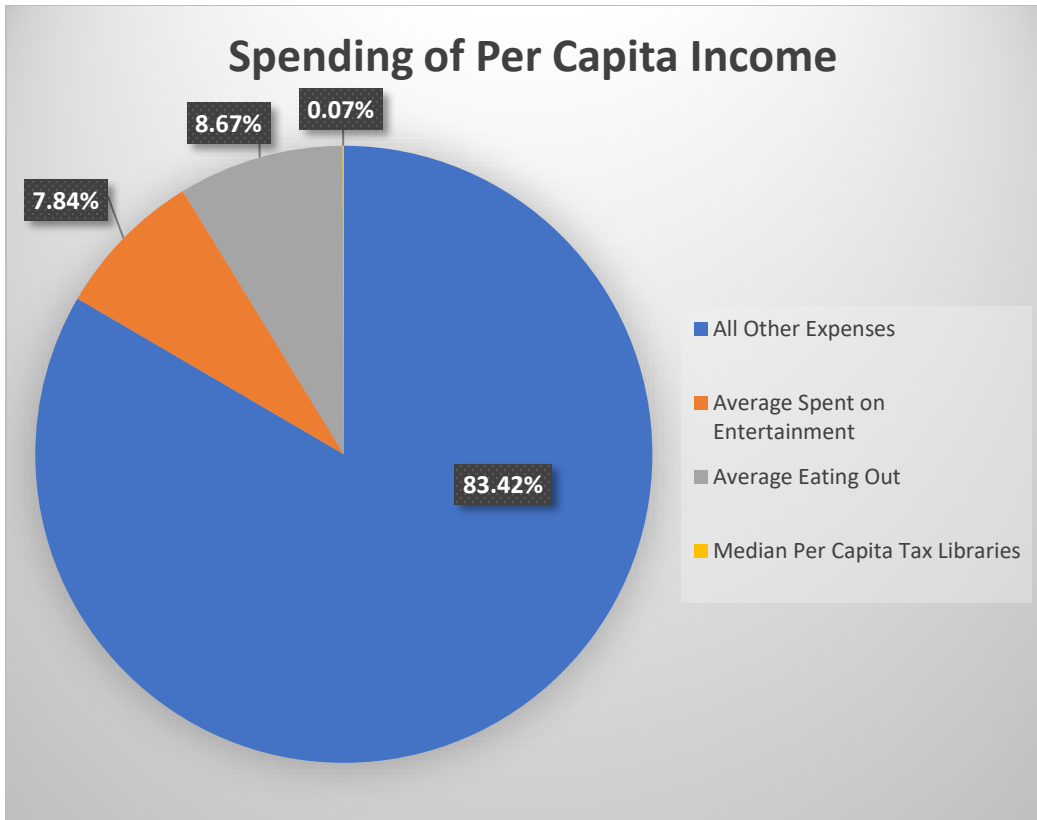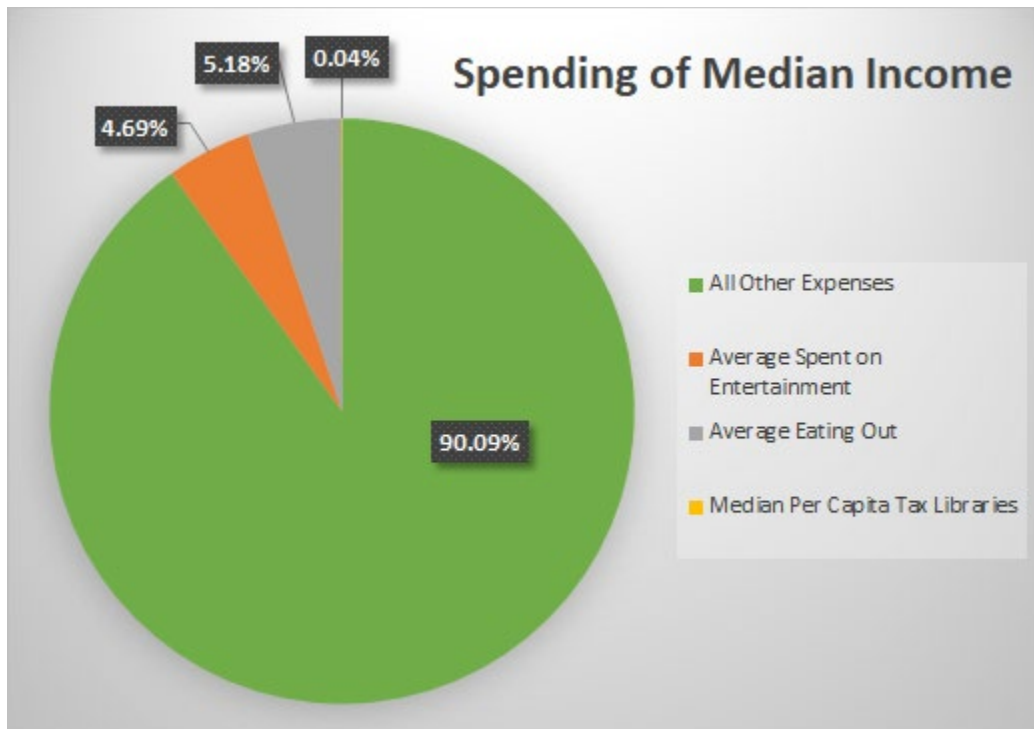
Figure 3: Spending of Per Capita Income

Figure 4: Spending of Median Household Income

As represented in the table, charts, and graphs, the percentage of income spent on entertainment and food purchased away from home far exceeds the percentage of income invested in public libraries via taxes. This information offers an opportunity for public awareness and engagement. In particular, presenting the wide range of services and products available at the local library level, and positioning the cost of those services versus the costs of discretionary spending, (entertainment & take out for example), will demonstrate the incredibly low impact on an annual personal budget that taxes for local libraries generally have. Another example is to take it all the way down to the micro level, "For less than the cost of one weekly take out coffee, you can continue to support your local library".

