

LIBRARY STRATEGIES



Rolling Meadows Library Community Survey | Summary Report



BACKGROUND

Between August and December, 2024, Library Strategies partnered with Rolling Meadows Library (RML) on a broad-based strategic planning process. As part of a multi-pronged community engagement phase of work, the consulting team crafted and administered an online community survey between October 2 and November 8. This was offered in three languages: English, Spanish, and Polish.

This questionnaire aimed to capture satisfaction with and perceptions of the public institution as it exists today, and to pinpoint unmet or undermet needs. Data shared for – and trends uncovered by – this survey influenced topics probed in the focus group step of community engagement activities. Survey input also directly informs many of the LSCG consulting team’s short- and long-term recommendations for RML.

In total, **767** residents participated in the 20-question questionnaire. This number significantly outpaces the consulting team’s stated minimum threshold of:

(#1) 500 completed response sets or

(#2) 1% of the library’s legal service area as defined by IMLS (in this case, approx. 242).

Respondents were ensured anonymity to encourage candor and a high response rate. However, questions and answer sets – including anonymous free-form responses to qualitative questions – can be provided to Rolling Meadows Library management separately upon request.

Note: Strong response rates notwithstanding, the broad distribution strategies employed preclude a truly “scientific” analysis of data. Nevertheless, we believe such a large respondent pool allows us to extrapolate trends and perceptions with reasonable accuracy.

DEMOGRAPHICS / CHARACTERISTICS

Seventy percent of respondents (529 ct.) self-report visiting Rolling Meadows Library at least once a month, and so can safely be termed *regular users*. In contrast, only about 11% (85 ct.) of survey-takers report that they “Never” or “Rarely” visit the libraries. (The remainder fall somewhere in between.)

This uneven distribution pattern is not surprising. RML’s heaviest users and biggest boosters are almost by definition easier for the Library to reach with an exercise like this one. However, surveying skip logic (see also: Q4) and data tagging allows us to determine if/where opinions meaningfully diverge based on a respondent’s self-reported library usage patterns.

That can also be said for other demographic characteristics. Participation rates were reasonably even among generational cohorts, excepting residents aged < 29 years (who are underrepresented at only 3.7% of the total).

The data skews female, with women accounting for 76% of all respondents. The respondent pool also diverges from the demographic composition of Rolling Meadows in two other respects. Compared against recent U.S. Census data, highly educated residents (holding an undergraduate degree or higher) are overrepresented in the sample set. White residents, although a majority within the community, are nevertheless also overrepresented among survey-takers.

Despite those limitations in the raw data set, we believe that such a large respondent pool still allows us to extrapolate trends and perceptions with reasonable accuracy.

QUESTION-BY-QUESTION BREAKDOWNS

Notes:

1. Question-by-question breakdowns are in some cases reordered, and in others joined together, for best flow and minimal redundancy.
2. Themes and takeaways captured here represent dominant sentiments unless specifically noted otherwise.
3. Direct quotes are used when particularly illustrative and representative of more general sentiments, but always in quotation marks.

Q2. How do you find out information about the Library? (Check all that apply.)

Answered: 759 / Skipped: 8

When asked how they stay alerted about resources, happenings, and other opportunities offered through RML, a majority indicated reliance on the library's own internal, digital communications channels: the website [rmlib.org] (65%), e-newsletter (47%), and social media (28%). However, word of mouth from neighbors, local friends, co-workers, etc. is also a vital consideration (26%). Word of mouth and community partners play a particularly important in the Spanish-speaking community.

When invited to share additional, less traditional ways in which they learn about library activities, several dozen also specified in-library advertisements (particularly flyers) and/or RML's periodic, print-format newsletters.

Q3. In the last two years, for what reasons have you used the library?

