

# 2011

## City of Ventura: Library Strategic Plan Part One: Community Conversations



Submitted by:  
Santiago Library Consultants  
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## Section One: Acknowledgements

The City of Ventura leadership and the citizens care deeply about their public library. The City of Ventura has a Library Advisory Commission that has focused on public library service for the community. With a desire to learn more and to better understand the workings of public library service models the city council voted to form a Library Strategic Plan Steering Committee to bring additional citizens into the process. The Library Advisory Commission produced a Request for Proposals and subsequently recommended hiring a consultant to help guide the community through the process of determining the best way to provide library service to the city. The members of the committees represent civic leaders, city staff, community groups, librarians, concerned citizens, and members of the local education community. We thank the members of both committees for their time, effort and passion in support of public libraries.

### **Library Advisory Commission Members:**

Chair: Berta Steele  
Vice Chair: Ron D’Incau  
Commissioner: Marianne Coffey  
Commissioner: Debbie Giles  
Commissioner: Linda Roslansky

### **Library Strategic Plan Steering Committee Members:**

Chair: Jim Friedman	Barbara Fitzgerald	Clarey Rudd
Vice Chair: Debbie Giles	Keith Gordon	Peter Sezzi
David Atkins	Kristine Guzman	Berta Steele
Maureen Byrne	John Jones	Michael Tapia
Marianne Coffey	Victoria Jump	Kathy Thomson
Colleen Coffey	Lori Karns	Eric Verde
Burris DeBenning	Marie Lakin	

**City of Ventura Liaison:** Denise Sindelar, Community Partnerships Manager

## Section Two: Project Overview

Santiago Library Consulting will follow the steps outlined below to gather information and data for the *Strategic Plan for Library Service* report for the City of Ventura:

1. Step One: Community Conversations on service priorities: May
2. Step Two: Community Conversations: Facilities, Staffing and Finances: June- August
3. Step Three: Conversations with County Library, State Library, Peer Libraries, and experts May- September
4. Step Four: Final Report to the City Council by October, 2011

The FINAL REPORT due in October by Santiago Library Consulting for the City of Ventura is to provide information on four methods of delivering library service to the community.

1. Continue to be a member of the County of Ventura Library System
2. Become a department of the City of Ventura, with city management of the library
3. Become a department of the City of Ventura, with a private company managing the library
4. Form a new library system or model of service, managed as a city department.

Options 2-4 would require pulling out of the County of Ventura Library System.

**The purpose of this document is to relay the findings to date on Step One of the process: Community Conversations/Service Priorities.**

## Section Three: Community Conversations Executive Summary

The initial information meeting was held on April 13, 2011. Santiago Consulting (SLC) met with the 20 member Steering Committee for their first session and outlined the process and priorities for the project.

The discussion focused on the trends in public library service, the role of the public library in today's communities and the future of public libraries in years to come. The purpose of the introductory session was to raise awareness with all stakeholders on what is possible for a community and also to think beyond their own experience with a public library.

The group reviewed and learned more about the 18 primary service roles that public libraries perform as described by the Public Libraries Association Publication: "Strategic Planning for Public Libraries." Our goal was to begin to set the priorities for library service in the City of Ventura. As an outcome of the discussions; Literacy, early childhood, reading for pleasure, technology and the library as a place for creativity and lifelong learning emerged as common priorities among the steering committee members. Although all of the 18 service roles have value in any public library, the reality of economic factors will prevent the city from doing all of them at a superior level.

With feedback on service roles from the Steering Committee, our next audience for feedback would be the community at large. We began discussions in late April and will continue to gather community feedback throughout the planning process. We used two primary methods for input from the community; one was the online survey, the second was through face to face meetings. The survey was available in paper format or online hosted by *Zoomerang* in English and in Spanish. The survey had 11 questions and multiple opportunities throughout the survey for opinion and views to be shared. Question 11 was a place for respondents to leave their email address if they desired to receive updates on the process as we move forward. We had 1480 people complete the survey in English and 22 complete the survey in Spanish.

The second way we gathered feedback, comments and suggestions was through one- on -one meetings, group presentations and community events. We met individually with approximately 20 community leaders, gave 12 presentations and attended 8 community events. This second group of community conversations allowed us to touch base with approximately 1000 people.