Qualitative Analysis

This section of the report provides the results from the survey the team conducted and includes graphs summarizing the data. The raw data has also been provided by the consulting team to the Department of Libraries for use in additional analysis by the Department of Libraries and others.

Geographic Distribution

The survey collected 1233 responses. Of those 1233 participants, the three counties with the most respondents were Washington County with 257 responses, Chittenden County with 235 responses, and Windham County with 153 responses. For a full breakdown of responses by county, see Figure 5, below. Counties were assigned using the town given by the respondent and a town-to-county listing ("Vermont Municipalities").
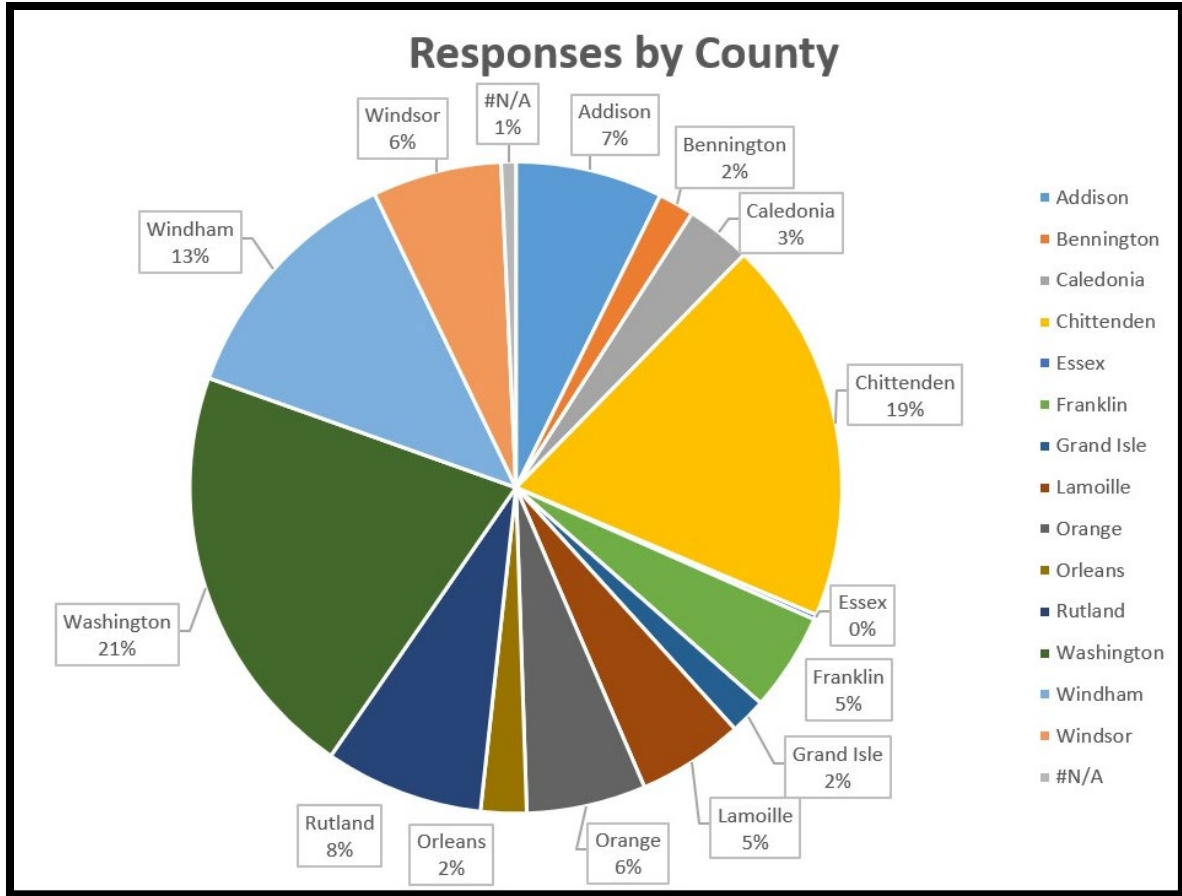
Figure 5: Survey responses by County.

Distribution by Age and Household Size

Of the 1233 responses, 788 listed themselves as being between the ages of 46 and 75. This accounts for 64%, or almost two-thirds, of all respondents. Figure 6 shows the age distribution of all respondents.
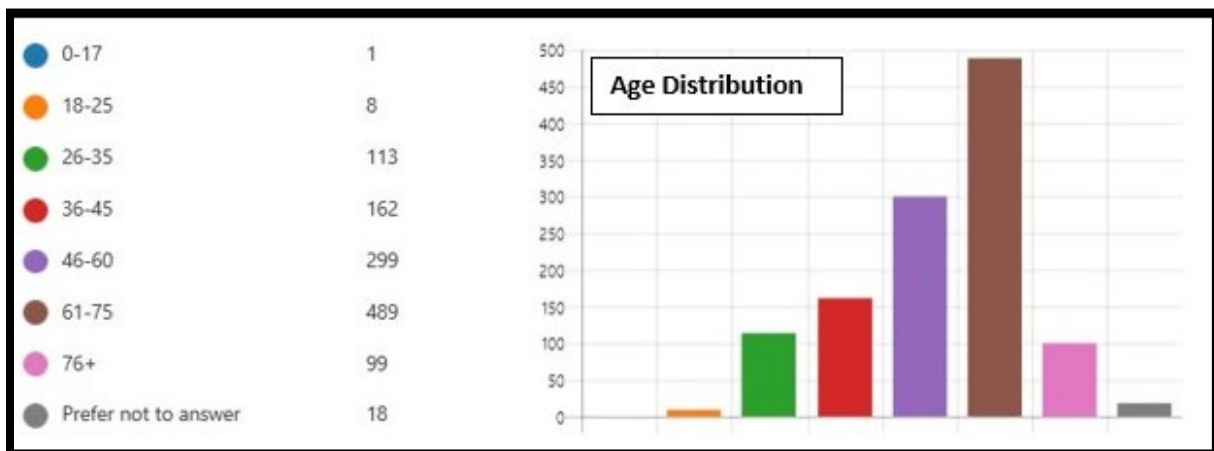

