

South Plainfield
Public Library



STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-2026

*Reflecting the
community in all
that we do.*

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“ *It is evident that the staff of our town library understands its purpose is to make the lives of our community better.*

-South Plainfield Resident



MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD

The South Plainfield Public Library had not revisited their strategic plan in over five years and the Board of Trustees felt that a revision may be needed partly because of the changing community population as well as limited hours that were enacted due to covid.

Library Crossroads Consulting was hired to help with the planning. With their expertise assistance input groups were established consisting of the Strategic Planning Committee, library staff, members from the Friends of the Library, Board Trustees, and community members from varied age groups. Through these meetings the Strategic Planning Committee developed a new Vision and Mission for the South Plainfield Library. The following goals were developed:

- Goal 1: Continue to develop and deliver effective resources, programs, and services based on the identified needs of our community.
- Goal 2: Increase community engagement and awareness of library programs and services through expanded public outreach and marketing.
- Goal 3: Create a functional and welcoming environment for our patrons.
- Goal 4: Cultivate inclusive community engagement through our services and programs.

By fulfilling our Vision and Mission and accomplishing the goals and objectives outlined in this plan, The South Plainfield Public Library, both staff and Board of Trustees, will continue to meet the needs of our patrons and diversified community. The library will be a place whereby ideas can be shared, programs will be entertaining, and patrons of all ages can become educated and informed. This document serves as a blueprint for our future and we hope that the community will read it and offer any further suggestions as this is a living document.

Cheryl Nagel-Smiley, President
South Plainfield Board of Trustees



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



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OUR PROCESS

Developing a useful strategic plan is a dynamic and comprehensive process, involving in-depth analysis and broad collaboration. The ultimate result is an overarching plan that is meaningful to the community. We begin with an information-gathering phase, then work together to develop specifics that can guide the library's decision-making in the future. You will see the results of each step of our process in this plan.

Community Analysis

To create this plan, we thoroughly analyzed the South Plainfield community. Using sources such as the U.S. Census and the NJ School Performance Report, we determined trends and unique features of the local area. This data also highlighted potential opportunities and strengths that emerged in later conversations with community members.

Surveys

A community-wide survey was designed to capture concerns, attitudes, opinions, challenges, experiences, and the needs of residents of South Plainfield. It was distributed electronically and in print. The survey contained closed- and open-ended questions to elicit a wide range of responses.

Focus Groups

As a final part of the information-gathering phase, we held a series of four focus groups. The groups consisted of members of key demographics, including: senior citizens, parents, working adults, and community members. Conversations were designed to explore themes that emerged in the previously collected data, and obtain more detailed, personalized feedback.

Vision, Mission, Goals, and Objectives

Consultants met with the library's Strategic Planning Committee to develop an informed set of values and goals. Over the course of many in-depth discussions, and shaped by the wealth of data previously collected, the Strategic Planning Committee created and refined the vision, mission, goals, and objectives that you will find in this plan.

This strategic plan is a result of a joint effort between the entire South Plainfield library community, and Library Crossroads Consulting, LLC.



COMMUNITY ANALYSIS

Introduction

This analysis includes data from sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau and the NJ School Performance Report, as well as insight gained from surveys and focus groups. Measurable statistics provide us with an improved understanding of the South Plainfield community, and help clarify emerging trends that were reflected in feedback from library staff and town residents.

At a Glance

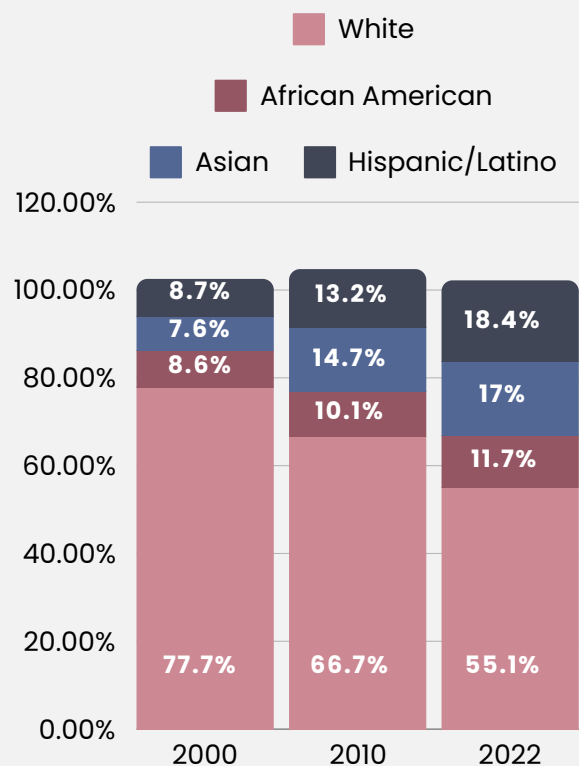
Population and Demographics - The South Plainfield population has increased 3.6% since the 2010 U.S. Census. The community has an increasing population of people who identify as Black or African American, Two or More Races, and Hispanic or Latino.

Computer and Internet Use - Nearly everyone has home access to a computer and broadband internet. This presents an opportunity for the library to act as a primary resource for education regarding information literacy and advances in technology.

