



LEVI HEYWOOD MEMORIAL LIBRARY
STRATEGIC PLAN
FY2026-FY2030

Levi Heywood Memorial Library
55 West Lynde Street
Gardner, MA 01440
<https://www.leviheywoodmemlib.org>

Approved by the Board of Trustees September 29, 2024

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INTRODUCTION

The Levi Heywood Memorial Library made a commitment in 2024 to gather information from the community and create strategic priorities to meet the needs that were identified. A Steering Committee was formed and began working with Deb Hoadley from Hoadley Consulting in March 2024. Through this process, a five (5) year strategic plan was created. This plan outlines the purpose and vision of the library and how it will support the City of Gardner, and serve the needs of the community. The focus is to provide access to information, materials, and programs of interest, and also supporting community connections. This strategic plan allows the Levi Heywood Memorial Library to adapt to Gardner as it continues to evolve into a vibrant and thriving community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

On behalf of the Library Administration, we sincerely thank the many residents and community members for their participation in the development of Levi Heywood Memorial Library's strong and relevant Strategic Plan FY2026-FY2030. The contribution of the library staff and community members who participated in the meetings and took the time to answer the library's survey speaks to the strong commitment and support of the Levi Heywood Memorial Library. We want to also thank Gardner's Mayor Michael J. Nicholson and Gardner Public School Superintendent, Mark Pellegrino for taking the time to be interviewed as key community leaders. We especially wish to thank the Community Focus Group who met for two evening meetings to discuss and formulate community and library needs, both now and in the future.

Community Focus Group Members:

Magnus Carlberg
John Czasnowski
Michelle Dunn
Dan Forte
David Hackett
Dana Heath
Jena Hill
Stacey Kazinskas
Marion Knoll

Judy Mack
Stephanie Marchetti
Jennifer Pelavin
Deb Pond
Nadine Rodrigues
Naneshka Lee Hernandez Santos
Lauren Spooner
Jason Zelesky

We want to thank the Levi Heywood Memorial Library Association Trustees for their valued contribution to the development and approval of this plan.

Levi Heywood Memorial Library Association Trustees:

Karen Anderson, President
Calvin D. Brooks, Vice President
Jennifer Dymek, Clerk
Susan Goldstein, Treasurer

Marisa Coviello
Sheila I. Heglin
Michael Horrigan
John Narkevicius

LIBRARY INFORMATION & HIGHLIGHTS

The first Gardner Public Library was founded on February 4, 1886. Subsequently, in 1978, the library moved to City Hall Avenue. With donations, state and federal government grants, and a donation of land by the City of Gardner, the now Levi Heywood Memorial Library was newly built on 55 West Lynde Street. It opened its doors in October 2004.

The Levi Heywood Memorial Library provides public library service for the City of Gardner (population of 21,287). The City funds salaries and most of the operational costs. The Library Association provides building and grounds repair, maintenance, and covers any other shortfalls in the overall budget using MA State Grant money; donations; investments; and support from the Friends of the Library group. This hybrid system works well for both the Association and the City. In order for it to be successful and yield the most money and services for the community, participation in the MA State Aid to Public Library Program is necessary. There are minimum standards that must be met to receive the full amount of state aid available.

The Levi Heywood Memorial Library is currently open 45 hours per week (this falls below the minimum state standards). The library is a free space for those who need to keep warm, a meeting place for senior companionship, an accepting environment for those who have immigrated and wish to learn more about the community, a safe environment for parent visitations, and a working space for students and adults. Knowledgeable and skilled library staff help with questions of all types, recommend books, helps with printing and faxing, fosters a love of literacy through early childhood programming, and more. Today the library is so much more than books, and must keep up with the ever-changing needs of the community.

Highlights from 2024 include:

- Hiring of a new Library Director, Stephanie Young
- Board of Trustees approved to fund the library's first strategic plan
- Partnerships with Fidelity Bank and GFA were formed to support the Summer Reading Launch Party
- Increased story times to include ages 6 months to 5 years
- Started new adult monthly programs
- Reduced barriers through updated policies, including being fine free

METHODOLOGY

The strategic planning process began in March 2024 when the Board of Trustees approved to hire consultant, Deb Hoadley. An internal Strategic Planning Steering Committee was selected. It was made up of: Stephanie Young, Library Director; Gina Verrelli, Assistant Library Director; Susan Goldstein, Library Trustee; and Tory Kazinskas, member of the Friends of the Library Group. They were instrumental in recruiting community members to participate in a community focus group, review the community survey and meet with the consultant for a retreat meeting to go over all the information gathered and create the core areas of the strategic plan (mission, vision, values, strategic priorities, and goals).

Ms. Hoadley held two meetings with the community focus group. One to discuss the library and do a S.O.A.R. (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results) brainstorming exercise and the other to discuss challenges, issues and visions for the City of Gardner. They ended their second meeting coming up with ways the library could play a role in meeting the community's needs.