Figure 6: Responses by age

Figure 7 shows the distribution of respondents by household size. It shows that 777 respondents (63%) self-reported being members of 1 or 2 person households.
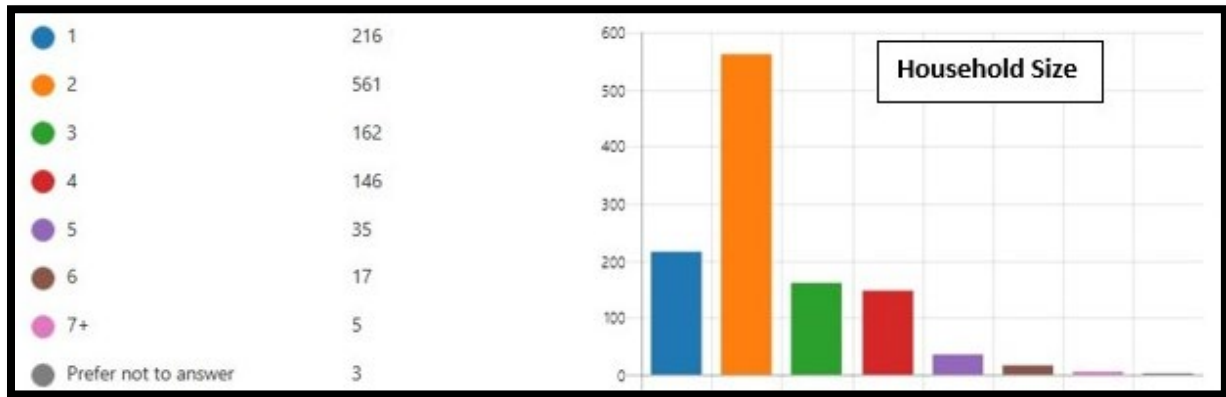

Figure 7: Responses by household size

Frequency of Visits and Communication Preferences

As seen in Figure 8, four hundred thirty-two (432) respondents (35%) indicated they visit their library, on average, 1-2 times per month. It should also be noted that 328 respondents, or 27% of respondents, indicated 5+ average visits per month. The consulting team did look at whether a correlation exists between age and number of visits/month or household size and number of visits/month, but the number of average visits/month was consistent regardless of age and/or household size.
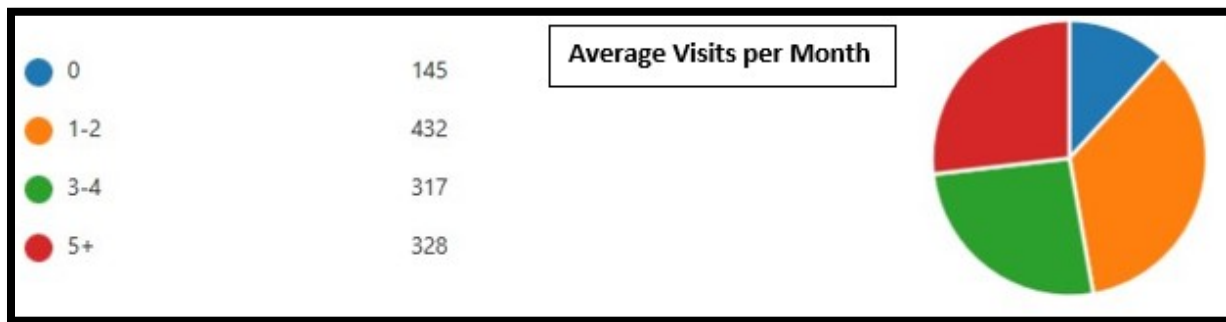
Figure 8: Average number of visits per month

Front Porch Forum and Social Media accounted for 1,010 selections of how respondents heard about the survey. It should be noted that this was a multiple-choice response. Figure 9 shows how respondents prefer to receive information about their library. Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of responses indicate an overall preference of receiving information via electronic means; 82% of the responses to this question identified an electronic preference.

Information Preference	
Email	758
Social Media	356
Phone call	15
Newspaper	202
Bulletin board at library	154
Front Porch Forum	655
Municipal website	157
Other	52
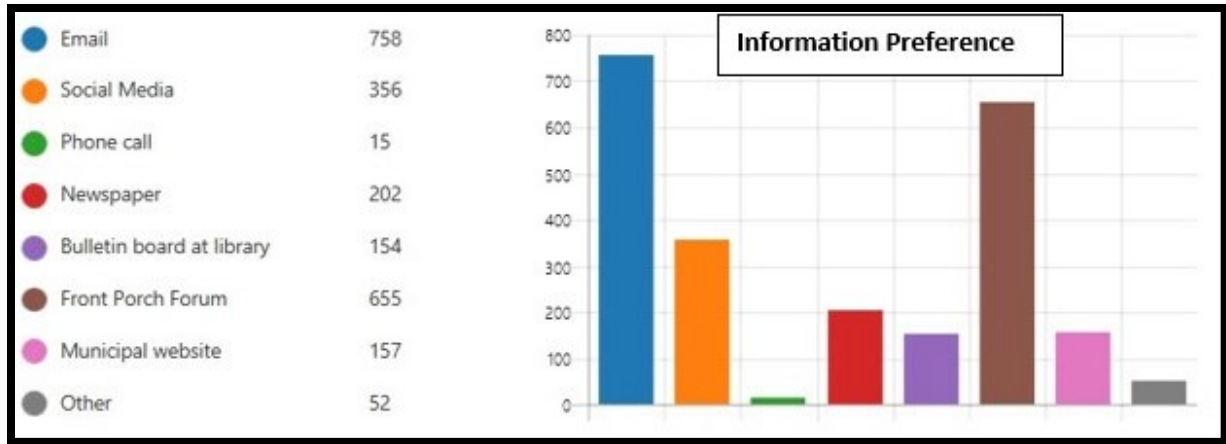
Figure 9: Preference of receiving information

Suggestions for Improvement

The survey also asked for suggestions for improvement. Figure 10 shows the survey responses while Figure 11 further breaks down the "Other" responses into the themes identified by the consulting team. There may very well be a correlation between the survey choices in the survey and the theme noted as "Funding/Staffing/Volunteering". The underlying issue may be that current funding and staffing levels do not allow for expansion of programs, services, content, and/or hours.