Education and Income - South Plainfield's students exceed the state average for standardized test scores and enrollment in post-secondary education. The library has an important role in supporting students, parents, and local school media specialists. The average income for the town exceeds the state average.

Location and Transportation - On the northern border of Middlesex County, and adjacent to Union County, South Plainfield is centrally located with easy access to major roads and NJ Transit train and bus options.

Economy and Business - South Plainfield has major chains and small businesses, as well as two malls on Stelton Road. Residents also have access to additional shopping opportunities in adjacent Piscataway and Edison townships.



Racial makeup of South Plainfield (by percentage) 2000-2020

Community Analysis

Population and Demographics

While the overall population of New Jersey has increased by about 5% since 2010, the population of South Plainfield, at around 24,228 residents, has increased 3.6% between 2010 and 2022.



The 2022 U.S. Census statistics for South Plainfield represent an increasingly diverse community, with residents identifying as White (59.7%), Hispanic or Latino (18.1%), Asian alone (13.6%), Black or African American (12.6%), and Two or More Races (6.8%). The Black or African American, Two or More Races, and Hispanic or Latino populations have increased 2.5%, 3.51%, and 4.86% respectively.

About 30.3% of residents in South Plainfield, similar to the New Jersey average of 31.9%, speak a language other than English at home. Just over 21% of residents were born outside the United States.

The median age of residents in South Plainfield is about 41.2 years, which is slightly higher than the average age of New Jersey residents, 40.3 years.

Voices from the Community

Over half of the survey respondents value that the library will build community by engaging with and connecting the South Plainfield population. Survey participants also appreciated that the library is a welcoming and accepting community resource, where they and their children can learn about other cultures.

Computer and Internet Use

South Plainfield residents have a high level of access to home computers (94.8%) and broadband internet (91%). Information literacy is difficult to gauge in communities, but it is an important element to consider when looking at computer and internet use. Libraries often find themselves to be the primary community resource for computer and internet assistance and training.



Voices from the Community

About 13% of survey respondents said that learning new technologies was a challenge they have faced recently, and overall survey responses show that the technology access and training provided by the library are valued by the community. Nearly 30% of survey participants felt that one of the library's top priorities should be investing in the technology required to create and assist digitally literate citizens.

Education and Income

Performance measures for South Plainfield public schools show an educationally thriving community where students consistently rank above the state average for English Language Arts and Math on standardized test scores. The South Plainfield school district has a total enrollment of 3,385 students who attend grades pre-K through 12, in eight different schools:

- John E. Riley Preschool Annex
- Franklin Elementary School K-4
- John E. Riley Elementary School K-4
- John F. Kennedy Elementary School K-4
- Roosevelt Elementary School K-4
- Grant Elementary School 5-6
- South Plainfield Middle School 7-8
- South Plainfield High School 9-12

The graduation rate from South Plainfield High School is also above the state average, and most students enroll in post-secondary institutions. About 43% go on to 2-year colleges, while about 57% enroll in 4-year institutions.



Over 41% of South Plainfield residents have a bachelor's degree or higher, which is around average for the state.

South Plainfield's pre-K through 12th grade schools are served by two media specialists. This presents a significant opportunity for the South Plainfield Public Library to serve as a valuable support for

students and parents, as well as local school media specialists.

South Plainfield is a community with a higher-than-average median household income, and a very low poverty rate. The median income of South Plainfield (\$114,293) exceeds the New Jersey median (\$89,703) by about 27%. The employment rate in South Plainfield is around 70.9%, which is above the New Jersey average of 65.6%.

Most residents (nearly 86%) in South Plainfield own their homes, with some renters. Over 34% of householders living in occupied housing units have moved into their unit since 2010. The median value of owner-occupied units in South Plainfield, from 2017 to 2021, was slightly above the median for New Jersey (about \$362,000 and \$350,000, respectively). Rental fees are slightly above the state average as well (about \$1,800 and \$1,400 respectively). The poverty rate is 3.3%, compared to the New Jersey average of 10.2%.

Voices from the Community

When asked about the most important issues in South Plainfield, 63% of respondents replied that education was most important. Nearly 25% of respondents said continuing lifetime learning and personal growth was a challenge they had faced in recent years. Also, respondents cited the library as a key partner in promoting the literacy, learning, and civic engagement necessary for a healthy democracy.

Respondents also cited affordability as one of South Plainfield's most important community issues. Cost of living was the top choice (46.7%) of respondents when asked about challenges they had faced in the past few years.

Location and Transportation

South Plainfield is a suburban community, connected to nearby towns by local roads, as well as major highways. The township is 8.33 square miles and sits on the northern border of Middlesex County. The municipality borders Piscataway

and Edison townships in Middlesex County, and Plainfield and Scotch Plains in Union County.

The major roads through South Plainfield are New Durham Road (CR 501), Stelton Road (CR 529), and Park Avenue (CR 531), which also provide connections to Route 27 and Route 1. Route 287 provides access to northern and eastern areas of New Jersey, as well as connecting to other major highways (New Jersey Parkway and New Jersey Turnpike). Easy access to these major highways makes South Plainfield a convenient place to live.

