Voter Perceptions of Libraries: Results and Methodology from the 2018 From Awareness to Funding Study

RIPL Webinar Series
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Voter Perceptions of Libraries: Results and Methodology from the 2018 From Awareness to Funding Study

Brief time travel to 2008

Image by Andrew Martin from Pixabay
2008 OCLC report

- Behavioral and psychological drivers
- Usage is a weak indicator
- Perceptions of library staff are key
- Power of transformative libraries
- Support claims are not commitments
- Awareness gaps persist

Strategic responses to 2008 report

- OCLC’s Geek the Library campaign
- PLA’s Turning the Page training
- ALA’s Libraries Transform campaign
- ALA Advocacy Bootcamp training
- EveryLibrary political action campaign
- Local recalibrations
- Rise of social networks
- Video streaming
- Smart phones, tablets, Kindles
- The Great Recession
- Millennials in the workforce
- 3 presidential elections
- Gig economy

2018 questions

- What do today’s voters think of the library?
- How does that impact support for library funding?
- How does that inform library advocacy strategy?

[Image by Gerd Altmann on Pixabay](https://pixabay.com)
A research collaboration

- Leo Burnett USA
- ALA/PLA
  - Barb Macikas
  - Larra Clark
  - Marci Merola
- Public Library Advisors
  - Vailey Oehlke
  - Pam Sandlian Smith
  - Gina Millsap
  - Susan DiMattia

Used a Research Panel to

- Reach the “right” audience
- Ensure a diverse audience
- Use weighting for a representative sample
- Generalize the findings confidently
Highlights of comparative findings

Most voters say they would vote in favor of local library funding.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2018</th>
<th>Would probably vote in favor</th>
<th>Would definitely vote in favor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
But fewer voters are committed to library support than in 2008.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Probably Vote in Favor</th>
<th>Definitely Vote in Favor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Voters support federal funding for libraries.

76% say the federal government should either...

- Increase funding for public libraries: 38%
- Keep it the same: 38%
But many are confused about the sources of library funding.

A majority of voters are willing to donate money to libraries.

- **59%** of voters think most library funding comes from non-local sources (e.g., state, federal, donations, fines, and fees).
- **86%** of funding comes from local sources (IMLS, 2015).

- **61%** have either contributed or are willing to contribute to fundraising efforts in support of their local libraries.
Most voters value public libraries as an essential local institution and a source of community pride.

- **Essential local institution**: 55% in 2018
- **Source of community pride**: 53% in 2018

But even more did a decade ago.

- **Essential local institution**: 55% in 2018, 71% in 2008
- **Source of community pride**: 53% in 2018, 73% in 2008
For most voters, libraries remain relevant in the Internet age.

- Internet is equivalent to libraries: 27% (2018), 26% (2008)
- Book retailers are easier: 19% (2018), 15% (2008)
- Libraries are unnecessary in Internet age: 13% (2018), 13% (2008)
- Internet makes libraries obsolete: 24% (2018), 14% (2008)

Traditional services are still very important to most voters.

- Quiet space
- Free, broad range of materials
- Convenient hours and location
- Free internet, computers, Wi-Fi

And a majority give their library high ratings on those services.
A majority of voters rate library staff qualities as very important.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff Quality</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friendly and approachable</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert connector to information and resources</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaches how to find trustworthy information</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes library a place for fun and creativity</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>True advocate for lifelong learning</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knows what books children would love</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ratings of local library staff qualities declined since 2008.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff Quality</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friendly and approachable</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is lifelong learning advocate</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has community knowledge</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knows how to address needs</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has excellent computer skills</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is well known in community</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
More voters today see their library as a resource for job skills, immigrants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helps to provide people with workplace skills</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services for immigrants, non-English speakers</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fewer voters see the library’s role in children’s lives than did in 2008.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent for homework help</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent preparation for school</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not as important in kids’ lives</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
More voters today say it’s important for the library to be a community hub.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activities, entertainment not found elsewhere</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be a place for people to gather and socialize</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support civic discourse and community building</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

And more voters see their local library as a hub today.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2008</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activities, entertainment not found elsewhere</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be a place for people to gather and socialize</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is a frequent social hub for the community</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support civic discourse and community building</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Market Segment Analysis

Segmentation algorithm

- Demographics
- Voting behavior
  - Library voting support
- Funding attitudes
- Awareness and use of libraries
- Perceptions of libraries
- Perceptions of librarians
Segmentation algorithm

Library Support Pyramid

SUPER SUPPORTERS

PROBABLE SUPPORTERS
- Just For Fun
- Kid Driven
- Library As Office
- Look to Librarians
- Greater Good

28.6%
39.3%
25.6%
6.5%

PEARLS TO SUPPORT
- Financially Strapped
- Detached
- The Web Wins

CHRONIC NON-VOTERS
“Barriers to Support” Tier

SUPER SUPPORTERS

PROBABLE SUPPORTERS
- Just For Fun
- Kid Driven
- Library As Office
- Look to Librarians
- Greater Good

BARRIERS TO SUPPORT
- Financially Strapped
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- The Web Wins

CHRONIC NON-VOTERS

The Web Wins segment
“Probable Supporters” Tier

SUPER SUPPORTERS

PROBABLE SUPPORTERS
- Just For Fun
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- Greater Good

BARRIERS TO SUPPORT
- Financially Strapped
- Detached
- The Web Wins

CHRONIC NON-VOTERS

Library as Office segment
Kid Driven segment

“Super Supporters” Tier

SUPER SUPPORTERS

PROBABLE SUPPORTERS
- Just For Fun
- Kid Driven
- Library As Office
- Look to Librarians
- Greater Good

BARRIERS TO SUPPORT
- Financially Strapped
- Detached
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CHRONIC NON-VOTERS
Super Supporters

So now what?
People-centered approaches

- Cultivate and steward strategic relationships
- Help your Super Supporters support
- Break through the distractions, overcome the “meh”
- Practice human-centered design (“design thinking”)
- Apply an equity lens to outreach, services, programs
- Target with segment-based marketing
- Your creativity, fun, and hope are infectious
- (Re)assess and (re)evaluate iteratively
- Partner with local market researchers to probe further

Resources

- Dig into the data, explore the research: oc.lc/awareness2018
- Hold community and stakeholder discussions
- Join the From Awareness to Funding Facebook Group: www.facebook.com/groups/FATF2018
- Revisit OCLC, PLA, ALA (and other) advocacy resources www.webjunction.org/explore-topics/advocacy.html
- Send WebJunction your ideas and requests for programming, training, resources: streamss@oclc.org
thank you
RIPL Webinar Series

Power Up Reports with Google

September 24, 2019 1:00-2:00 Eastern/10:00-11:00 Pacific
Lynn Hoffman, Director of Operations
Somerset County Library System of New Jersey

Thank You!

Webinar evaluation:
https://s.lrs.org/voter