Suggestions for Improvement	
Offer programs at more conve...	240
Expand digital content offerings	293
Expand class offerings	352
Convenience of hours	388
Job training	124
Other	267
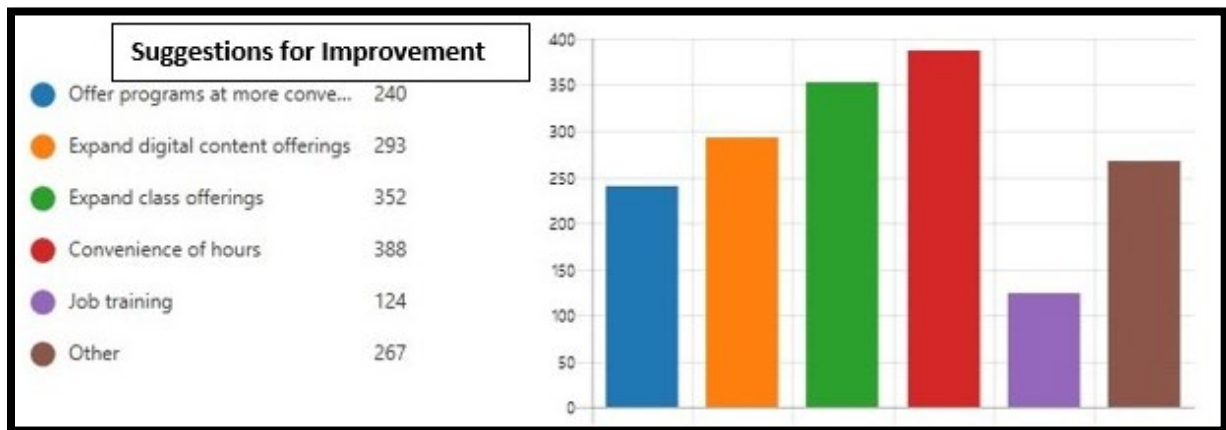
Figure 10: Suggestions for improvement
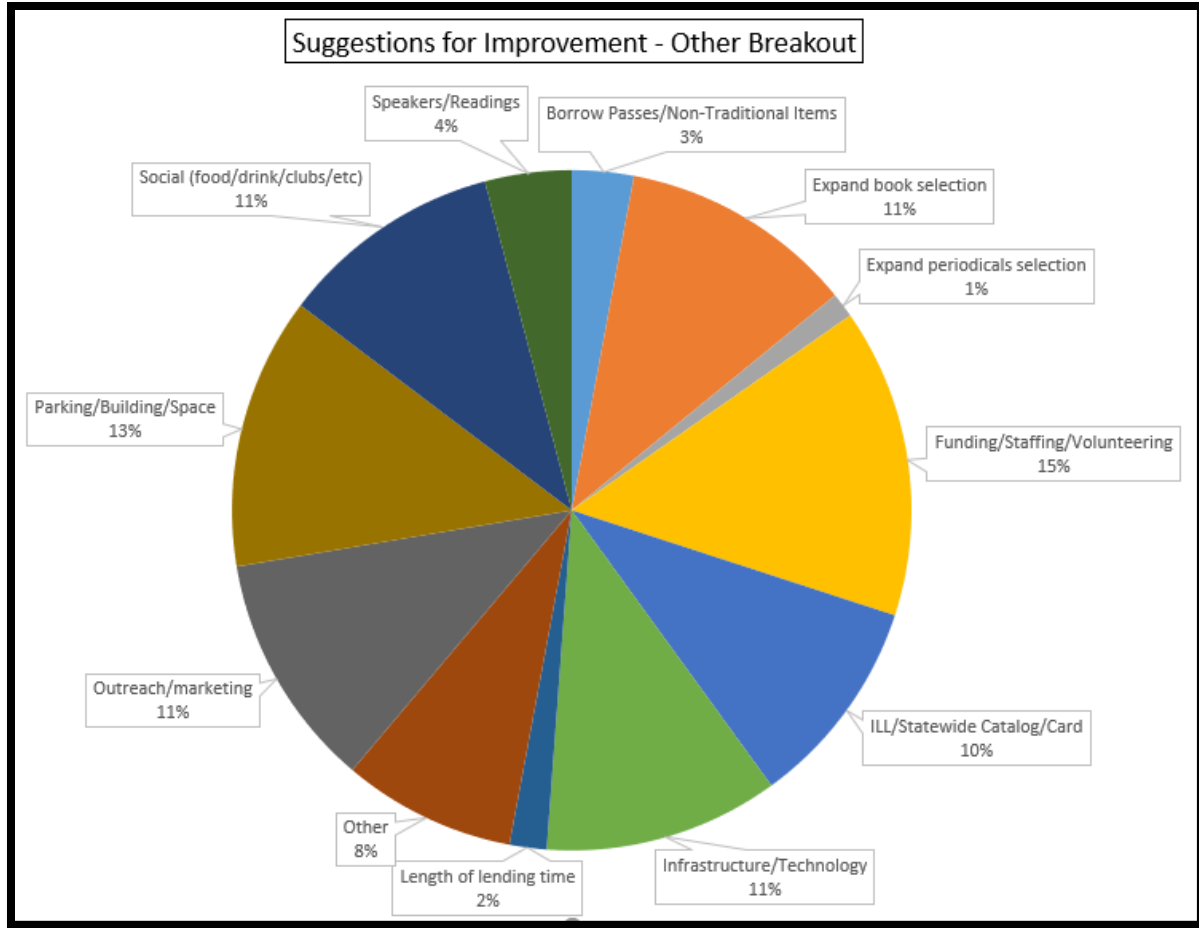
Figure 11: Suggestions for improvement – breakdown of "Other" themes

Perceived Value

The average value given to libraries increased only slightly after displaying the range of services typically offered at local libraries. With 1215 individuals responding, the value given before identifying library programs and services had an average of 4.78 (on a scale of 1-5), while the value given after identifying programs and services recorded 1226 responses with an average value of 4.79.