Answered: 674 / Skipped: 93

A majority of survey respondents who visit RML do so - at least in large part - for traditional, transactional reasons. Ninety percent (604 ct.) check out physical materials, and 47% (317 ct.) utilize the Library's holds system and pick-up shelves. In addition, well over half (59%, 400 ct.) enjoy or find value in browsing the available collections.

Also high among the offerings listed on the survey, and in descending order, patrons report using the Library to: attend a children's program or event (30.3%, 204 ct.), read or study (27%, 182 ct.), attend an adult program or lecture (26.7%, 180 ct.), utilize print/copy/fax services (24.6%, 166 ct.), and get help from RML staff (21.5%, 145 ct.)

In addition, 146 respondents took the opportunity to expand the list provided with free-form answers. Repeated themes include tax and notary assistance; the children's play area; volunteering; and the on-site café amenities.

Q4. What are some reasons you don't use Rolling Meadows Library or its resources? (Check all that apply.) Q5. Elaborate on any of the above as you choose.

Answered: 75 / Skipped: 692

When asked why they do not visit RML, nonusers and sporadic visitors stated that they find what they need on the open internet (30.7%, 23 ct.), that they simply don't need a library (26.7%, 20 ct.), that they prefer to buy their own books/materials (16%, 12 ct.), and that their young families have "aged out" of the library (16%, 12 ct.)

In the open-ended section of this question, infrequent visitors volunteered two further reasons for their usage pattern: they are simply too busy to patronize the library and/or feel the facility is "outdated" – particularly when compared to other public libraries within a short driving radius.

Note: A further 6.7% of respondents report utilizing the Library, but *only* for its online resources, and so self-identified as sporadic or nonusers for the purposes of the survey.

Q6. How satisfied are you with the following aspects of Rolling Meadows Library operations?

Answered: 684 / Skipped: 83

Feedback on this key question offers a high level but meaningful "report card" on the Library's overall performance as judged by the public. With a survey sample set this size, Library Strategies flags areas that meet or pass the 5% threshold for dissatisfaction, and is *most* interested in areas that exceed the 10% yardstick.

In Q8, survey-takers rated 16 aspects of RML operations ranging from physical areas (ex., children's areas, meeting rooms), to hours of operation, to staff helpfulness and friendliness.

Only one of the factors in question hit the 10% threshold: the library's website, which notched a 10.8% dissatisfaction rate. Respondents report that it is "outdated" in appearance and both unintuitive and unreliable in functionality. Specific examples offered up repeatedly include a program sign-up protocol that is "low-tech and cumbersome," confusing site navigation, and a general aesthetic that is both outmoded and off-putting.

In addition, 4 of the 15 remaining operational considerations scored a dissatisfaction rating between 5%-10%.

Feature / Trait	Dissatisfaction Rate
Children's Area	7.24%
Online Catalog	6.55%
Restrooms	6.04%
Facility (Overall)	5.87%

- RML's **children's area** compares unfavorably with those maintained by other nearby libraries, including Schaumburg and Arlington Heights. It is well-loved but well-worn – and does not offer many of the fixtures and amenities that many families are starting to expect.

- Much like the website, RML’s **catalog** is unintuitive to use. In addition, basic searches often turn up unrelated results. Both novice and veteran users of the catalog report these frustrations, though the latter group are oftentimes able to find serviceable workarounds for themselves within Vega.
- **Restrooms** are critiqued less for their day-to-day cleanliness than for their apparent age. In the telling words of one survey-taker: “These restrooms are from the 1950s.”
- Commentary about the children’s area and restrooms are representative of the public’s attitude towards the **facility** as a whole. On balance, the Martin Lane building presents as somewhat careworn and distinctly “outdated.” Critiques are exacerbated by the high concentration of public libraries in the general vicinity, giving many patrons direct points of reference on how a modern public library *could* look.

Q7. Please check whether you are satisfied with the following aspects of CPL collections and resources.