Two different New Jersey Transit trains are accessible near South Plainfield: the Raritan Valley Line, with stops in Dunellen, Plainfield, and Fanwood; and the Northeast Corridor, with stops in Edison, Metuchen, and Metropark. The trains provide access to New York City, as well as Newark (airport and city) via transfer. NJ Transit buses also connect residents with Manhattan and Newark, NJ.

Middlesex County Area Transit (MCAT) is a reservation-based transportation service for persons 60 years of age and older, and persons with disabilities who are 18 years of age and older.



Voices from the Community

Over 40% of survey respondents cited traffic as an issue in South Plainfield, and 31% of respondents cited concerns of over development. However, focus group and survey participants do appreciate the community's location relative to where they work.

Economy and Business

South Plainfield's largest businesses are fuel, recycling, IT, and engineering firms. These firms are complemented by many major chains, including Dicks Sporting Goods, Home Depot, Target, ShopRite, Marshalls, and HomeGoods. Data Axle Reference Solutions*** estimates that hundreds of small businesses, and nearly 50 home businesses, also exist in South Plainfield. South Plainfield has two large shopping centers along Stelton Road: Middlesex Mall, and the adjacent Hadley Center.

Many local businesses are members of the Tri-County Chamber of Commerce,



located in South Plainfield, which serves businesses in Middlesex, Somerset, and Union Counties. The area is also covered by the Middlesex County Regional Chamber of Commerce.

Voices from the Community

While participants in the survey and focus groups discussed traffic and over-development, they also appreciate the access they have to local businesses.

U.S. Census Statistics for South Plainfield, New Jersey*

Total population:

2022 Estimate: 24,228

2020 Census: 24,338

2010 Census: 23,385

Median household

income, 2017-2021:

South Plainfield: \$114,293

New Jersey: \$89,703

Employment rate:

South Plainfield: 70.9%

New Jersey: 65.6%

Median age:

South Plainfield: 41.2

New Jersey: 40.3

Persons in Poverty:

South Plainfield: 3.3%

New Jersey: 10.2%

Racial and Ethnic Groups (2010):

White alone: 66.7%

Black or African American alone: 10.1%

Asian alone: 14.7%

Two or More Races: 3.3%

Hispanic or Latino: 13.2%

Racial and Ethnic Groups (2022):

White alone: 55.1%

Black or African American alone: 11.7%

Asian alone: 17%

Two or More Races: 7.2%

Hispanic or Latino: 18.4%

Language other than English spoken at home, percent of persons age 5 years+

South Plainfield: 30.3%

New Jersey: 31.9%

Languages Spoken at home:

- Spanish: 12.2%
- Other Indo-European: 8.9%
- Asian and Pacific Island: 7.5%
- Other: 1.5%

Foreign born persons, percent, 2017-2021

South Plainfield: 21.6%

New Jersey 22.9%



Computer and Internet Use

Households with a computer, percent 2017–2021

South Plainfield: 94.8%

New Jersey: 93.9%

Households with a broadband Internet subscription, percent, 2017–2021

South Plainfield: 91%

New Jersey: 89.4%

Educational Attainment

Bachelor's Degree or Higher

South Plainfield: 41.1%

New Jersey: 41.5%

Home Ownership

Homeownership Rate:

South Plainfield: 85.7%

New Jersey: 64.0% +/- 0.3%

Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2017–2021:

South Plainfield: \$362,200

New Jersey: \$355,700

Median Gross Rent:

South Plainfield: \$1,766

New Jersey: \$1,436

Occupied Housing Units:

8,144

Householders who moved into their unit since 2010:

South Plainfield: 2,843 (34.9%)

Mean Travel Time to Work:

South Plainfield: 28.5 minutes

New Jersey: 31.5 minutes



NJ School Performance Reports (2021-2022) for South Plainfield**

South Plainfield Township School District Statistics

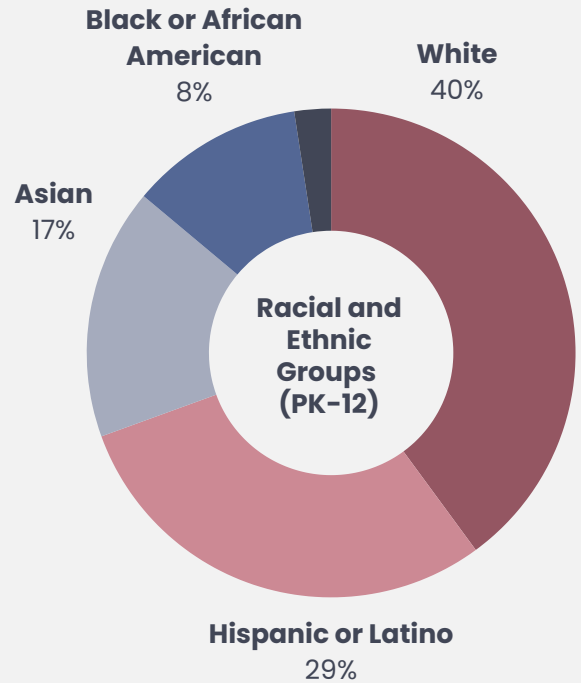
Enrollment: 3,385

Student Groups (PK-12)

