

Executive Summary: Outreach Services Community Assessment

Rationale:

Over the summer, West Fargo Public Library conducted its first large-scale outreach route with the Little Red Reading Bus. This route was a fantastic success, reaching people who would otherwise not have participated in the library's Summer Boost program and getting library cards into underserved communities. This work was built on years of prior successes of the Little Red Reading Bus program and the library's year-round outreach service to daycares, preschools, and senior living communities in West Fargo. A community-wide survey conducted in 2021 also showed that West Fargo parents especially need services close to home. Clearly, library outreach is something West Fargo needs.

To that end, The West Fargo Public Library staff will conduct a community assessment to investigate needs in the greater West Fargo community and surrounding areas that could be addressed by library services. The results of this assessment will be used to guide long-term strategic, staffing, and financial planning, as well as design of outreach services.

Scope:

The scope of this assessment will cover the geographic areas of the City of West Fargo, the West Fargo School District and Cass County only. It will not include planning for additional physical branches or outreach vehicles. The purpose of the research is to better understand the people who live in each area – the specific barriers and needs that library services could address, and services that already exist or don't exist to address them in each area. Areas outside of West Fargo proper are included with the purpose of understanding the broader ecosystem and to aid administration and the Library Board in their consideration to provide services and pursue additional funding sources over time (e.g., additional municipal or county funding sources). The library's current service area is the West Fargo Public School district as outlined in library policy, and the library provides access to non-residents throughout the county through paid non-resident cards.

It is worth noting that outreach services in public libraries can vary greatly based on demographics. The recent public input projects the library has undertaken have provided much guidance with regard to the types of services needed in West Fargo. But additional research is needed for long-term planning purposes.

Example types of outreach services in public libraries:

- Home delivery service to individuals who cannot easily leave their place of residence
- Walk-on bookmobile service to towns or neighborhoods lacking brick and mortar public libraries
- Deposit collections in local services organizations and businesses (ex: shelters)
- Pop-ups at community events
- Mobile job and tech help

Research Questions:

1. What are the demographics of West Fargo, West Fargo School District, and Cass County?
How do they differ?
What languages are spoken in these different areas?
2. What priorities do people in these different areas have?
What needs do people who live in these areas have? For example – where is access to technology or Internet difficult?
How do the needs of urban and rural people differ?
3. How close to services do people in these areas live, including:
Public or school libraries
YMCA or Parks
What organizations would be potential outreach partners?
How many potential partners are there for a certain type of outreach activity – e.g., how many daycares in an area?
4. What amenities are or are not available in these areas?
5. Who in the larger Cass County area is already using WFPL? For example – non-resident cardholders

Research Strategies:

In order to explore these different questions and get a comprehensive picture of the needs of the larger West Fargo/Cass County area, many different types of information will need to be gathered.

- Census data – information about local demography.
- Gale Analytics – information about WFPL cardholders in certain areas.
- Local entities – information about their constituents, clients, strategic plans and priorities.
- Schools – test data and student performance, enrollment information.
- Interviews with residents, local organizations, and community leaders.

Timeline:

- September – Phase one: Environmental scan and collection of quantitative data. Analyze data for notable population segments.
- October – Phase two: Interview with residents, local organizations, and community leaders.
- November – Present results of research to Mobile Library Task Force and Library Board.