Ms. Hoadley also held focus groups with the library staff, and the Board of Library Trustees. They also did the S.O.A.R. exercise and discussed the community's needs and wants. Ms. Hoadley also did phone interviews with Mayor Michael J. Nicholson and Mark Pellegrino, Gardner Public School Superintendent. They discussed goals for the city and the public schools, and how the library could support these goals in the coming years.

A community wide survey went out to the public and ran from June-July 2024. A total of 304 responses were collected (see Exhibit A). This survey was used to gauge library service satisfaction and also specifically look at library hour modifications, programming opportunities and priorities the library should consider over the next five years.

As mentioned earlier, after all the information was gathered, Ms. Hoadley conducted a retreat of the Steering Committee. The purpose of this retreat was to create mission, vision, and value statements, strategic priorities, and goals. The final plan was then written and submitted to the Board of Trustees for approval. The approved plan then was submitted to the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC) for their approval. Once approved, the Levi Heywood Memorial Library would be eligible for state grants to support their goals based on the plan.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

After reviewing all the information from over 500 community members, as well as from City officials, Library Trustees, Friends, and library staff members, a five-year strategic plan was developed. The Levi Heywood Memorial Library strives to be integral to the lives of those living, working and studying in the community and desires to be responsive to the changing needs of the community and supporting connections between the city, businesses, schools, organizations, and the community college. From the information, here are the priorities and services identified for both the City of Gardner and the Levi Heywood Memorial Library.

Community Vision

These vision statements reflect a holistic approach to community development, emphasizing inclusivity, support, sustainability, and active engagement.

1. **Inclusive and Thriving Community Vision:** Gardner will be a vibrant, inclusive community where everyone feels represented and welcomed. The city will thrive with a bustling downtown, robust educational institutions, and diverse recreational opportunities. The community will be known for its proactive engagement, ensuring that residents of all ages and backgrounds have access to affordable housing, healthy food, and ample employment opportunities. Gardner will cultivate a strong sense of community pride, where residents are actively involved in shaping the future through

participation in local events, decision-making processes, and by supporting local businesses.

2. **Educational and Cultural Hub Vision:** Gardner envisions itself as a hub of educational excellence and cultural diversity, offering extensive programs and services through its thriving library system, connected to schools and community organizations. The community will support a rich tapestry of cultural events, including a summer concert series and diverse community gatherings that attract residents from neighboring areas. With strategic collaborations, the community will provide comprehensive resources and counseling services, ensuring that all community members have the support they need to thrive.
3. **Sustainable and Supportive Community Vision:** Our vision for Gardner is to be a sustainable community where growth and support are intentional and visible. The community will offer a network of support systems that include accessible and affordable healthcare, housing, and transportation options. Gardner will be a place where families can comfortably live and work without the necessity of dual incomes, supported by fair wages and safe work environments. The city will be equipped with modern amenities and services that meet the needs of its residents, fostering a shared responsibility and strong community bonds.
4. **Dynamic and Accessible Community Vision:** Gardner will become a dynamic community recognized for its accessibility and high quality of life. The city will provide well-maintained parks, efficient public services, and plentiful job opportunities. Residents will enjoy a variety of recreational activities and amenities close to home, from walking trails to cultural and sporting events, ensuring that Gardner remains a welcoming and engaging place for families, young professionals, and seniors alike. The community will remain committed to keeping costs affordable, making Gardner an ideal place for everyone to live, work, and play.

Community Priorities

Based on the detailed community visions mentioned above, here are five key priorities that the city of Gardner should focus on to foster growth, inclusivity, and sustainability:

1. **Affordable and Accessible Housing:** Develop and implement strategies to ensure the availability of affordable housing options for all income levels. This includes partnering with local developers to promote income-driven housing projects and ensuring that these housing options are integrated within the community to foster diversity and inclusivity.
2. **Economic Development and Job Creation:** Promote local economic growth by supporting small businesses, encouraging new enterprises, and attracting investments that provide stable, well-paying jobs. This includes enhancing partnerships with local businesses and institutions like hospitals and colleges to ensure they are thriving and capable of offering employment to residents.
3. **Comprehensive Healthcare and Educational Services:** Improve access to quality healthcare and educational services, ensuring that all community members have the resources they need to stay healthy and opportunities to learn and grow. This would involve expanding medical

facilities, mental health resources, and educational programs, particularly focusing on early childhood education and ongoing adult education.

4. Community and Cultural Engagement: Enhance the sense of community and cultural representation through regular events, programs, and festivals that celebrate diversity and foster community spirit. This includes increasing the frequency and diversity of cultural events like the summer concert series and ensuring these events are accessible to all residents.

5. Infrastructure and Public Services Improvement: Invest in improving infrastructure and public services such as transportation, parks, and recreational facilities. This includes developing new trails and parks, enhancing public transport options to increase accessibility, and ensuring that public spaces are well-maintained and equipped to meet the needs of the community.

Library Priorities:

The following library priorities are designed to create a more vibrant, inclusive and essential resource for the community, aligning services with the specific needs and aspirations of its users.