- Economically Disadvantaged Students 17.0%
- Students with Disabilities 17.3%
- English Learners 2.5%

Racial and Ethnic Groups (PK-12)

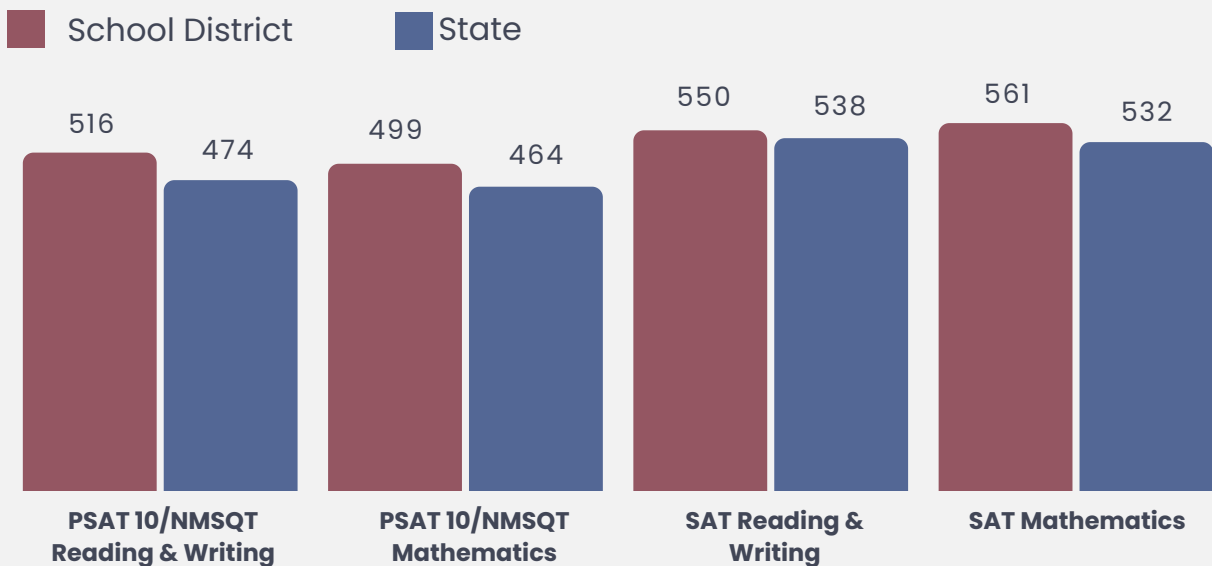
- White 39.6%
- Hispanic 29.3%
- Black or African American 11.4%
- Asian 16.5%
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander 0.5%
- American Indian or Alaska Native 0.3%
- Two Or More Races 2.4%



Enrollment by Home Language (PK-12)

- English 72.3%
- Spanish 14.4%
- Gujarati 2.5%
- Telugu 1.4%
- Vietnamese 1.2%
- Other 8.1%

Standardized Testing Scores



Graduation Rates (4 Year Cohort 2021)

School District Graduation Rate 92.3%

Statewide Graduation Rate 90.9%

Post Secondary Enrollment

School District 82.7%

Statewide 73.7%

% of Enrolled in 2-Year Institution

School District 42.9%

Statewide 29.5%

% of Enrolled in 4-Year Institution

School District 57.1%

Statewide 70.5%

School Librarian/Media Specialists: 2

Sources

*[U.S. Census Bureau Quickfacts](#) and [U.S. Census Data Files](#)

**[NJ School Performance Reports \(2021-2022\)](#).

***[Data Axle Reference Solutions](#)

COMMUNITY SURVEY

Summary

We asked the South Plainfield community to share some of their concerns, attitudes, opinions, challenges, experiences, and needs with us in order to get a clearer picture of why people use (or don't use) the library, what their expectations are, and how the library can support the community.

The survey was distributed online and in print format. Four hundred sixty five people answered most, or all, of the questions, which ranged from simple closed questions (such as, "What is your age?"), to more detailed, open-ended questions (such as, "How does the library improve the quality of your life?"). The majority of participants were adults between the ages of either 22- 44 years, or over 65 years.



The survey results show that a large number of participants absolutely love and are proud of their library. Almost 90% of respondents reported having positive feelings about the library facility. A favorite thing about the library was often the “friendly staff,” and welcoming atmosphere. People like the access to books and materials, and love the children’s room and programs. The overall rating for the library was 4.4 (out of 5).

The survey participants also had a range of good ideas about ways the library can improve. The most popular choices for building improvements were to add more seating with electrical access for devices, and renovate or expand areas for adults, children, and teens.

Overall, South Plainfield community members want to live in a place that is friendly, inclusive, and diverse, with informed neighbors who are helpful and love learning. The top two most important issues facing the community were reported to be education and safety. All of these values were cited frequently when respondents wrote about what they appreciate about the South Plainfield library.