While there was the opportunity for respondents to add text comments attached to the "Other" responses, there were not statistically relevant themes which arose. To see these comments, readers should refer to the electronic data provided to the Department of Libraries.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Recommended Value of Library Programs and Services

After conducting the research to determine values for library programs and services and then checking those values with a librarian to see if any should be updated or adjusted for Vermont, we recommend the figures in Table 6, below, for values of some common library programs and services.

Table 6: Recommended value of library programs and services.

Program or Service	Recommended Value	Comments
Adult Program Attended	$15-20	
Youth Program Attended	$12-15	
Children's Program Attended	$10-15	Consider additional in materials or skilled support required
Park/Museum Pass Borrowed	$40-60	Based on four users
Meeting Room Use (per hour)	$25	
Computer Use (per house)	$10-15	

Note that many of these recommended values exceed those listed in Table 2 in the results section above. This is to account for inflation, the actual value of some of the services (like museum and park passes) based on our research for Vermont, and the feedback we received from an interview with a librarian about the value of these programs and services. An individual library may chose to utilize these figures in assessing their value to their community.

Marketing

At the outset of this project, Vermont's website for public data, https://data.vermont.gov, was displaying a Public Libraries dataset from 2012. The team connected the Director of Web Services at the Agency of Digital Services with the Department of Libraries to begin the process of updating contacts as well as re-establishing this data feed so that patrons can see utilization, spending, and other important details regarding libraries across the State of Vermont. The consulting team recommends follow up to ensure that this data feed is re-established successfully and maintained going forward so that these data continue to be available to the public.

The consulting team, in general, was unaware of the breadth of services offered by local libraries. To inform taxpayers of the potential benefits and personal cost savings, it is recommended to market these services similar to how a vendor would market their own services. They do this by making the argument for cost savings while maintaining stable and reliable products, which is readily transferrable to the model used by public libraries.

To make this marketing very personal and specific to individuals within the community served by each library, the consulting team recommends creating a Return on Investment calculator utilizing an online form or spreadsheet. This should be created at a centralized level and distributed for individualization

per library. This calculator should have the ability to calculate a value based on individual utilization (see "Library Use Value Calculator") but also include the individual tax rate value in order to fully show the user cost savings based on current municipal budgets and taxation.

Municipal Funding

Municipal funding and budgeting should not only be thought of as Town Meeting Day arises. Ongoing budgeting and capital planning should be a regular occurrence. Continuous communication with the governing body of the municipality is key. Without public awareness of available municipal library services, support for such funding weakens over time. The survey conducted during the development of this report has revealed that the general public is not fully aware of the potential advantages available from their municipal library which can have an impact on voting results for municipal library funding.

This report was being finalized during the COVID-19 pandemic. Libraries, as well as many other municipal and private sector services, have been forced to close their doors to consumers. For many, this has left a gap not only in personal routine, but also for those who depend on library services due to the need to leverage cost savings for their families. Now, more than ever, libraries should be positioning themselves to answer difficult questions to not only defend their existence but also to identify and focus on the value they provide to the public.

Ongoing Qualitative Analysis

The format of this survey was chosen due to its inclusion with Microsoft Office 365 and the ease of use of the Forms application and by the survey respondent. Although the consulting team utilized this Microsoft tool, there are numerous technology offerings which can serve similar functions, many of which are free or include other licensing options. For comparison across all towns and counties, the team recommends the Vermont Department of Libraries administer this survey to gain a statewide awareness of how Vermonters feel about their libraries and that individual libraries conduct similar outreach efforts in their communities to identify local attitudes and desires. The consulting team recommends repeating the survey on an annual basis for awareness of community needs and gathering input for improvement. Ongoing feedback in the form of a survey allows the library to "take the pulse" of the public it serves and decrease many pressures felt during budget approval. It allows the library to more readily answer the "what's in it for me?" questions that ultimately arise when asking residents to open their wallets. It will also allow libraries and the Department of Libraries to better understand what patrons want out of their libraries and which services and programs are most valuable to the public.

It should be noted that the consulting team was not aware of the difference between a municipal and incorporated library at the launch of the survey. Once the survey was launched, we were unable to edit questions without negating the value or intent of those responses which were already received. Therefore, although the Front Porch Forum ad language was revised, the question related to presence of a municipal library was not changed mid-survey. The big takeaway is that language does matter, and potential survey questions should be reviewed and tested beforehand to avoid confusion whenever possible.

The consulting team recommends that the Department of Libraries make the full dataset resulting from the survey available to all public libraries and the public. This information can be sorted per town to give each individual library a resource of comments, feedback, and areas suggested for improvement specific

to each library. This may provide important insight for individual libraries and help them determine where they want to focus their efforts going forward.

Process Improvement

The consulting team sees great value in undertaking a continuous improvement exercise at the individual library level. These exercises map processes and business flows in order to eliminate waste and increase efficiencies. Once processes and offerings are accurately and thoroughly documented, these can be reviewed for opportunities for cost-saving or greater efficiency and marketed and tracked accordingly to demonstrate a commitment to process improvement and responsible use of funding.

There is also much value in developing a standard 'menu' from which each library can select programs and services that would most benefit its patrons. Standardization of offerings can be individualized per municipality while eliminating the need for each library to reinvent base concepts and marketing tools.