1. Strengthen Educational Partnerships:

- Foster relationships with local schools to integrate library services into the educational framework, focusing on the critical early learning years (birth to age 4).
- Develop programs for school vacations and summer breaks that are designed to bridge educational gaps and maintain student engagement.

2. Enhance Community and Cultural Engagement:

- Utilize the library as a central hub for community celebrations and events like job fairs and business expos.
- Offer the library as a neutral venue where various groups and organizations can hold meetings or office hours, thus cementing its role as a key community connector.

3. Youth Engagement and Inclusion:

- Establish a dedicated teen advisory group and expand volunteer opportunities for young people to influence library services and offerings.
- Design programs that reflect and celebrate the cultural diversity of the youth in the community.

4. Accessibility and Inclusiveness:

- Ensure that all library services and programs are accessible to everyone regardless of income. This includes maintaining a fine-free policy and ensuring that facilities and programming are welcoming and accessible to diverse populations, including non-English speakers.

5. Expand Programming and Outreach:

- Develop a broader range of programs to cater to various interests and needs, such as professional development workshops, health and wellness events, and innovative children's programs. Include passive programming that encourages spontaneous participation.

6. Improve Physical and Online Spaces:

- Redesign library spaces to be more inclusive and dynamic, including the creation of intentional teen and children's areas, better use of outdoor spaces, and extended hours of operation, particularly on weekends and summer evenings.

7. Enhance Staff Training and Development:

- Invest in ongoing professional development for library staff to keep them abreast of industry trends and better equipped to serve the community effectively.
- Consider increasing staffing levels to support expanded services and programs.

8. Leverage Technology and New Media:

- Develop a robust digital presence that extends beyond traditional social media platforms to engage community members. This includes creating engaging content like library tours, storytelling sessions, and instructional videos.

From these eight (8) priorities, the following strategic plan was created.

LEVI HEYWOOD MEMORIAL LIBRARY STRATEGIC PLAN FY2026-FY2030

MISSION

(Our purpose and why we exist):

The Levi Heywood Memorial Library provides universal access to materials, services, and programs, and supports community connections to enrich the quality of life for all.

VISION

(Aspirations we have for our library):

The Levi Heywood Memorial Library will be a leader and trusted source that strives to be an integral part of the community, where diversity is celebrated, provides opportunities to experience the pleasure of reading, and to explore and share ideas, skills, and cultures.

VALUE STATEMENT

(What we believe in):

The Levi Heywood Memorial Library's core values will guide the library's mission and vision by:

- 1. Being a friendly and welcoming place for community members to gather.*
- 2. Being actively engaged in the life of the community.*
- 3. Employing a collaborative, knowledgeable, and positive staff focused on the diverse interests and needs of the community.*
- 4. Being good stewards of the library's resources.*
- 5. Ensuring equitable access to materials, programs and services.*
- 6. Championing everyone's right to intellectual freedom and privacy.*

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES & GOALS

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: ACCESS TO RESOURCES

Goal 1: Expand Digital Collection

Enhance the library's digital collection by adding more e-books, audiobooks, online databases, and streaming services, ensuring patrons have access to a wide range of digital resources anytime, anywhere.

Goal 2: Outreach

Develop services to reach new residents and underserved areas by providing access to books, technology, and library programs outside the physical library building.

Goal 3: Reduce Barriers to Access

Implement policies and programs that reduce barriers to accessing library services, including meeting and maintaining the minimum state standards for library services.

Goal 4: Increase Access to Indoor and Outdoor Spaces

Improve and promote access to the library's physical spaces, both indoors and outdoors, by creating welcoming, accessible, innovative technology, and flexible areas for reading, studying, and community activities, ensuring everyone can utilize and enjoy the library facilities.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Goal 1: Strengthen Partnerships with Schools

Maintain and expand collaboration with local schools to enhance educational resources, support student literacy, and provide access to library services.

Goal 2: Collaborate with City Departments

Work closely with various city departments to align library services with broader community goals, such as public health, recreation, and cultural initiatives, ensuring the library contributes to the overall well-being and enrichment of the community.

Goal 3: Foster Relationships with Businesses and Mount Wachusett Community College (MWCC)

Create partnerships with local businesses and MWCC to sponsor events, provide job training, career development workshops, and cross market to gain more exposure for businesses, the college, and the library.

Goal 4: Expand Volunteer Opportunities

Enhance volunteer opportunities to involve more community members in library activities, utilizing their skills and expertise to support library initiatives, continue to build the Friends of the Library membership, and cultivate current and future donors.

Goal 5: Promote Talents and Skills of Community Members

Engage and support community members to provide programs and events for all ages, focusing on celebrating cultures, arts, and music.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: PROGRAMMING

Goal 1: Increase Access to Reading Materials

Expand the library's collection to include a wider range of genres, languages, and formats (e-books, audiobooks, large print), and implement outreach initiatives to ensure all community members, including those in underserved areas, have easy access to reading materials and resources.

Goal 2: Support Adult Lifelong Reading and Learning

Offer diverse and inclusive programs for all age groups fostering a culture of lifelong learning and encourage community engagement.