•**The top service priorities conveyed to us during this month of community conversation were:**

1. Reading for Fun
2. Literacy, helping all ages to learn to read
3. Lifelong Learning
4. Homework Help
5. Technology, providing to all

•**Additional trends in the answers and comments of the survey centered on these common themes:**

1. More locations for library service
2. More materials and books
3. More technology/EBooks

•**All ages responded to the survey**, close to 50% of responders were over 50 years of age and 50% of responders were under the age of 50.

•**Zip Code** 93003 was most represented, followed by 93001 and then 93004 for survey responders.

•**Through many comments** it is apparent that the community is most anxious to move on to the next level of discussion concerning:

1. Library Locations,
2. Library Cost
3. Library Management

In summary, Step one of the Strategic Planning Process was effective in communicating the process involved, gaining trust from the citizens in the process, and educating folks about public library service possibilities. In many cases the audience or survey responders came with preconceived notions on the planning process intent and we spent a great deal of time getting citizens to focus on service roles. There was much discussion concerning the past history of library service in Ventura and healing old wounds.

We are confident as we move into the heart of the project we can continue to communicate and educate the community on future library service so they have current and accurate information at all times.

## Section Four: Community Survey

As **one part** of the multi layered community input process; a library service roles survey was launched. The survey was released in English and in Spanish on May 5, 2011 and was open to the public for participation through June 8, 2011. The survey was completed online and on paper- the link for the online and paper surveys was posted throughout the city. The Foster and Avenue branch library locations as well as city hall were drop off points for paper survey returns. To keep the data integrated, all paper surveys were input onto the online site to allow us to capture all the data in one place. The online survey format allows us to capture all the comments and responses to share with the public. We used *Zoomerang* as our survey site host. ([www.zoomrang.com](http://www.zoomrang.com))

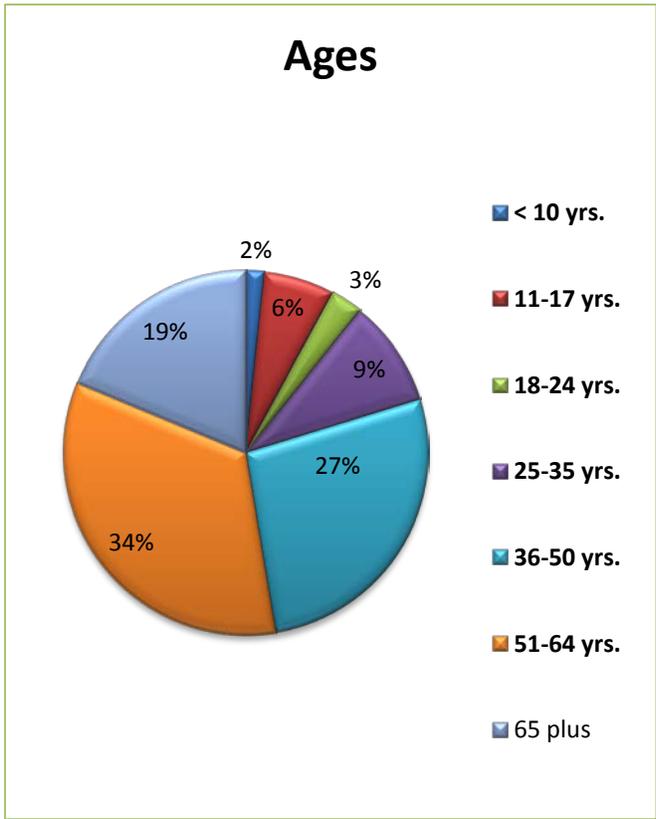
1500 people participated in the survey process representing about 1.5% of the population. This level of involvement is average in most library centric surveys. In addition, we had approximately 1000 people involved in meetings and presentations providing feedback to us.

### Key characteristics of the survey respondents:

- Almost equal split between over 50 years of age and under 50 years of age in respondents
- 44% of participants live in zip code area 93003      25% in 93001      19% in 93004
- 99% of the people who responded think the library is important to the community
- 78% of the responders have visited the library in the last 12 months.  
22% have NOT visited the library



