

Notes from Midtown Campus Planning Session: March 26, 2015

KEY THEMES FROM BREAK-OUT DISCUSSIONS

Research and Writers

- Integral that NYPL ensures quick and reliable access to books and materials on-site; strong views were expressed that the historic stacks should be used for book storage
- Increase access to and visibility of staff; ensure that staff are knowledgeable about the collections and can help users discover materials
- Need to preserve serendipity in the discovery and research process
- Need for greater transparency in Library decision-making and planning processes
- Ensure that dedicated spaces for reading and study are separate from other livelier spaces in the Library

Core Services

- Improve access to collections by increasing the number and scope of books on-site (including mainstream and bestselling books; books in a variety of languages; and periodicals and journals) and create a more user-friendly borrowing service
 - Increase access to collections for all users of the Library; ensure staff is available to help users navigate the collections
 - Improve training for staff so the Library can provide a better user experience
- Clearly distinguish between quiet spaces for reading and study and livelier spaces for programs or group work
- Improve accessibility to NYPL administration

Business Library

- Many participants are current users of SIBL who want to ensure that its current offerings remain available in Midtown
- Request for regular updates on the program planning process and for the Business Library and its relation to adult education services in the Midtown Campus
- Expand number of programs and classes, as well as hours that they are offered
- Provide spaces for group work, as well as designated quiet spaces for independent study or one-on-one consultation
- Ensure that access to databases and collections is maintained in the Midtown Campus

PK-12 Education

- The space must be responsive to the needs of children, teens, parents, homeschool groups, and schools; the Library must be accountable and transparent about its choices
- Children and teens should be able to see and make use of the collections
 - Have researchers serve as mentors
 - Provide access to comprehensive collections in various languages
 - Offer programs for teachers in how to use collections
 - Use collections to make art
 - Train staff to help teens use the collections in the Rose Main Reading Room
 - Ensure books are in every room
- Teens expressed interest in learning more about the research collections, conducting research, and gaining improved access to research staff and experts; they said it would be inspiring to attend classes and workshops about the collections in the Midtown Campus

Adult Education

- Ensure that programs and services offered in the Midtown Campus complement, and do not take away from, resources for branch locations
- Expand class offerings and ensure extended hours to accommodate new groups of users
- Tie adult education programs to knowledge-creation opportunities and activities throughout the system
- Literacy education programs are of the utmost importance, along with access to collections
- Consider the adult education center and the Library as a whole in a model similar to that of a museum, university, or community center

ADDITIONAL NOTES:

Research and Writers

- Quiet spaces for reading and study:
 - Concern that the Library has taken on events and offerings not intended by its original envisioning as a research Library
 - Reading rooms are too noisy
 - Ensure quiet spaces are separate from livelier spaces
- Access to expert librarians/curators/specialists:
 - Concerns expressed that expert staff are not as accessible as they need to be, and that front-line staff members are insufficiently knowledgeable
 - Desire for increased access to staff and for a focus on education and training of staff
 - Concerns expressed about the salaries of librarians
 - Individual staff consultations would be helpful to increase access to senior librarians, described as “treasure troves”
- Quick and convenient access to books and materials:
 - Concern expressed that too much of NYPL’s collection is stored off-site, with strong suggestions that more materials be moved on-site (not just at 42nd Street, but at other NYPL research centers, such as the Schomburg Center)
 - Statements that the majority of researchers visit the Library to access materials, so it is important that materials are quickly accessible. Imperative that the maximum amount of materials are maintained on-site
 - Depth of the collections is a key strength; researchers come to NYPL to find things here that are not available elsewhere
 - Suggestion that NYPL not rush into the digital age at the expense of printed materials, which are still very important to researchers
 - Suggestion that the digital catalog be improved to adopt autocorrect and suggestion features that are present in other online search tools, such as Google
 - Suggestion that NYPL and its users have to work together to confront the changing role of libraries and changing needs of their users
 - Suggestion that the storage location of materials is less important than ensuring a positive research outcome and experience
 - Provide links between NYPL sources and to collections held elsewhere (for example, papers held by NYPL should include records of how those papers relate to other holdings)
- Preserve serendipity of discovery:
 - Statements that the research experience is about having questions and slowly and intellectually uncovering information. Serendipity of discovery is a conceptually important part of the research process. Accessibility of materials is critical in keeping a rhythm while researching
- Requests for regular updates/e-mails and information regarding Library decisions, processes, and news (for example, what is happening with the Rose Main Reading Room)
- Amenities:
 - Statements that there are not enough electrical outlets or functional Ethernet outlets

