

July 2014

Annual Tigard Library Survey Measures Patron Feedback

Paula M. Walker
Tigard Library

Sarah Jesudason
Tigard Library

Recommended Citation

Walker, P. M., & Jesudason, S. (2014). Annual Tigard Library Survey Measures Patron Feedback. *OLA Quarterly*, 19(1), 8-10. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7710/1093-7374.1379>

© 2014 by the author(s).

OLA Quarterly is an official publication of the Oregon Library Association | ISSN 1093-7374

Annual Tigard Library Survey Measures Patron Feedback

by Paula M. Walker
Communications Coordinator,
Tigard Library

and

Sarah Jesudason
Adult Services Supervisor,
Tigard Library



Paula



Sarah

Libraries frequently get positive feedback from satisfied users. It builds staff morale and gives them a sense of pride. Patrons also suggest improvements and additional services. How do libraries capture those comments in an organized way? How do they determine which services are most valuable to patrons?

For the past 20 years, the Tigard Public Library has conducted an annual patron survey in both English and Spanish. Since 2008, the library has received more than 3,000 completed surveys each year. Although it is not scientific, the responses have prompted library staff to enhance programs and services to meet library users' needs.

The survey has evolved over the years. For the first 13 years, staff handed out paper surveys in the library for two weeks. The personal touch and direct requests proved to be successful. A second plus was that more staff had the opportunity to interact with the public, including those who did not work at the public service desks.

As technology advanced, the library added new formats for the survey. In 2013 patrons had the option to take it from the Library and City websites, public Internet computers, Facebook, Twitter, Wi-Fi, the library's e-newsletter, as well as on paper in the Library and in the City newsletter that is mailed to 27,000 Tigard addresses.

Last year for the first time, we pushed out a follow-up e-mail to the more than 25,000 addresses in our e-newsletter database. We were pleasantly surprised to receive more than 700 responses. That response helped us collect a record 3,818 surveys. This year we received nearly as many responses to the "push" e-mail.

For approximately ten years, we have tabulated responses on Survey Monkey, a significant improvement over the nineties, when we tabulated results by hand, making hash marks for each response. Electronic responses go directly to Survey Monkey, while a team of hardy volunteers enter the results of the paper surveys.

The paper surveys and personal touch are still the most effective way to encourage participation. But electronic methods are gradually gaining steam. In 2012, 63.1 percent of the surveys were paper and 36.9 percent were submitted electronically, a significant jump from 2011 when only 13.2 percent of responses were electronic (Tigard Public Library, Annual Survey).



Over the years the library has asked such diverse questions as “Which online resources have you used in the past year?” to “Do you own an e-reader?” to “How has the reference staff helped you in the past three months?”

Each year the survey asks demographic questions about age and how often people use the library. A customer service question asks patrons to rate their experiences at the public service desks and the availability of Internet computers. The percent of people who rate service as “excellent” or “good” has topped 95 percent since 2009 (Tigard Public Library, Annual Survey).

The survey serves a dual purpose of both eliciting patron reactions and educating them about our services. For example, when the survey asked people what online resources they had used in the past year, the response was low, but several people commented that they had been unaware of them and would try them.

We have always asked for additional comments and often they prove to be the most revealing about what people like and don’t like about the library. Out of 1,668 open-ended comments in 2013, nearly 60 percent praised the library or library staff (Tigard Public Library, Annual Survey). We also value the constructive criticism, which helps make us even more responsive to the public.

Last year e-books, online resources, public computers, cell phones, cultural passes and parking won the “frequently commented on” awards. Sample comments included:

“Every time I want an e-book, there’s a waiting list. Thought e-books would have more.”

“It would be cool if the study rooms could be reserved on the library website instead of having to come to the library to reserve a room.”

“You need a bigger parking lot!”

Although we may not always be able to implement patron suggestions because of budgetary or other restrictions, we hope to be able to address some of them in the future. Some issues such as noise complaints help remind staff to be sensitive to patrons’ perceptions.

Some comments reminded us why people become library lovers in the first place and why the library plays such a significant role in the community:

“I’m old school. I like to touch books. I need to talk to a librarian. People here are very helpful. This is one of my favorite places.”


“I do not have Internet at home anymore, due to economy reducing my income. I have used the Internet at the library to do my Internet banking and searches, etc. Thank you.”

Responses to the survey questions have resulted in several improvements. The library has added weekend programming for children; offered Wi-Fi service; created a monthly e-newsletter; added Blu-Rays and created an area for people to pick up their own holds. As a result of patrons’ survey responses, we began to provide e-mail notifications about held materials, a service that eventually was implemented countywide.



Patron responses have been extremely helpful over the years in determining service hours. The Tigard Library has changed its hours eight times since 2001, increasing or decreasing them depending on available funding. The “hours question” yielded concrete statistics that were valuable in justifying changes during budgetary deliberations.

Given the number of positive spontaneous comments as well as the customer satisfaction rates, the annual survey has also affirmed that the library is generally serving the community’s needs. Daily, we serve over 1,000 people in person and over the phone. Our job is to meet their immediate needs. The survey gives us an opportunity to step back and take a look at the big picture. The results have been informative and encouraging. In addition to providing valuable feedback, it has amounted to a collective pat on the back for our staff and operations.

Each year we post the results of the survey and the additional comments on the Tigard Library website (http://www.tigard-or.gov/library/about/library_reports.asp). Beginning last year we addressed some of the frequent comments in a series in our library e-newsletter. With a twenty-year track record, the library has streamlined the survey process. While it requires preparation and follow-up, it has proven to be well worth it, especially when we get comments like this: “*Awesome. I get 20 or more books every week and I’m 9!*” 

Works Cited

Tigard Public Library. (n.d.). Annual Patron Survey, 2006-2013. Retrieved March 19, 2013 from http://www.tigard-or.gov/library/about/library_reports.asp