Thank you to the South Plainfield community for taking the time to complete this survey. The information that has been provided will be enlightening and invaluable to future planning efforts.

Survey Responses

Do you have a South Plainfield library card?

Answered: 465

- Yes: 83%
- No: 17%

Are you a resident of South Plainfield?

Answered: 465

- Yes: 95%
- No: 5%

If you are NOT a resident of South Plainfield, what town do you live in? Answered: 22

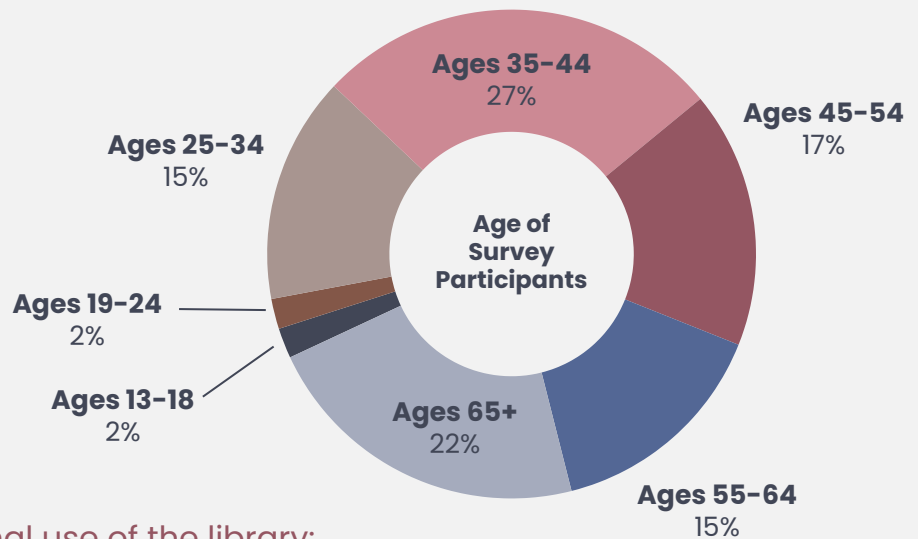
- Edison, Woodbridge, Metuchen (4 each)
- Piscataway (3)
- Plainfield, Clark (2 each)
- Dunellen, Green Brook, Flemington (1 each)



What is your age group?

Answered: 454

- 13-18 years: 2%
- 19-24 years: 2%
- 25-34 years: 15%
- 35-44 years: 27%
- 45-54 years: 17%
- 55-64 years: 15%
- 65+ years: 22%



Please describe your normal use of the library:

Answered: 454

Ranked Responses

- 50% I primarily use the library to check out print materials, attend in-person programs, and/or use the facility
- 23% I regularly visit the library, AND use the library virtually
- 19% I don't use the library
- 9% I primarily use the library virtually by downloading books, using online resources, or attending online programs

Which of the following factors limit your use of the library?

Answered: 447

Ranked Responses

- 34% Too busy / No time
- 27% I use my own computer at home or other location
- 17% I buy my own books and other materials
- 9% The hours are not convenient
- 3% Not enough quiet space
- 2% I use another library
- 2% I don't drive
- 2% The location is not convenient
- 1% Parking
- 1% Unpleasant past experience
- 1% Not enough access to electricity for devices
- 34% None of the above
- 10% Other*

* Other responses included: dissatisfaction with the selection of materials, unawareness of services and programs; not speaking English; and health reasons.

During your visits to the library which of the following are the most important to you and other members of your household? 1 (Most Important) through 10 (Least Important) Answered: 402

Ranked Responses

1. Borrowing Books
2. Programs and Events
3. Children's Room
4. Borrowing Non-Book Items (such as museum passes)
5. Studying/Quiet Space
6. Information/Technology Help
7. Computer/Printer/Scanner/Fax
8. WiFi (Wireless Internet)
9. Notary/Postal Services
10. Social Worker Access

If you have visited the South Plainfield Public Library in the past three years, please describe how you felt about the facility. Answered: 402

Open-Ended Responses

The answers to this question were overwhelmingly positive (89%). Many respondents mentioned the friendly, nice, and helpful staff, and also felt "great" about the library. The library was often described as "clean" and "welcoming."

Four percent of the responses were neutral, with respondents saying they felt "ok," "adequate," or "fine" about the library.

Seven percent of the respondents had negative feelings about the library that mainly centered around the building feeling small, crowded, or "crammed."

What should South Plainfield Public Library do to improve its space?

Answered: 393

Ranked Responses

- 24% Add seating options with electrical access
- 22% Renovate/expand the adult area
- 21% Renovate/expand children's room
- 18% Renovate/expand teen space
- 18% Add meeting room space
- 16% Add small group study space
- 7% More public computers



- 28% None of the above
- 16% Other*

* Other responses mainly centered around expanding or improving spaces in the library to include: a STEM lab, art installations and plants, space for local groups to meet, more copies of popular books, or a directory near the entrance.