Goal 3: Enhance Early Childhood Literacy Programs

Develop and expand programs targeting early childhood literacy, such as storytime sessions, interactive reading workshops, and parent-child reading initiatives, to instill a love of reading from a young age.

Goal 4: Expand Teen Programs

Create targeted diverse programs for teens focusing on topics of interest and providing access to diverse and relevant reading materials that inspires a love of reading.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4: STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Goal 1: Enhance Professional Skills and Knowledge

Implement a professional development program that offers ongoing educational opportunities, including workshops, certifications, and online courses, to ensure staff members are up-to-date with the latest library practices and technologies.

Goal 2: Encourage Involvement in Professional Organizations and Associations

Support and encourage staff participation in library associations and professional organizations through memberships, conference attendance, active involvement in committees, and special interest groups to enhance professional networks and stay informed about industry trends.

Goal 3: Evaluate and Build Capacity for Overall Services

Assess current staff capacity and skills to meet identified needs, and provide resources to enhance staff ability to engage with and support the community.

EXHIBIT A

Levi Heywood Memorial Library

Summary Report for Survey

July 30, 2024

There were 304 total responses to the survey. Of the 304 total responses, 70 were from the direct link on the website, 73 were from the pop-up invitation on the website, 131 were from the social media link, and there were 30 paper responses entered manually. Statistically, based on a population sample size of 17,505 (removing the under 18 population), there is a 95% confidence rate with a 5.5% margin of error. Therefore, we can be 95% sure that the population would select an answer within a certain range, and we can expect the survey results to reflect the views of the overall population.

Q1. Do you currently have a Levi Heywood Memorial Library Card?

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	89.11%	270
No	10.89%	33
	Answered	303
	Skipped	1

Q2. Do you live in Gardner?

Yes	77.89%	236
No. Please tell us where you live?	22.11%	67
	Answered	303
	Skipped	1

The top 4 towns listed for where people live other than Gardner were: Templeton, Ashburnham, Hubbardston, and Winchendon.

Q3. In the past year, how many times have you visited the Levi Heywood Memorial Library?

On average, people said they visited the library 25 times a year, or about 2 times a month.

Q4. If you do not visit the library regularly or at all, why not? (Check all that apply.)

I use the library's downloadable eContent such as Libby and the online databases.	44.35%	51
I am too busy.	26.09%	30
I buy my own books and other reading materials.	22.61%	26
The library's hours are not convenient for me.	22.61%	26
I use a neighboring town's public library.	13.04%	15
I don't know what the library has to offer me.	8.70%	10
I don't have a library card.	6.96%	8
I use the library at my school/college.	4.35%	5
I don't have any transportation.	3.48%	4
The library is too far from my home.	1.74%	2
Other (please specify)		30

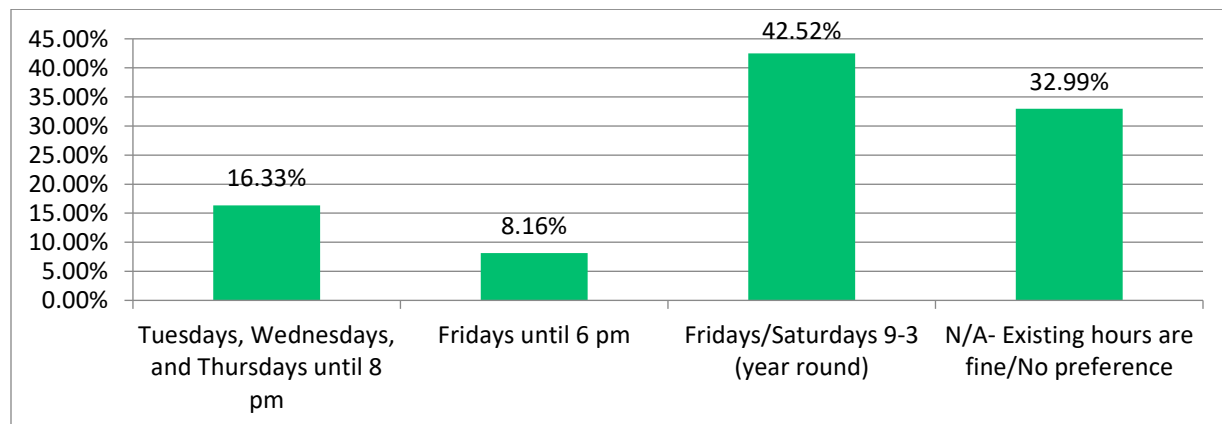
Other reasons listed in the comments were: Hours (not convenient) and fines for late books.

Q5. If you have visited the Levi Heywood Memorial Library in the past year, what were your main reasons for visiting? (Check all that apply.)

