

THE CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY 2008 MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARIES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Customer service in libraries encompasses every aspect of its operations. Typically it includes the range of library services and materials provided, how customers experience the physical environment, the accessibility of materials, collections and technology, how customers are treated by staff in every contact (face to face as well as online and telephone) with the library, and the availability of products and programs the customers want and need. All these things contribute to how customers experience library services and whether or not they are satisfied. Customer satisfaction is an indicator of the extent to which the library has been able to satisfy its customers' needs and is a potentially useful measure of library performance.

Following the results of a Montgomery County, MD 2007 Residents Survey, which focused on the quality of service delivery and the importance of services delivered by all county departments, the Montgomery County Public Libraries (MCPL) conducted an in-depth assessment of their customers to learn more about their perceptions and use of services and materials. A Customer Satisfaction Survey was distributed in house at all MCPL branches in April 2008. The survey was designed to measure customers' satisfaction with:

- the library and services including staff, materials, programs, technology and facilities;
- how well the library is accomplishing its mission; and
- how the use of libraries has had an impact on their lives.

Demographic characteristics of customers were also surveyed.

The data obtained from the Customer Satisfaction Survey can be used to estimate both the level of overall satisfaction experienced by customers in their interactions with the library and their satisfaction in each of the service categories identified in the survey. The data will reveal which of the library's service characteristics are most highly related to the satisfaction and dissatisfaction of customers and will be used to identify opportunities for improvements in library services.

DATA COLLECTION

The Customer Satisfaction Survey was conducted in the 21 branches of Montgomery County Public Libraries during National Library Week, April 13-19, 2008. The questionnaires were distributed to all library customers – 12 years of age and over – as they entered the building during specific sampling hours each day. Survey distribution in each library branch was accomplished by the participation of branch staff, Library Advisory Committees, Friends of the Library and other volunteers. The surveys were completed onsite. In addition to the sampling timeframes, copies of the survey were available at all times in each library for walk-in customers who wished to complete the questionnaire. The survey was available in English, Spanish, Chinese and Vietnamese.

To ensure that each of the samples was representative of all segments of the customer population within each of the library branches, data collection sessions were scheduled for weekday mornings, weekday afternoons, weekday evenings and Saturday. Surveys were also distributed on Sunday in the eight branches open.

A total of 8,036 surveys were collected throughout all 21 branches. The raw data was sent for data analysis to Montgomery County Government's CountyStat office, a new program initiated by the County Executive to assist departments to improve performance and accountability resulting in improved customer service. CountyStat analyzed the results of the survey in three ways: system-wide results, results by branch, and results by demographic group. Noyes branch had only 29 respondents so their results were not included in the data analysis.

SURVEY RESULTS

System-Wide Results

System-wide results were calculated as the average of branch results. Respondents rated MCPL well both in terms of overall satisfaction and in each of the twenty-five service categories identified in the survey. The average overall satisfaction rating was 1.37 on a 5-point scale (1 was highest) and the average service category satisfaction was 7.39 on a 9-point scale (9 was highest). Other overall results included:

- When customers were asked how satisfied they were with overall library experience over the past year, 96.2% were satisfied (67%-very satisfied + 29.2%-satisfied).
- The two most common reasons for going to the library – cited by more than half of respondents – were to (1) borrow books or other materials and (2) entertainment (leisure-time materials for reading, viewing or listening)
- More than half of respondents visited the library on a weekly basis with another 25% visiting monthly.
- The three most common ways in which libraries made a difference in the lives of patrons – cited by more than 40% of the respondents – were (1) provided resources to research personal information, (2) improved quality of life, and (3) helped with school assignments and projects.

- Of the twenty-five service categories that respondents were asked to rate in the survey, five were most predictive of overall satisfaction:
 - (1) Customer Service: Availability (availability of staff when assistance is needed)
 - (2) Customer Service: Courtesy (staff courtesy and approachability)
 - (3) Collections and Materials: Books et al (satisfaction with books, magazines, audio books, CDs, videos/DVDs)
 - (4) Collections and Materials: On hold (satisfaction with the availability of books, magazines, audio books, videos/DVDs that can be borrowed or placed on hold)
 - (5) Technology: Computers: Internet (availability of computers to access the Internet)

Branch Results

Branch-specific results were measured through comparison of the average results for all branches. All branches received high overall satisfaction ratings (average ratings ranged from 1.20 to 1.56 on a 5-point scale with 1 being highest). Satisfaction with the service categories was also high (average ratings across all twenty-five service categories ranged from 7.81 to 6.99 on a 9-point scale with 9 being highest). Branch results included:

- Borrowing books and other materials was cited as the reason most people came to the library (in 15 of the twenty branches included in the analysis)
- All branches showed a high percentages of respondents who visited weekly.
- The most common way in which libraries made a difference in the lives of patrons were:
 - (1) The provision of resources to research personal information (in nine of the twenty branches)
 - (2) Improved quality of life (in four of the twenty branches)
 - (3) Helped with school assignments and projects (in seven of the twenty branches)

Demographic Group Results

Among ethnic groups, whites showed the highest levels of overall satisfaction. Among age groups, respondents age 50 and older showed the highest levels of overall satisfaction.

- For most demographic groups and age groups, borrowing books and other materials was the most common reason for visiting the library.
- For Hispanic, black and African American demographic groups and for respondents younger than 35, the most common reason was help with school assignments and projects.
- All demographic groups and age groups showed high percentages of weekly visitors. The highest percent of respondents who visited daily were found among Hispanic, black, and African American respondents along with those under the age of 18.

KEY FINDINGS

- The most important MCPL service is the provision of books and other materials (DVDs, CDs, audio books, magazines, etc.) for borrowing. It is the most common reason for using the library overall, at most branches, among most ethnic groups, and among most age groups.
- Customers stated that the library resources available to research personal information, to improve their quality of life, and to help with school assignments and books for children made a difference in their lives – cited by more than 40% of respondents.
- Overall satisfaction increased as the number of reasons for visiting increased and as the number of ways in which libraries made a difference in the customer's life increased.
- Next to books and materials, a core predictor of overall satisfaction was the availability of computers to access the Internet.
- In general, there were higher levels of satisfaction with customer service and building amenities, average satisfaction with the materials collection and lower than average satisfaction with the website, technology help and library programs. Age differences reflect that younger age groups (0-34) tend to be less satisfied with the availability, helpfulness, courtesy and convenience of library staff services than older respondents; but younger age groups tend to be more satisfied with programming than older age groups.