Answered: 682 / Skipped: 85

As noted above, Library Strategies concentrates attention on areas that meet or pass the 5% threshold for dissatisfaction – and is *most* interested in areas that exceed the 10% yardstick. In this case, none of the 15 factors listed hit the 5% dissatisfaction rate. With that said, two came quite close and so merit a brief mention.

Feature / Trait	Dissatisfaction Rate
Books for Adults	4.58%
eBooks	4.35%

- Where it is reported, dissatisfaction with the library’s **books for adults** appears to hold true across the library’s collections (i.e. not confined to one genre or specific sections). Survey-takers report a need for weeding (and occasional dusting), difficulty procuring new releases, extended waiting periods for popular items, and a desire for greater variety with their reading area(s) of interest. More books in Spanish for adults rises to a level of concern among Spanish-language respondents.
- Put succinctly, patrons who utilize **ebooks** desire one or both of two things: a wider selection of titles to choose from, and shorter wait periods. Books on offer do not always feel well matched with what is popular, and items that are popular often have inordinately long wait periods.

Q8. Please check whether or not you are satisfied with the following aspects of Library programs, events, and outreach:

Answered: 671 / Skipped: 96

As part of Q8, the survey asked participants to score 7 dimensions of library programming and outreach. Only one scored a dissatisfaction rate of +5%: “*Awareness of Library Services, Classes, and Events*” (6.91%). However, given the *nature* of awareness, it also warrants noting the high “I Don’t Know” rate for this poll question: 19.37%.

Representative comments offered in the open-ended response section of Q8 include:

- “I would like more information on library events.”
- “It would be nice if orientation was available so we know all of the services that are available.”
- “The library should promote its services. Readers services have been doing many great things.”
- “I did not know the library offered deliver[ed] materials to the homebound.”

As that last comment suggests, survey-takers are especially surprised, confused, or otherwise uninformed about the Library To-Go services available through Rolling Meadows Library:

- “I had no idea there was a Library to Go outreach service. That’s something I would love to help with!”
- “I didn’t even know there was Library To-Go Outreach Services!”
- “I found out about the Library-To-Go Service when I worked here and I think that it is wonderful! I also think that it needs to be advertised better.”

Q9. Which library services are currently important to your family? Q10. Which do you expect to be important to you or your family in five years?

Answered: 648 / Skipped: 119

It is valuable to pair and contrast these questions. While the first is straightforward, the second probes patrons’ aspirations and reasonable guesses about their family’s evolving needs as they will look in half a decade. As a rule of thumb, Library Strategies flags any +/- ≥10% difference for closer review.

According to this self-assessment metric, only two of these show any decrease whatsoever. ** In contrast, patrons forecast at least some increased desire/need for the remaining 16 services.

Ten of these hit and surpass the +/- ≥5% threshold:

1. Tween and Teen Programs (+13.2%)
2. Large Print Materials (+10.7%)
3. Reading and Study Spaces (+10.3%)
4. eBooks & e-Audiobooks (+8.3%)
5. Access to Computers and Related Technology (6.9%)

6. Free WiFi (+6.3%)
7. Magazines & Newspapers (+6.3%)
8. Computers Classes or Assistance (+6.2%)
9. Adult Classes, Lectures, or Events (+5.8%)
10. Employment Resources (+5.4%)

*** Note: Categories that registered a decrease are “Children’s Storytimes” and “Children’s Summer Reading Program.” This is a polling trend common to the majority of communities where Library Strategies surveys, and can be attributed at least in large part to parents who can easily conceptualize their young children “growing out of” children’s activities and “growing into” library programming geared towards teen/tween audiences. However, a yet-to-be-born cohort of the library’s littlest patrons will likely make up for this seeming deficit, netting a marginal if any true decrease in the community’s need for children’s resources and services.*

Q11. What, if any, classes, programs, resources, or library services do you think could be provided that are not currently offered?