What do you like most about the library? Answered 339

Open Ended Responses

Survey participants liked a variety of things about the library, some even replied, “everything!” The following three things occurred most frequently in responses:

- The friendly and helpful staff
- Access to books, movies, and other resources and materials
- The children’s room and children’s programs

Respondents also liked:

- The “nice” and comfortable facilities, and welcoming atmosphere
- The variety of programs
- The library’s convenience, accessibility, and location
- Being part of a larger network of libraries
- Cost-savings of using the library

Please pick three statements that best represent your values. (What is most important to you?) The Library will... Answered 339

Ranked Responses

1. Invest in the facility to provide a safe, comfortable and welcoming environment. (206)
2. Offer a great library experience by hiring friendly, knowledgeable, and helpful staff. (200)
3. Build community by engaging with and connecting South Plainfield’s population. (200)
4. Promote the literacy, learning, and civic engagement necessary for a healthy democracy. (172)
5. Invest in the technology required to create and assist digitally literate citizens. (99)
6. Be careful stewards of public resources and value integrity as a cornerstone of all that we do. (80)
7. Seek to be more effective by collaborating with other community organizations. (60)



Please pick your top three priorities for the library. Answered: 339

Ranked Responses

1. Well-trained, engaged staff providing excellent customer service (194)
2. Convenient operating hours (165)
3. Safe and clean building (163)
4. Diverse assortment of programs and events (163)
5. Expansive physical and digital resources (including Libby/Overdrive, Hoopla, etc.) (130)
6. Ample, attractive interior physical space (meeting/study rooms, display spaces, etc.) (71)
7. Strong partnerships with community organizations (60)
8. Access to technology (computers, tablets, WiFi hotspots, printers, etc.) (59)

How does the library help improve the quality of your life? Answered: 339

Open-Ended Responses

There were many ways the library improved the quality of participants' lives, from helping them relax with a book in their "happy place," to providing cost savings by offering free access to materials and resources they wouldn't otherwise have. Survey respondents love the library, and the most frequent response to this question was that the library provides them with books, materials, resources (including technology), and services.

The second most popular response was that the library enriched the lives of participants' children. Respondents were happy to share their love of reading with their children. They valued that the library helped their children learn about other cultures, connect with the community, and get out of the house.

Other responses included: opportunities for connection and a sense of community; increased knowledge; and a safe place to study, read, and learn.

Overall, how would you rate your satisfaction with the South Plainfield Public Library? Answered 339

Average Rating 4.4 ★★★★★

What should the library improve overall? Answered: 339

Open-Ended Responses

Survey respondents had many strong and thoughtful ideas about what the library can do to improve (if anything, many people felt the library was great as is). The responses were varied and detailed, from soliciting ideas for programs and offering more volunteer opportunities, to lending and swapping puzzles, or canceling late fines.



Over 20% of the responses suggested some type of renovation: a separate teen area (this was a popular suggestion); more meeting rooms; a bigger children’s room; a playground outside; comfy seating for kids and adults; little nooks for reading; more quiet areas; a makerspace; or a complete refresh of the interior space to improve aesthetics.

The following ideas also appeared in several responses:

- Add more copies of popular books to the collection, in print and digitally
- Increase hours, particularly on Sundays
- Hire additional friendly, well-trained staff (including bilingual staff)
- Hold more book sales
- Offer more diverse museum passes
- Check out books on hold when the patron picks it up, not before
- Increase borrowing speed from other libraries
- Add more music and art programs, and movies
- Increase technology (including digital media), and public computer monitoring
- Continue building a welcoming community for all

Please describe what type of community you want South Plainfield to be?

Answered: 339

Open-Ended Responses

Most survey participants want to live in a pleasant, caring community. One quarter of the responses included words like, “friendly,” “welcoming,” “peaceful,” “sharing,” and “kind.” A further 7% added “unified,” “close knit,” and “proud.” Over 30% of respondents said they want South Plainfield to be (or continue to be) inclusive and respectful of all people.

Responses also frequently included the following descriptions:

- Safe and stable
- Diverse
- Informed and educated
- Helpful and supportive
- Active
- Family centered
- Positive
- Clean and environmentally aware
- Affordable
- Accessible and walkable
- Financially successful



What are the most important issues when it comes to the South Plainfield community? Answered: 339

Ranked Responses

- 63% Education
- 57% Safety
- 44% Affordability
- 44% Cleanliness
- 41% Traffic
- 40% Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- 32% Development
- 27% Environmental Sustainability
- 11% Housing
- 9% Employment
- 9% Public Transportation
- 4% Parking
- 4% None of the above

What challenges or concerns have you or your family personally dealt with in the last few years? Answered: 339

Ranked Responses

- 47% Cost of living
- 26% Aging parents
- 25% Financial Planning
- 25% Continuing lifetime learning and personal growth
- 22% Ensuring opportunities for children
- 21% Childcare
- 20% Aging (self)
- 15% Grief
- 15% Social isolation
- 13% Learning new technologies
- 12% Unemployment or underemployment
- 9% Racism or other prejudice
- 8% Finding reliable health information
- 6% Physical mobility
- 6% Running a small business
- 5% Economic hardship
- 3% Divorce
- 2% Food insecurity
- 1% Housing insecurity or homelessness
- 12% None of the above
- 3% Other*

* Other responses included: caregiving, disabled family members, child mental health issues, and bullying.