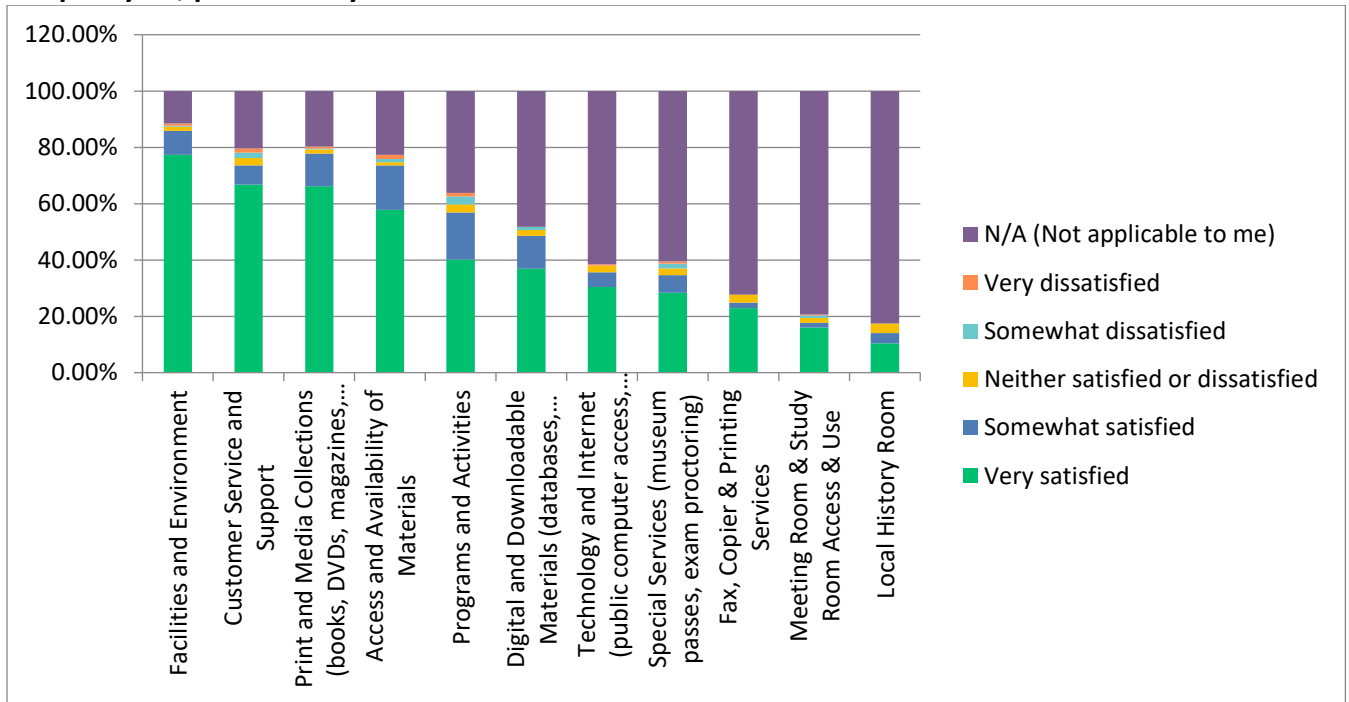
Access to Books and Media: Borrowing a wide range of books, audiobooks, DVDs, and other media.	82.37%	243
Children's Activities and Storytimes: Participating in children's storytimes, crafts, and other activities for ages 0-10.	27.46%	81
Relaxation and Leisure: Enjoying a quiet and comfortable environment to relax, read, or unwind.	25.76%	76
Programs and Workshops: Attending educational programs, author talks, book clubs, and cultural programs for adults.	20.00%	59
Quiet Study and Work Spaces: Finding a quiet place to study, work, or read without interruptions.	19.32%	57
Fax/Printing Services: Making copies, using the fax, and the WiFi printing service.	15.59%	46
Free Internet and Computer Use: Utilizing public computers and internet access.	10.51%	31
Research and Reference Services: Accessing research assistance, reference materials, and databases for school or personal projects.	9.83%	29
Local History and Genealogy: Exploring local history archives, genealogy resources, and historical collections.	6.10%	18
Tween/Teen Activities: Attending events and programs for ages 11-17.	4.75%	14
Meeting and Collaboration Spaces: Reserving the meeting room or small study rooms for community groups, study sessions, or collaborative projects.	4.07%	12
Other (please specify)	16.61%	49

Other reasons listed were: Museum passes, art shows/displays and book sales.

Q6. If the Library could expand its hours, which would be of most use for you (or your family)? Please select the one most important to you. Current Library hours: Mon-Tue 9-6; Wed 9-7; Thu 9-6; Fri-Sat 9-1 (June-Aug Closed)



Q7. If you have used any of the following services at the Levi Heywood Memorial Library in the past year, please rate your satisfaction with each one.



Here are the top five (5) reasons people gave for being dissatisfied:

Limited Programming: Many respondents felt that the library's programming, especially for children and adults, was either lacking or not sufficiently varied. They expressed a desire for more engaging activities that are scheduled at more convenient times.