## Question One: What is your age?



**Question One was a mandatory question for all respondents.**

### Age Group Summary

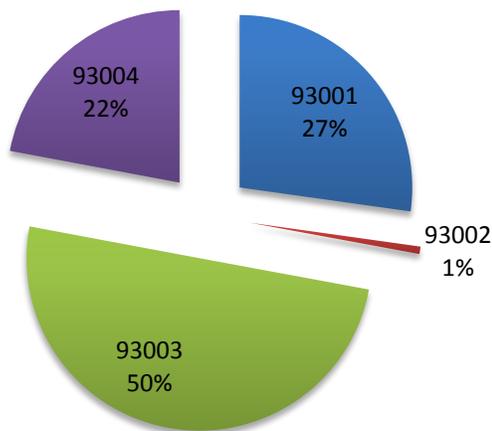
The active solicitation of all population groups in the City of Ventura provided a full spectrum of respondents. Although we actively, and repeatedly attempted to get a higher number of teens and preteens to respond we were not successful. We will continue to focus on feedback from this age group over the summer months.

As is in most community campaigns we have a very engaged over 50 years of age population. For the most part they have more time to devote to civic issues and are more vocal on issues that impact their lifestyle.

We are confident that we captured a wide range in ages in our survey and will continue to focus on more input from folks under 50, and especially under 18 over the next few months.

## Question Two: What is your zip code?

### Zip Codes



Because library service is provided to all who live, work or attend school in Ventura we added the work/school option to this question for those without city zip codes.

5% Work in Ventura

1% Attend school in Ventura

4% Do not live, work or attend school.

The 4% group input is important but they will not be included in data since they are not part of the library service area.

**Question Two was a mandatory question for all respondents. The question helped us to make sure all neighborhoods were reached for feedback.**

Responders were very clear in more than one response to the survey questions about a library facility being close to their home. The East Side residents feel left out and neglected when it comes to public library services. It will be important as the process moves forward to make an effort to engage this geography of the community in future library service expansion. Residents near the former Wright Branch feel that their neighborhood library was unfairly closed.

**RED FLAG:** East Side residents express concern that they are not receiving library services. If library service is not improved in their neighborhood, the City of Ventura risks alienating them from future civic engagement.

### Question Three: Have you visited a public library in the City of Ventura in the last 12 months?

**78% Replied YES**

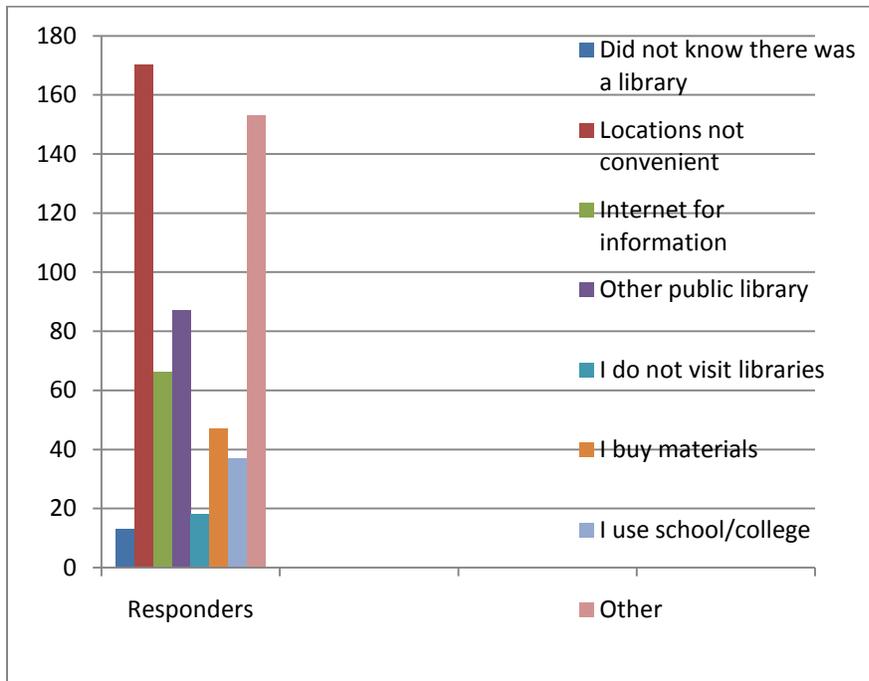
**22% Replied NO**

The question is important to the result set because we want to confirm we are reaching out to non library users. The public library is an asset that is community based; it is unrealistic to think that 100% of all citizens will use the asset. Non-library user feedback is crucial to help us find out what they are looking for in a public library.

**88% EP Foster      6% Avenue      11% BOTH**

Since EP Foster is the larger of the branch locations serving the City of Ventura, it validated what we thought that most of the citizens do use the downtown facility.