FOCUS GROUPS

Twenty five people participated in four different focus groups. The groups consisted of members of key demographics, including: seniors, parents, working adults, and community members. Each group met for about one hour at the library.



Conversations were designed to explore themes that emerged in the previously collected data, and obtain more detailed, personalized feedback. To encourage participants to feel comfortable speaking freely, employees of the library and board members were not present. Focus groups were run by consultants from Library Crossroads, LLC. The questions started broadly, then narrowed to focus on specific library services.

Overall, participants were very engaged, highly supportive, and spoke enthusiastically about the library, its services, and the staff. All groups demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the library and its role in the South Plainfield community. Participants also identified some areas for improvement, mainly: a renewed focus on collection development, enhancing the library's website, and addressing some building issues (primarily bathroom access, more quiet study, and more programming rooms).

Summary of Comments

What type of community do you want to live in?

The most popular response to this question had to do with education. All groups discussed an educated community in various ways: from competent school administration, to the opportunity to learn about other cultures. The groups each discussed a community that values education and learning, with community members who are "curious."

The next most popular response, discussed by all groups, was having to do with valuing a sense of community. Various groups discussed wanting to live in a community that is "close knit" with good communication and a sense of belonging.

Groups also spoke about a community that is:

- Diverse and inclusive
- Safe and family focused
- Active and collaborative
- Accessible (walkable, easy to navigate, and close to work)
- Safe and affordable
- Fun, and "vibrant," with amenities (like a good library, good restaurants, and a dog park)
- Compassionate
- Stable, yet evolving



Why does a community need a library? What is the library's role?

All groups discussed how the library serves as a place for the community to come together, through connection with others (and other cultures) and involvement (in groups, programs, and book clubs). They felt the library was an important community center that encouraged people to interact with each other.

Each group also brought up that the library is an important public resource for books and materials. The groups talked about the value of being able to access anything, from books (digital and print) and movies, to tax forms. One group even described a library as “a community’s greatest asset.”

The groups also discussed how the library:

- Promotes literacy and a love of reading
- Supports education, through access to information and tutoring
- Provides access to technology
- Saves people money
- Provides notary services
- Provides social services
- Is a safe place

What needs or issues specific to you can the library help with?

The theme that arose most frequently was technology. Group participants discussed the need for technology help in many ways: technology training and support; adaptive technology (especially for the visually impaired); access to digital resources, the internet, WiFi, and printing; and improving integration between the library catalog and website. While participants spoke very positively about the individualized technology support offered, some participants indicated such support and training was difficult to access.

Two other important themes were print and digital collection development, and education. Participants talked about the need for a “good” collection, including audiobooks and large print items; more newer materials (print and digital); and help with ILLs. They also discussed the library as a place to meet educational needs, such as: providing a place to read and study, and providing help with school work and research.

Other topics that were discussed included:

- Programs, such as book clubs, summer reading, children and adult programming
- Cultural events, such as Spanish classes (for native English speakers)



- Information (about the community, as well as library services)
- Increased notary hours
- Museum passes
- Artwork on display
- Meeting spaces for community groups
- Holiday collections for charity

What would you like to see at or from the library? What do you use the library for?

All groups discussed the library's activities and programs. Participants had many suggestions for programs they would like to see at the library, from more book clubs for all ages, to opportunities to learn other languages (through classes and conversation groups). Some groups discussed offering CPR classes, or having family board game nights. They also would like to see more hands-on activities offered at the library, like puzzles. Some seniors indicated they would like programming later in the day (they understood that kids programming becomes the focus when school is out, but wished the library could accommodate programming for all throughout the day).

Groups also frequently discussed how they would like to see more resources and services at the library. Among ideas that were mentioned were: purchasing more books (print and digital); offering suggested reading lists; providing research tools or help; and having more language learning software and a community calendar.

Groups also talked about the library's children's offerings. In particular, they mentioned holding children's programs later in the evening so that children of working parents can attend. They also would like to see more space in the children's room, more children's programming, and a designated "zone" for teens and tweens.

Other themes that were discussed were:

- The addition of more quiet space
- Increased hours (particularly on the weekend)
- Greater collaboration with the community (i.e. schools and senior center)
- Improved marketing
- More technology classes and an updated website



Please share positive or negative opinions about:

Building

Strengths: Groups like the location and parking. Many appreciate the updated building, describing it as “welcoming,” “clean,” and “orderly.” Some parents appreciate the separation of children’s and adult areas, while others mentioned they would like the children’s area to be closer to the rest of the library.

Opportunities: Seniors found accessibility somewhat difficult, particularly the front stairs and ramp, and the bathrooms. Other groups mentioned the need for more comfortable seating, more electrical outlets, and colorful touches to make the library more aesthetically pleasing. All groups mentioned frustration with the locked bathroom policy.

Website

Strengths: Participants use the website often for accessing the catalog, placing holds, and reviewing the calendar.