It is worth noting that the Department of Libraries may wish to enter into master contracts from which local libraries can purchase goods and services with a bill back to the individual library. These goods and services can range from office supplies and furniture to computer hardware, infrastructure, and Library Management Systems. Having a consistent and centralized approach to purchasing available systems and products will open the potential for cross-municipality training and sharing of resources. Many vendors also provide reduced rates for bulk purchases through these types of contracts.

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Appendix

Client Consultant Agreement

Vermont Department of Human Resources
Center for Achievement in Public Service
Vermont Public Manager Program

Consulting Skills Project
Client-Consultant Agreement

Client Department/Agency: Agency of Administration/Department of Libraries

Client Contact: Jason Broughton, State Librarian
Telephone: 802-636-0031   **Mobile Phone: 802-359-3178**
Email: jason.broughton@vermont.gov

Project Working Title: Economic Impact of Public Libraries in Vermont

Brief Project Description: (based on original proposal, revised to reflect changes)

The Vermont Department of Libraries seeks to answer the following questions:

   (1) What is the value-add of library services to Vermonters in financial term?
   (2) What are the economic implications for Vermonters and the Department of Libraries?

Answering this question may involve data drawn from a variety of sources, including (but not limited to) annual reporting data collected by the Vermont Department of Libraries, Division of Library Advancement, the US Census, the Agency of Commerce and Community Development and others to demonstrate the economic impact of public libraries.

The biggest catalyst for pursuing this work is to examine the economic landscape of public libraries across Vermont and the return on investment related to comparable economic actions and spending trends.

1

Vermont Department of Human Resources
Center for Achievement in Public Service
Vermont Public Manager Program

Expected Outcome (objective of the project):
This project will include an analysis which articulates the economic implications for how the Department supports Vermonters and how the Department can continue to do so more economically. A successful outcome will include valuation of library resources in comparison to the private sector, including a return on investment for members of the public and, indirectly, the Department of Libraries. This analysis and comparison of public library data should be utilized to promote public libraries to Vermonters about the value of having a library within the community along with the valuation of resources, products, and platforms.

Deliverables (to include the following, but may also include items specific to the project):
1. Quantify the monetary value of public library assets including physical and digital holdings, library programs, and services available;
2. Identify the value of public libraries to the typical family in real dollars;
3. Identify return on investment of public libraries by comparing the cost of services/offerings to private sector and the correlation to average municipal tax allocation to library budgets;
4. Qualitative analysis of current mood toward public libraries by garnering public/patron/community feedback;
5. Recommend concepts for public outreach and marketing efforts to raise awareness and increase library assets utilization.

Assumptions:
1. The Department of Libraries has existing criteria for categorizing libraries as Large, Small, Rural, and Tiny;
2. Public libraries have already been categorized based on size;
3. For comparison/feedback, a subset of libraries and/or communities will be selected by the consulting team as representative samples. The team welcomes input from the Department on particular libraries that they would like evaluated.

2

Vermont Department of Human Resources
Center for Achievement in Public Service
Vermont Public Manager Program

General Timeline (key dates):
1. January/February 2020 – Client touchbase/progress update
2. 4/6/2020 – Consulting Report Draft Due
3. 5/11/2020- Final Report Due
4. May/June 2020 – Presentation of final report; date TBD based on client and team availability

Consulting team will provide:
1. Deliverables included in this agreement including a final report of findings.
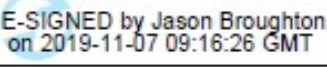
Client will provide:
1. Support and information to team as necessary to provide deliverables;
2. Follow through needed on any recommended ideas contained within final report.

3

Vermont Department of Human Resources
Center for Achievement in Public Service
Vermont Public Manager Program
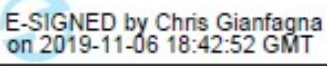
Signed:

For the client:

Name: _____E-SIGNED by Jason Broughton_____
        on 2019-11-07 09:16:26 GMT
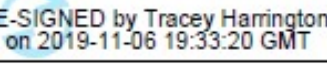
Title _State Librarian_____

For the Consultant Team:
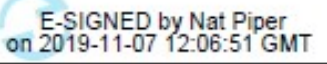
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(contact person)
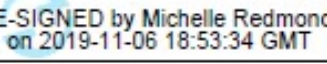
Title _Environmental Program Manager_____

Name: _____E-SIGNED by Tracey Harrington_____
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Title _IT Manager_____

Name: _____E-SIGNED by Nat Piper_____
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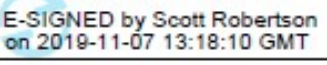
Title _Business, Legislative, and Community Relations Coordinator_

Name: _____E-SIGNED by Michelle Redmond_____
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Title _AOT Technician VII_____

Name: _____E-SIGNED by Scott Robertson_____
        on 2019-11-07 13:18:10 GMT

Title _Project Manager III_____

4

Summary Survey Responses

This appendix includes the summary of the survey results, including graphs. This summary may also be accessed electronically by visiting the Survey Analysis Page referenced in the work cited section of this report.

1. In which town do you live?

More Details

Town	Count	Town	Count	Town	Count
Addison	5	Bridgewater	0	Danville	9
Albany	5	Bridport	2	Derby	2
Alburgh	3	Brighton	1	Dorset	4
Andover	0	Bristol	10	Dover	0
Arlington	3	Brookfield	8	Dummerston	4
Athens	0	Brookline	2	Duxbury	5
Averill	1	Brownington	1	East Haven	0
Avery's Gore	0	Brunswick	0	East Montpelier	8
Bakersfield	0	Buels Gore	0	Eden	2
Baltimore	1	Burke	3	Elmore	3
Barnard	0	Burlington	52	Enosburgh	5
Barnet	1	Cabot	34	Essex	23
Barre City	16	Calais	6	Fair Haven	4
Barre Town	16	Cambridge	5	Fairfax	3
Barton	3	Canaan	0	Fairfield	1
Belvidere	1	Castleton	8	Fairlee	5
Bennington	5	Cavendish	6	Fayston	0
Benson	0	Charleston	0	Ferdinand	0
Berkshire	2	Charlotte	3	Ferrisburgh	9
Berlin	9	Chelsea	6	Fletcher	2
Bethel	1	Chester	2	Franklin	1
Bloomfield	0	Chittenden	3	Georgia	4
Bolton	3	Clarendon	0	Glastenbury	0
Bradford	3	Colchester	15	Glover	4
Braintree	3	Concord	0	Goshen	0
Brandon	11	Corinth	3	Grafton	1
Brattleboro	11	Cornwall	5	Granby	0
		Coventry	0	Grand Isle	5
		Craftsbury	1	Granville	2
		Danby	3	Greensboro	5