### Question Five: If NO, why you have not visited the public library in the City of Ventura?

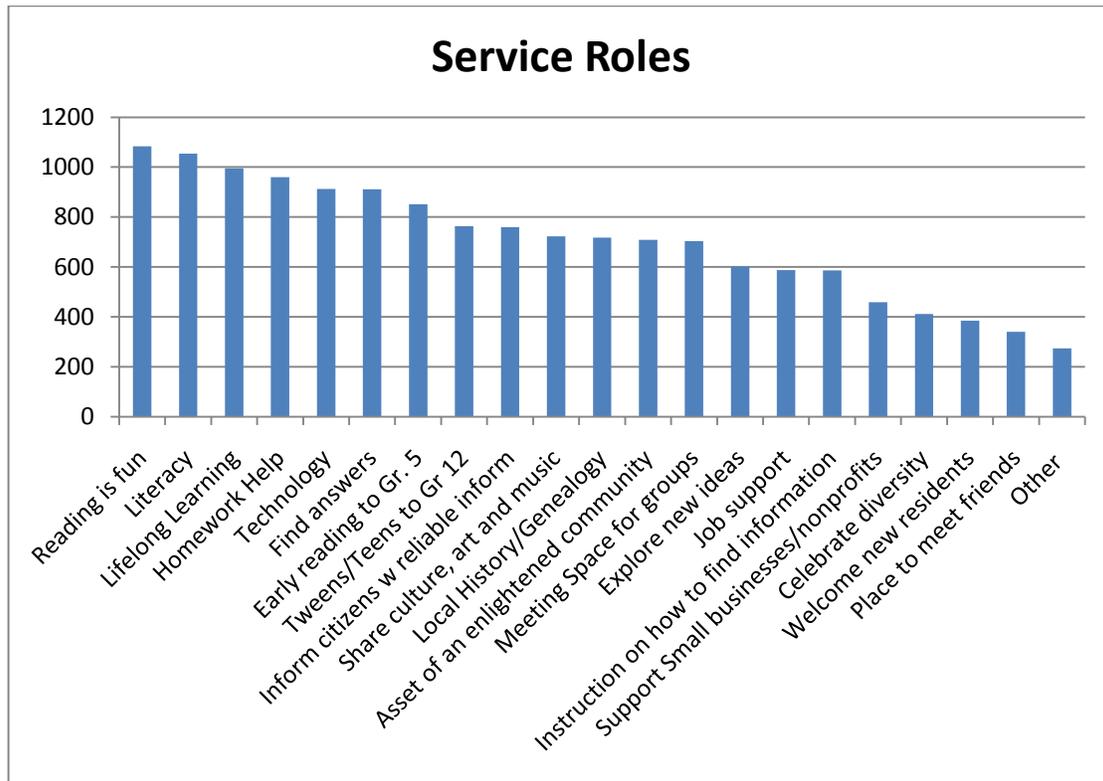


There were 153 comments written under "Other" the bulk of the comments centered on "location" of the library.

- East side needs a library
- Not convenient to home/school
- Not safe for my kids downtown
- They used Wright

**Red Flag:** Citizens are going to neighboring communities for library service.

**Question Six:** The services that are provided by public libraries to their community vary from city to city. What services do YOU think are important for the public library to provide? (You may select more than one.)



Reading is the primary goal of all libraries around the world. The City of Ventura is no different in their desire to make that the number one priority for library service. Close behind is a focus on literacy for all ages, lifelong learning, homework help and technology. The services Ventura residents requested are dependent on two key factors of the delivery of excellent library service:

**Highly trained staff and New Resources**

NOTE: The services most requested by City of Ventura responders are the most expensive in public library budgets.

The majority of "Other" comments mentioned additional materials desired such as: DVD's, story time, café, author visits, computers and books. There were multiple mentions about Inter Library Loan from other libraries as well as quiet study areas. Most responders did not realize that a later question in the survey would ask them about what they would like to see more of at the library.

## Question Seven: Do you think that a public library is important to our community?

**99% voted YES**

**1% voted NO**

This question was one of the most important in the survey. The City of Ventura citizens want a public library in their community. The overwhelming positive response to the question confirms the community's desire for a public library. NOTE: Wanting a public library and supporting a public library are two different questions that need further exploration.