Opportunities: All groups found the website difficult to navigate, saying it was “cluttered,” or “not intuitive.” Participants were unable to distinguish between the library’s website and the consortium’s website. They discussed the need for a website that can be easily accessed and used from a mobile device. When asked specifically about the library’s website, they indicated difficulty using it on their phones and felt that it was dense (a lot of information, little white space). When asked specifically about the consortium website and app, they felt that search results were sometimes confusing, and they were generally unaware of the app.

Resources

Strengths: Group participants felt like they can often get whatever they need from the library, either directly, or through ILL. Seniors appreciate the print magazines. Others also appreciated Libby (especially for kids), Hoopla, the genre stickers on books, and the seed catalog.

Opportunities: Groups discussed the need for more copies of newer books. They also felt that the library could use more language-learning resources for children and adults. Seniors wanted to see more “how to” and local history books. Others discussed book delivery services for the homebound.



VISION

The South Plainfield Public Library supports our community and its evolving needs through diverse, dynamic services.

MISSION

We **reflect** our community and strive to assure that everyone **sees themselves** in our services. We are committed to promoting literacy, diversity, community services, and a life-long love of reading.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

GOAL 1: Continue to develop and deliver effective resources, programs, and services based on the identified needs of our community

OBJECTIVES

- Evaluate and make recommendations regarding library hours and possible expansion of library hours
- Review existing collection development policies and recommend changes to incorporate more user input into material selection
- Seek additional user feedback on programming for all ages to assure identified needs are met
- Continue to foster cross-cultural community engagement

GOAL 2: Increase community engagement and awareness of library programs & services through expanded public outreach and marketing

OBJECTIVES

- Review existing marketing and social media tools and how they are deployed
- Create a task force from all departments to develop a marketing plan, including strategies for achieving marketing goals (new tools needed, staffing requirements, etc.)
- Seek patron input on useability of the website, and develop a plan for implementing those recommendations
- Promote use of the library's app

GOAL 3: Create a functional and welcoming environment for our patrons

OBJECTIVES

- Contract with a space consultant to review and make recommendations regarding existing use of space in light of current library usage, expected trends in library services, and feedback received through this strategic planning process
- With the space consultant's input, develop a plan to enhance the aesthetic appeal of the library, including use of color, seating, and art



- Investigate the feasibility of remote or satellite services, including identifying what services could be involved, what potential locations would be suitable, and any financial implications

GOAL 4: Cultivate inclusive community engagement through our services and programs

OBJECTIVES

- Review our existing community partnerships and identify ways to strengthen them (senior center, schools, etc.)
- Identify community organizations that could partner with the library, and seek them out to discuss potential partnerships
- Foster a diverse, inclusive staff, and support them in the provision of quality library services by identifying needed resources and assuring effective professional development opportunities



“*Every time we've been to the library we have genuinely felt welcome and appreciated.*

-South Plainfield Resident

HOW TO USE THIS PLAN

This strategic plan is the result of input from the community and library staff. It has been shaped by data about where the library has been, and feedback about how the library can best serve the community and your stakeholders. As a result, it contains information and recommendations that can be used to strengthen and guide library management in a number of ways. These include:

Sharing

This plan should be shared with anyone who would benefit from understanding where the library has been, and where you would like it to go. Communication about this plan can be shared with:

- Staff
- Township Officials
- The Township
- Friends of the Library
- Community Partners
- Potential Funders
- Surrounding Libraries
- Job Applicants

Planning

Does an existing service or program help the library meet your stated goals, or would those resources be better applied to a new service? How do you meet the seemingly unlimited needs of the community with a limited amount of resources, time, funding, and staff effort? The library's Vision and Mission statement and Goals and Objectives can help guide the library's annual planning, and inform difficult decisions around the expenditure of limited assets.

Evaluating

This plan serves as a rubric for measuring your success. Oftentimes, the assessments made by members of library administration differ from considerations of those outside of library management. For this reason, we encourage libraries to provide opportunities for feedback – for your entire community, and all areas of library staff – to evaluate your library's success in meeting the stated goals and objectives.



“It's been a joy to watch our daughter lean in to the children's programming over the years. We are truly grateful!

-South Plainfield Resident

Budgeting

When developing your next budget, ensure that your library's goals and objectives are reflected in your budget. This strategic plan should also be a regular part of any budget presentation or request for funds.

Reviewing Policies

Are your current policies reflective of the Vision and Mission statement and the Goals and Objectives in this plan? For example: if you want a "welcoming and comfortable space," is the policy under consideration welcoming to everyone? Who does it include? And who is being left out?

Recruiting

Are you recruiting the staff you need to meet your Goals and Objectives? We encourage you to use this strategic plan as a rubric for developing employment postings and hiring practices. Through job listings and an easy-to-find location on your website, all applicants should be able to review the strategic plan to see what your library values.

Working with Partners

Sharing the strategic plan with potential partners, including other libraries, may create new opportunities to work together for collective impact.

Holding Staff Meetings

We recommend actively engaging with this plan - share and discuss the strategic plan with all staff and volunteers. Simply making the plan available does not ensure the plan has been read and understood. Reviewing and discussing will help library staff and volunteers become involved with the stated goals, and see how their own feedback is reflected in the plan.