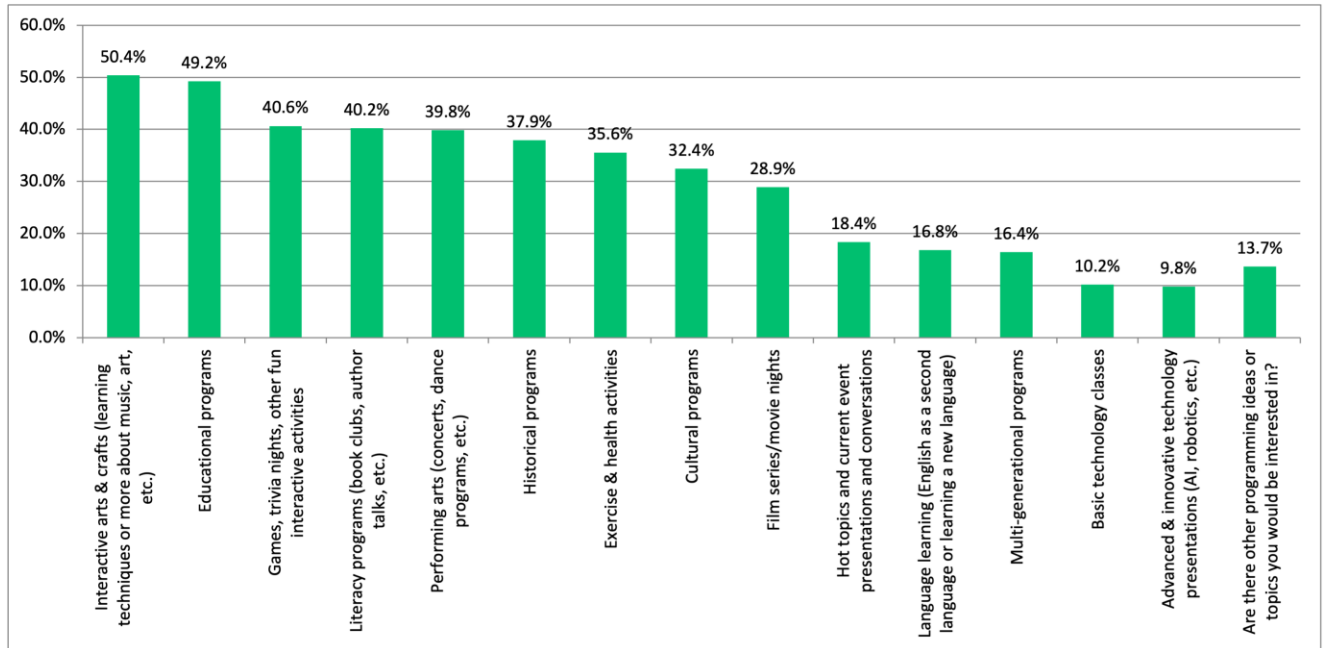
Customer Service Issues: Numerous patrons expressed dissatisfaction with the customer service, noting that some staff members were rude, unwelcoming, or dismissive, which significantly impacted their experience at the library.

Poor Communication: Users reported that events and services were poorly communicated. Information about ongoing or upcoming events often reached them too late, or not at all, leading to missed opportunities.

Inadequate Facilities and Resources: There were complaints about the physical space and resources, including a need for more large print books, better facilities for group meetings, and updated equipment in meeting rooms. The children's area was specifically mentioned as being too restrictive and not engaging enough.

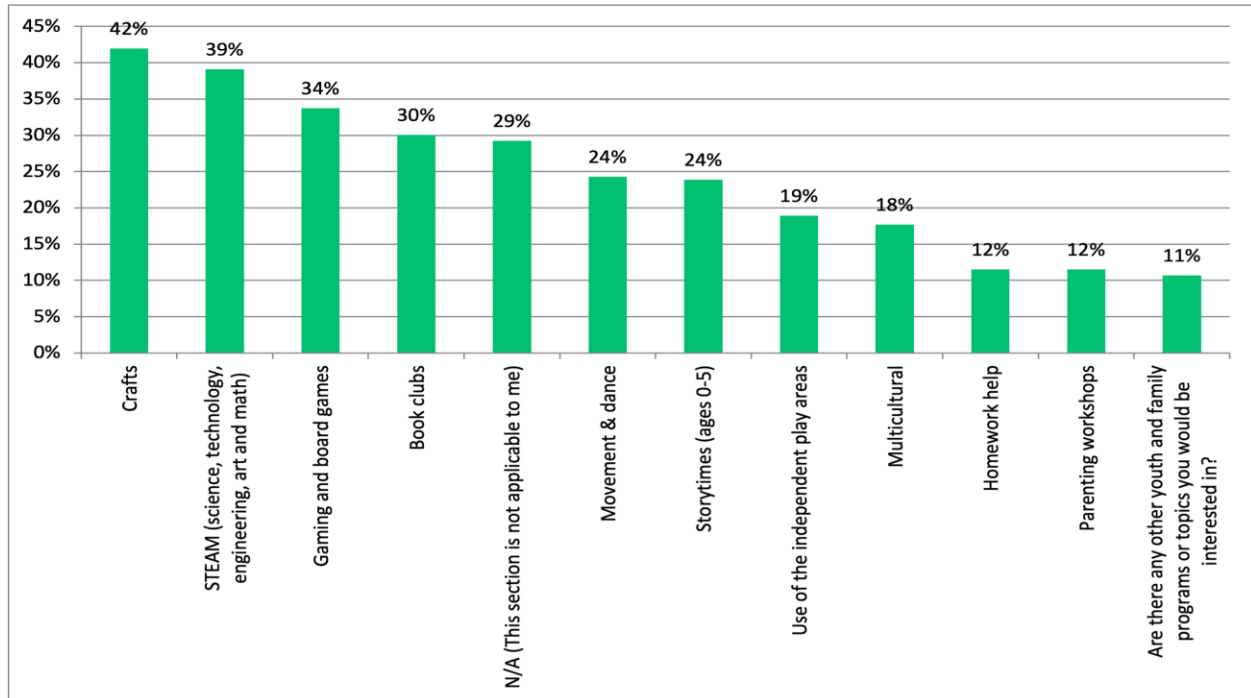
Restrictive Policies: Some patrons felt that the library's policies were too strict or limiting, particularly concerning access to materials and participation in programs, which could be more inclusive or accommodating.