Next on the discussion table are the tough questions, "Will citizens be willing to financially support a strong public library?" Will citizens use their public library? Will citizens support a library that serves everyone in the City, not just their neighborhood or family?

**910 people wrote a personal comment in response to Question Seven. This is the area that feelings came through most passionately. Sample responses below. All are available online at the City of Ventura website.**

*"It is a basic service for the American Way of Life. One of the free services available for intellectual growth."*

*"Information access for everyone is vital to democracy."*

*"Education. A place to learn about the world of art, music, technology -- lifelong learning and enjoyment."*

*"It is potentially the heart of any community. Unfortunately, our libraries haven't been presented that way."*

*"A city w/o a library? Nonsense"*

*"It is among the first places I visit in a community."*

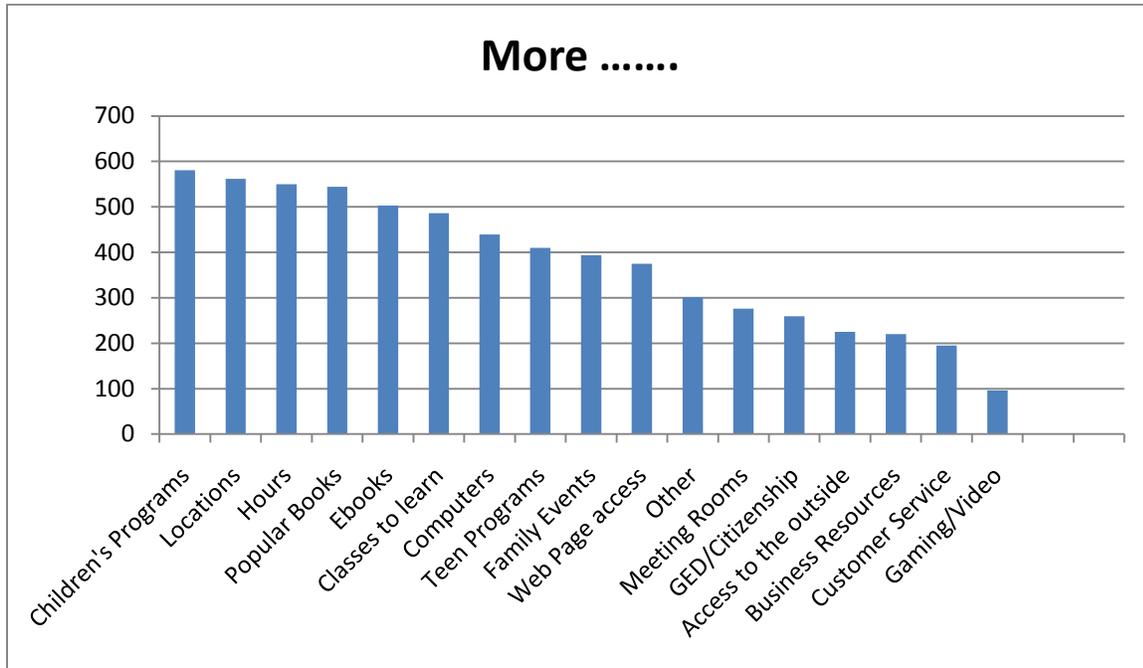
*"It is the place that first opened up the world to me; at age 71 it is still important in my life. I want others to have the same experience."*

*"An educated community is a safer and more satisfied and happy community."*

*"Only backward communities would be without a public library; Ventura should not be one of these."*

*"A sanctuary where people can go to enrich their lives."*

**Question Eight:** What offerings would you like to see MORE of at the current City of Ventura locations? (EP Foster and The Avenue libraries)