Answered: 226 / Skipped: 541

Suggestions ran a wide gamut, but a plurality include some element of personal enrichment and/or social interaction for the Library’s adult audiences. Ideas expressed most frequently included:

- “Life skill” classes (ex., job searching, financial literacy, cybersecurity, navigating Medicare, misinformation spotting, language learning).
- Activities and/or partnerships centered around mental health and wellbeing (ex., yoga, mindfulness, nutrition).
- Craft programs and clubs, with an emphasis on sewing, knitting, and related activities.
- Makerspace amenities, akin to those offered at the “destination worthy” public studios maintained in Arlington Heights and Palatine.

Programs and activities targeted to younger demographics are not a strong focus in Q11 (but are addressed elsewhere, ex. Q6 and Q12).

Q12. How could your satisfaction with library services or resources be increased? (Feel free to reiterate or cite earlier answers – or to skip if you have already addressed this point to your satisfaction.)

Answered: 173 / Skipped: 594

One in five survey-takers offered additional input through this question. Where they exist, recurrent themes are familiar from feedback offered as part of prior questions:

- 1. Children’s Area:** Families desire (and basing off experiences at other suburban libraries, are increasingly coming to *expect*) a larger, more visually inviting, and better equipped children’s area. Notably, this critique is coupled with appreciation for what RML does *already* offer. In the words of one: “Libraries are so important for families with small children. There aren’t many public spaces where children can learn and play and parents don’t have to worry about paying a fee.”
- 2. Makerspace:** As with the children’s area, RML draws unsolicited and unfavorable comparisons with nearby libraries (particularly Palatine and Arlington Heights) when it comes to maker amenities. While the latter are both public and located near enough to be convenient for many Rolling Meadows residents, there is no reciprocity agreement in effect; RML cardholders are effectively “shut out” from much of what those other makerspaces offer to their patrons.
- 3. Website + Catalog:** RML’s online presence is central to the library experience – and for many, their first point of reference. As noted previously, patrons suggest that the layout is outdated, confusing to navigate, and does not sufficiently capture the mission and offerings of the Rolling Meadows Library.
- 4. Self-Checkout:** Survey-takers express a desire for a self-checkout option (*in addition to* but not *instead of* a process involving staff). For some, this is purely a matter of convenience. For others, there is a privacy element. They would prefer not to interact with staff, fearing they may judge their checkout selections. While respondents usually cite one reason or the other, these two considerations are not mutually exclusive.

Q13. What about the library system as it exists today would you like to make sure is kept or maintained into the future? Q14. Please add any additional comments.

Answered: 283 / Skipped: 484

Many survey-takers took this optional opportunity to express that Rolling Meadows Library, though imperfect, is a valuable and valued community resource.

Staff are called out for particular praise: for their knowledgeability, friendliness, and commitment to the work (which in turn encompasses everything from readers’ advisory to one-on-one tech assistance). Their presence and demeanor does much to warm and enliven an atmosphere that the aging facility tends to detracts from.

Secondary focus areas included:

1. **Physical Books:** Survey-takers express anxiety that physical collections will be de-prioritized in favor of digital formats (at their local library but also across society more generally). They share that this perceived pattern runs contrary to their wishes and personal usage patterns.
2. **Library of Things:** Patrons who are familiar with the L.O.T. note appreciation for the existing offerings and hope that it can expand in future. While not a L.O.T. tie-in per se, respondents are likewise keen to see continuation of RML's museum access pass program.
3. **Technology:** While maker amenities are desired because of their difficulty for consumers to access elsewhere, RML's on-site computers are valued for essentially the opposite reason. In our increasingly tech-driven world, residents without access and aptitude for "basic" technologies (like PCs and printers) can easily be left behind. RML is a practical check against this happening, because it offers both computers and staff who can provide a measure of handholding and troubleshooting assistance when needed.
4. **Interlibrary loan:** ILL is valued by those who take advantage. The service does much to make up for the fact that RML's circulating collections are lighter in some areas than readers of that genre/topic would like.