Q8. Please check any of the following adult programs you would most likely attend.



Other programs mentioned included: wellness (yoga, meditation) and parent/family classes.

Q9. Please check any of these youth and family programs that you or your family would be interested in.



Other programs mentioned included: Animal programs, writing, homeschooling programs, and nature programs.

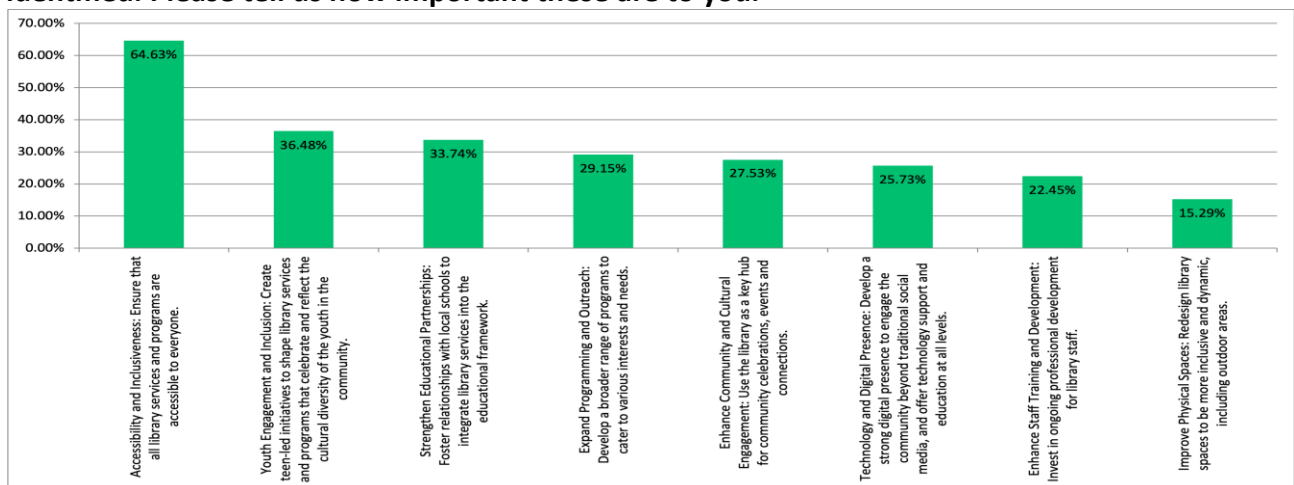
Q10. When you think of the Levi Heywood Memorial Library, what three words would you use to describe it as it is now?



Here are the top ten words and how frequently they were used:

- Friendly** - 87 times
- Helpful** - 53 times
- Clean** - 47 times
- Welcoming** - 42 times
- Accessible** - 31 times
- Community** - 28 times
- Fun** - 27 times
- Comfortable** - 23 times
- Inviting** - 23 times
- Peaceful** - 23 times

Q11. During the library's focus group meetings, the following eight (8) priorities were identified. Please tell us how important these are to you.



Q12. Is there anything else you would like to share with us about the Levi Heywood Memorial Library?

Here are some of the comments that are representative of both “Positive Feedback” and “Suggestions for Improvement:”

Positive Feedback:

1. "It is such a beautiful library and the downstairs staff are phenomenal! Thank you! Feel very fortunate to have such a resource in this city!"
2. "I appreciate the library and especially the children's room remaining politically neutral and providing a safe and edifying environment for children to come and learn peacefully."
3. "The library staff, specifically in the kids/youth area, are some of the most friendly and helpful people. Their kindness is always appreciated as my child loves to visit and see these wonderful people. Their positivity definitely adds to the excitement of every visit for my child. Thank you so much for that!"
4. "I'm so happy with our library. The programs offered already for kids (crafts, terrarium making, summer reading) have made me brag to friends outside of Gardner, and make me proud."
5. "This library is a wonderful place to visit, whether you are a regular patron or just visiting. You have a wonderful, helpful, and friendly staff and a nice atmosphere to relax in."
6. "Patrons do not hesitate to stop a staff member as they move about the library to ask them a question or seek support. This is due to the level of professionalism and availability to patrons of the staff. We take it for granted. Not all libraries are as lucky as us. Thank you."
7. "I feel our library represents the best use of my tax dollars."