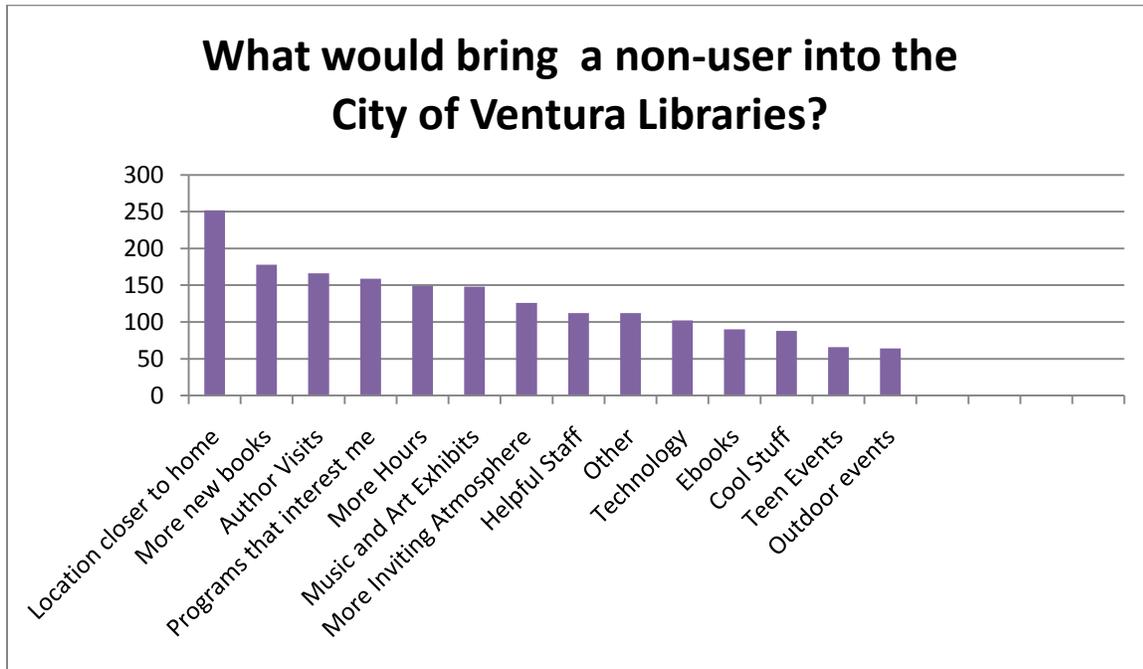


Survey responders were again looking for more of the traditional library services to be provided along with new trends in service like EBooks. The library will be playing a pivotal role in moving the community forward as new technologies are developed and implemented into people's lives.

The "other" comments submitted for this question were about:

- Author visits
- More science, more music, more Christian, more kids, more literature....all books
- More parking
- Location on East Side
- ESL and language classes
- Adult programs
- Ebooks and technology with help on how to use

**Question Nine: If you DO NOT visit the City of Ventura public libraries what would bring you into the library?**



The fact that 22% of the survey responders are NON USERS tells us that this segment of the population wanted to be heard on the library issue.

Location comes up as the top reason why people did not go to the library in the City of Ventura. We heard from East Side folks and Mid Town who wanted a location closer to home. In addition, there were comments regarding the Downtown location that were negative:

- Better parking
- Quiet Spot for adults on second floor
- More Security
- More friendly
- More like a bookstore
- More new materials/services

**Question Ten:** If you have visited another public library that you REALLY enjoyed, please tell us where the library is located and why you enjoyed your visit

700 plus responders shared with us which public library (ies) they enjoyed visiting and why. With local communities surrounding the City of Ventura placing an emphasis on public library building in the past 10 years there are locations that popped up very frequently as a response to this question.

The community of Camarillo was most identified; approximately 60% of all chose Camarillo as their favorite. The new central library has a café, large children’s area and many nooks and crannies for visitors to get lost in a book. The library was built with approximately \$6M of city funding and is currently operated by LSSI a non city private concern.

*“Camarillo Library--It’s so beautiful and clean with good parking”*

The community of Oxnard was also a local favorite for Ventura residents. The highlights are extensive children and adult programming a pleasant atmosphere easy to access and lots of books. Oxnard is a city run and owned library.

*“Oxnard Public Library is wonderful. The collection is great, the staff is helpful, and community offerings are interesting.”*

The community of Thousand Oaks rounds out the three local libraries that residents drive to on a frequent basis. Thousand Oaks is mentioned as a well run library with lots of programs and DVD’s and audio books are frequently highlighted by responders.

*“Thousand Oaks - It is a beautiful children’s gathering place, it’s a nice new building and it has many books, DVD’s and movies to rent.”*

Local County library branch locations were also mentioned as frequented by City of Ventura residents. Saticoy and Ojai were the most frequently mentioned. Friendly staff and ease of access were the reason they visited.