Groton	0	Marlboro	1	Pomfret	0
Guildhall	0	Marshfield	5	Poultney	13
Guilford	7	Mendon	2	Pownal	1
Halifax	6	Middlebury	10	Proctor	2
Hancock	1	Middlesex	10	Putney	20
Hardwick	5	Middletown Springs	8	Randolph	11
Hartford	2	Milton	8	Reading	1
Hartland	34	Monkton	5	Readsboro	1
Highgate	3	Montgomery	2	Richford	0
Hinesburg	13	Montpelier	59	Richmond	10
Holland	0	Moretown	7	Ripton	2
Hubbardton	1	Morgan	2	Rochester	3
Huntington	7	Morristown	13	Rockingham	6
Hyde Park	23	Mount Holly	0	Roxbury	1
Ira	0	Mount Tabor	0	Royalton	4
Irasburg	3	New Haven	4	Rupert	0
Isle La Motte	1	Newark	0	Rutland	15
Jamaica	1	Newbury	3	Ryegate	0
Jay	0	Newfane	12	Salisbury	0
Jericho	11	Newport City	1	Sandgate	3
Johnson	6	Newport Town	1	Searsburg	0
Killington	1	North Hero	3	Shaftsbury	2
Kirby	0	Northfield	18	Sharon	1
Landgrove	0	Norton	0	Sheffield	3
Leicester	1	Norwich	1	Shelburne	22
Lemington	1	Orange	0	Sheldon	3
Lewis	0	Orwell	2	Shoreham	3
Lincoln	9	Panton	1	Shrewsbury	2
Londonderry	2	Pawlet	4	Somerset	0
Lowell	1	Peacham	3	South Burlington	10
Ludlow	2	Peru	0	South Hero	10
Lunenburg	0	Pittsfield	0	Springfield	11
Lyndon	4	Pittsford	4	St. Albans City	18
Maidstone	0	Plainfield	7	St. Albans Town	9
Manchester	1	Plymouth	1	St. George	2

St. Johnsbury	2		Weathersfield	5	
Stamford	1		Wells	4	
Stannard	0		West Fairlee	0	
Starksboro	11		West Haven	0	
Stockbridge	0		West Rutland	1	
Stowe	8		West Windsor	1	
Strafford	1		Westfield	0	
Stratton	4		Westford	11	
Sudbury	2		Westminster	6	
Sunderland	0		Westmore	2	
Sutton	2		Weston	0	
Swanton	7		Weybridge	3	
Thetford	1		Wheelock	4	
Tinmouth	2		Whiting	0	
Topsham	0		Whitingham	5	
Townshend	5		Williamstown	19	
Troy	1		Williston	25	
Tunbridge	2		Wilmington	0	
Underhill	13		Windham	2	
Vergennes	5		Windsor	4	
Vernon	1		Winhall	1	
Vershire	0		Winooski	7	
Victory	0		Wolcott	4	
Waitsfield	12		Woodbury	6	
Walden	2		Woodford	0	
Wallingford	7		Woodstock	0	
Waltham	0		Worcester	6	
Wardsboro	57				
Warner's Grant	0				
Warren	4				
Warren's Gore	0				
Washington	4				
Waterbury	27				
Waterford	2				
Waterville	0				

2. What is your age?

🔵 0-17	1
🟠 18-25	8
🟢 26-35	113
🔴 36-45	162
🟣 46-60	299
🟤 61-75	489
🟣 76+	99
⚫ Prefer not to answer	18
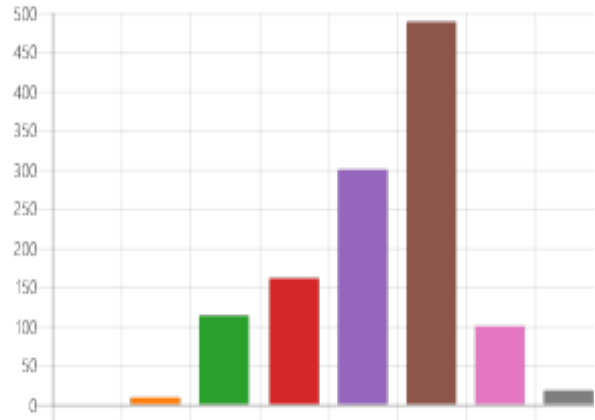
3. How many people reside in your household?

🔵 1	216
🟠 2	561
🟢 3	162
🔴 4	146
🟣 5	35
🟤 6	17
🟣 7+	5
⚫ Prefer not to answer	3
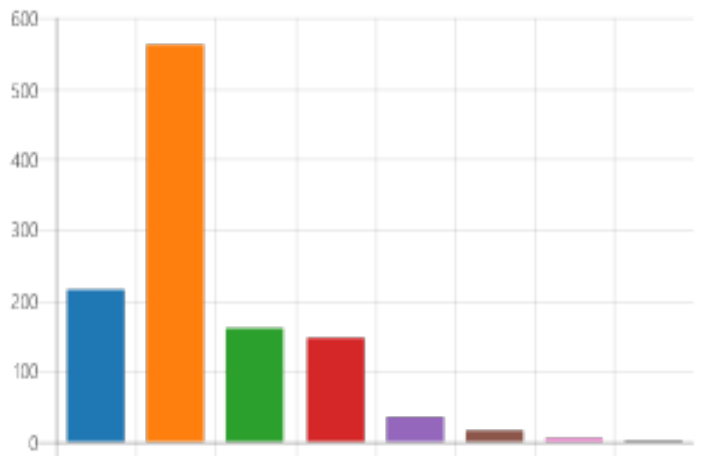
4. Do you have a public municipal library in your town?