Suggestions for Improvement:

1. "More visible and reaching out to seniors."
2. "A place where veterans can attend and air out frustrations to the city and other departments without getting into trouble."
3. "I love all of the programs put on by the library. I do wish that some of the times for them could be different, which I know is hard due to the hours the library is open, but having events from 5-6 is right at dinner time, which I imagine is the same for several families, are tricky to attend."
4. "If there were more events for after school or evening. As Gardner does not have a lot of events going on every weekend. We need to have something more consistent where families can bring their kids to on weekends during fall/winter."
5. "I miss the place online where you could recommend a new book and then get added to the wait list when it was purchased."
6. "The building is beautiful. There should be a huge improvement in storytimes (even the activities and crafts in the storytimes need improvement)."
7. "I would like to see a library service that delivers books and other materials to folks who cannot leave their homes to visit the library. I would gladly volunteer to assist in these deliveries."

Levi Heywood Memorial Library



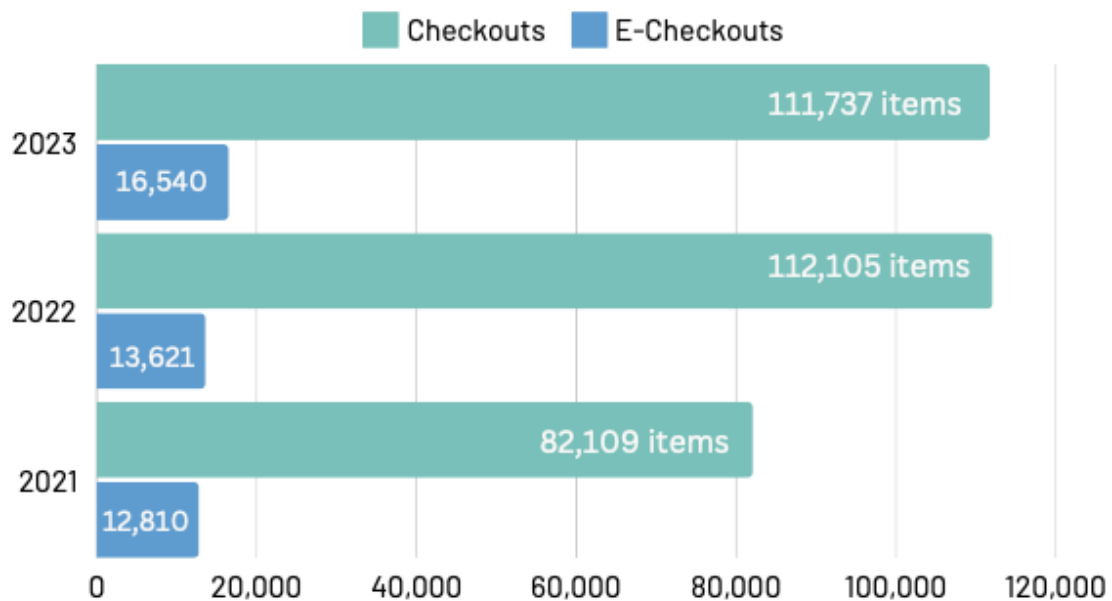
9,027 Total Patrons
102 e-card Patrons



142,949 Owned Physical Items
Collection valued: \$2,917,237



Access to 209,406 e-content titles



City of Gardner

Population



21,287

Employment



53.5%

Employment Rate

Income and Poverty



\$56,974

Median in Gardner

\$94,488

State Median Income

14.8%

Poverty in Gardner

10.4%

Statewide Poverty

Education

Bachelor's Degree or Higher



19.4%

Gardner

46.6%

Statewide

Housing



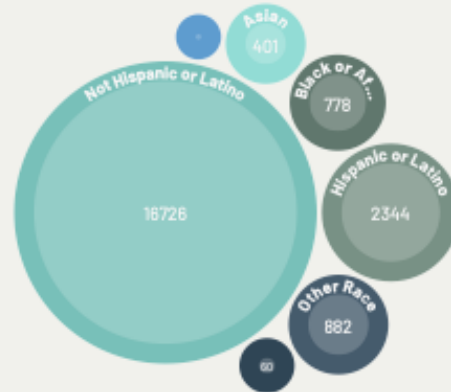
9,411 Units

\$1,041

Median Gross Rent

57.7% Homeownership Rate

Race and Ethnicity in the Community



Gardner Public Schools

2,472 Students Enrolled

PK-12 Student Race and Ethnicity



PK-12 Selected Populations