Responders mentioned the following characteristics about libraries around the country they liked to visit:

- Safe
- Friendly staff
- Clean
- Programming across all age groups
- Extensive collections
- Lots of parking

**Other popular libraries:**

**LA Public**  
**Santa Barbara**  
**NY Public**  
**Beverly Hills**  
**Pasadena**  
**Tucson, AZ**  
**Seattle**  
**...many hometown favorites mentioned**

**Question Eleven:** If you would like to receive online updates about the City of Ventura: Strategic Planning for Public Library Service Project please provide your email address below.

Approximately 500 people provided their email address to us for future communication on the library planning process. Emails are precious and for so many people to share theirs with us shows a high level of commitment from the citizens to see the process move forward and stay informed.

The email addresses will not be made public or be shared with any city or county entity. They will be used for emails on this project only.



**Spanish Survey Results:** We had 22 submissions. Although we had 85 people look at the survey online, only 22 took the entire survey.

1. All survey responders were over the age of 18. With 59% aged 36-50 years of age.
2. 50% of our survey responders lived in zip 93001 and 50% in 93003 and 93004
3. 82% of our responders have visited a library in the City of Ventura.
4. 44% of responders visited the EP Foster Branch in Downtown Ventura.
5. If they **did not** visit the library the top three reasons were:
  - a. I did not know there was a library
  - b. The library is not convenient to my home
  - c. I get the information I need on the Internet
6. Service Roles that were important to the responders are:
  - a. Help with Homework
  - b. Technology
  - c. Literacy for all ages
  - d. Job Help
  - e. Programs for young children and teens
7. Our responders unanimously believe a library is important to the community.
8. Our responders would like to see MORE in the City of Ventura Libraries:
  - a. Computers
  - b. GED and Citizenship Classes
  - c. Programs for young children
  - d. Programs for teens
  - e. Family events
9. If you **did not** visit the library what would make you come in?
  - a. Author Visits
  - b. Outdoor events
  - c. Music and Art Programs
  - d. Technology
  - e. New Materials (especially Spanish language)
10. The library most visited outside of Ventura was Oxnard with Camarillo in second place.

COMMENTS on surveys touched three topics:

1. Libraries are important to help our children be educated.
2. Libraries are a source for information and learning for all ages.
3. Libraries can be a place to go and enjoy cultural and family activities.

## Conclusions: Lessons Learned

The month of May offered the community many opportunities to share their thoughts on public library service in the City of Ventura. We were able to gather insight into the minds of Ventura citizens on the topic of the public library from their active participation in community meetings and through the survey drive. A few key issues have been identified as most important and worth further exploration.

- **Additional Locations for library service ( # 1 priority)**
- Additional resources for materials (books, DVD's, Ebooks)
- Programming: What is provided and what is desired?
- Services: Classes, Tutoring, and Staff allocation: resource evaluation
- Finances: How are dollars allocated for existing services? What financial resources are currently available to the city for library services? If more services are desired: What is the cost for the City?

The top service priorities for the City of Ventura are:

- Reading for Fun
- Literacy for all ages
- Lifelong Learning
- Homework Help
- Technology

The many ideas for programs, materials and "things" that would make the library attractive to the citizens of Ventura could be addressed in the above 5 areas of service. Although the service priorities are more traditional, we believe there is a need to position the library for the next generation of users. Without abandoning the top 4 areas of service-we believe

**Technology applications should be woven into each and every service role.**

Technology will be the way to keep the library relevant and exciting to all who live in the City of Ventura now and into the future.

The library is the place to learn about new technologies and to help residents adapt to an ever changing world. Having a top notch public library will help to keep the City of Ventura on the cutting edge and competitive with peer cities in California as well as other states.

## Conclusions: Next Steps

The next two months will be spent gathering information on existing library services in the City of Ventura and the costs associated with the current level of service. We will compile data on providing the services the community sees as its priorities. We will apply the findings across the board to each of the potential library service providers.

- County of Ventura, Current Provider
- City of Ventura, Department of the City- administered by a private firm
- City of Ventura, Department of the City- administered by the city
- A potential combination of library service providers. TBD

\*\*\*To help the community further understand library services we will be hosting a community meeting in July, 2011 with a panel of library experts to discuss service roles and how they can be delivered. **KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR DATE-TIME-PLACE INFORMATION**

\*\*\*We will continue to publish Library Polls in the next few weeks to gather additional feedback on important issues such as: Library locations, funding, service providers and programming choices.

The final report will be published in October in time for the Library Advisory Committee, the Steering Committee and the City Council to review and discuss for the next steps to be finalized and put into motion for the City of Ventura.