🔵 Yes	1075
🟠 No	133
🟢 I don't know	13

5. Do you have a library card?

🔵 Yes	1115
🟠 No	101

6. Please rate the following statements regarding your public municipal library

🟧 Strongly Disagree   🟧 Somewhat Disagree   ⬜ Neutral   🟦 Somewhat Agree   🟦 Strongly Agree

Public libraries are assets to their communities.

I am aware of the services provided by public libraries.

Public libraries provide cost-savings to me/my family.

7. What value do you give public libraries in Vermont? *On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is the least value and 5 is the most value:*

1215	4.78
Responses	*Average Number*

8. On average, how many times per month do you visit a public library?

🔵 0	145
🟠 1-2	432
🟢 3-4	317
🔴 5+	328

9. Were you previously aware of the range of services/programs offered at public libraries in Vermont?

🔵 Yes	1116
🟠 No	109

10. Taking into consideration the range of services/programs, what value do you give public libraries in Vermont? *On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is the least value and 5 is the most value:*
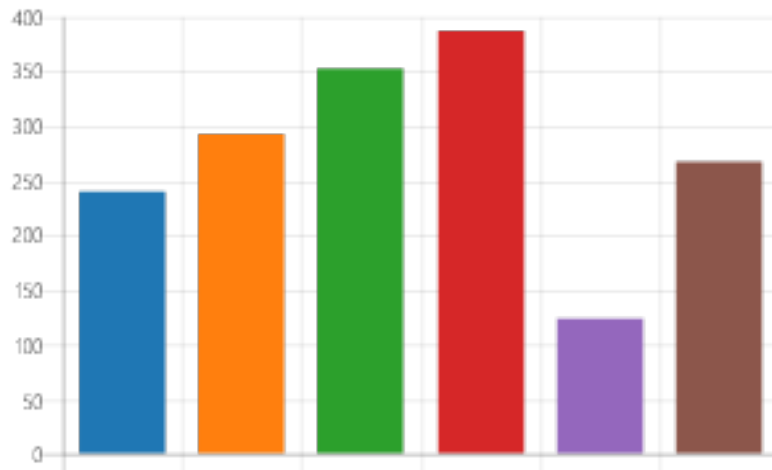
| 1226	4.79
Responses	*Average Number*

11. What are your suggestions for improving services/programs offered at your municipal library?

🔵 Offer programs at more conve…	240
🟠 Expand digital content offerings	293
🟢 Expand class offerings	352
🔴 Convenience of hours	388
🟣 Job training	124
🟤 Other	267

12. How did you hear about this survey?

🔵 Visiting my library	50	
🟠 Library/town website	77	
🟢 Social Media	166	
🔴 Front Porch Forum	844	
🟣 Friend	73	
🟤 Other	62	
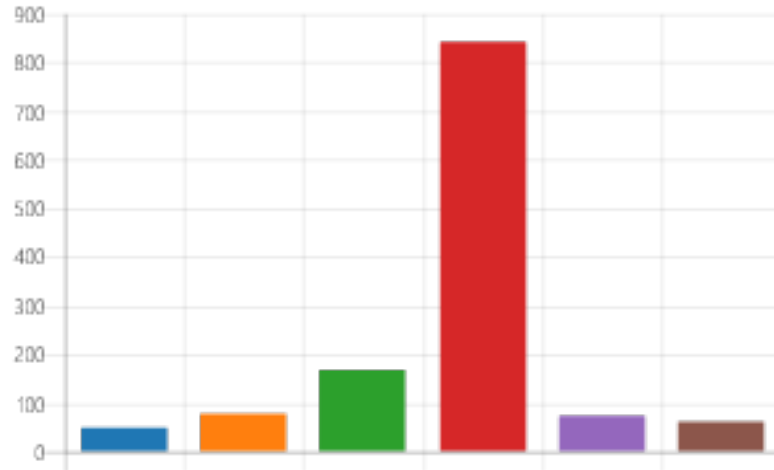
13. How would you prefer to receive information about/from your municipal library?

🔵 Email	758
🟠 Social Media	356
🟢 Phone call	15
🔴 Newspaper	202
🟣 Bulletin board at library	154
🟤 Front Porch Forum	655
🩷 Municipal website	157
⚫ Other	52
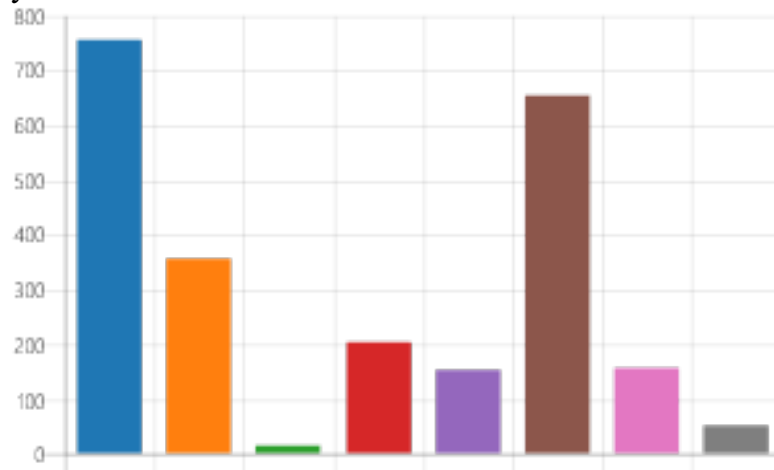
14. Comments/Feedback

454 Specific comments were received as responses to question 14. These comments were provided to the Department of Libraries in electronic format and can be obtained by contacting the Department.