Core Services

- The group cited the following reasons for visiting the Library, among others:
 - Because this is THE New York Public Library; it's a unique, iconic place
 - Science, Industry and Business Library's services
 - Late hours
 - E-resources only available on-site
 - To do research and find resources (from high school to post-graduate)
 - Reference materials
 - Programming
 - Browsable collections

- Suggestions for future program offerings:
 - More convenient and efficient borrowing services that are easier for everyone to use
 - Record more public events and programs (especially Mid-Manhattan's Author @ the Library series) to be made available online or by podcast
 - Recognition that area schools and colleges use the Schwarzman Building as their primary library and that many students are first-time library (not just NYPL) users

- Suggestions for space planning:
 - Keep spaces available for researchers, but books don't have to be reserved/kept for individual researchers
 - Mid-Manhattan should be more like the Science, Industry and Business Library but with a broader variety of subject materials and mix of services: collections, staff, group spaces, individual workspaces, power outlets
 - Quiet, respectful, defined, and enforced spaces (classrooms, collaboration)
 - Better enforcement of quiet spaces and/or more designated "noisy" spaces for group work and collaboration
 - Other specialized areas, perhaps like the "Wikipedia Space" that was recently funded by a Knight Foundation grant in Washington, D.C.
 - More spaces for ESOL classes
 - Improved wayfinding (how to do things and find things can be unclear today: you go to one place for information, wait in line, then have to go to another place for the books, information, or resources)

- Access to staff and collections:
 - Branch advocacy groups
 - Books at the Schwarzman Building; more books for browsing at Mid-Manhattan (especially those other than mainstream fiction and bestsellers)
 - More foreign-language books
 - Ready access to experienced librarians so that more users can take full advantage of all the resources available
 - Better access to periodicals and journals for students to get them thinking academically and like researchers
 - Better training for staff to ensure a positive user experience

- Technology resources
 - Book scanning services (self-serve)

Business Library

- Access to collections and databases:
 - Database access at SIBL for consumer and business lead lists
 - Necessity for print, not just e-format; often books that are needed are falling apart
- Access to training and classes:
 - Technology training—in various formats—is key to new business launch and assessment (for example, understanding Google Analytics)
 - Lynda.com meets a need, but Library should not just support online training; instructor-led, hands-on training is how some people learn best
 - Great need for more classes offered after work hours
 - Longer hours, longer evening hours, more Saturday hours
- Staff expertise:
 - SIBL should focus on building up its librarians' expertise; need to continuously expand librarians' knowledge of real-life business needs
 - Additional expertise needed in opening a home-based business
- Role of the Business Library:
 - Several noted that it is not clear which parts of SIBL will be included in the Business Library
- Many are current users of SIBL who requested a steady stream of information about the plans for the Midtown Campus Business Library :
 - Clarity needed, specifically in programming the Business Library and adult education spaces; publicly articulate programmatic adjacency between these offerings
 - Clarify role of science at a research level
 - Articulate how many books will fit in the new Business Library
 - Some current users stated that they would prefer that the business services not move
- Space-planning suggestions:
 - If the Business Library offers space where people can use laptops and cellphones, access databases, and meet and collaborate, it will be busy and many people will come; Need to keep this activity separate from quiet study
 - Business Library should include dedicated spaces for this type of function/activity (for example, the Library as office/co-working space for freelancers, project managers, and mobile knowledge workers)
- SCORE mentors specifically would like to see the following offered in the future:
 - More private office space for advisors
 - More focus on established, operating businesses not only startups
 - Beyond advisory offices, mentors need access to:
 - Meeting rooms for client interactions (for 4-6) and networking spaces (for 20-40)
 - Space for forums, fairs (for example, industry focused): bring in businesses and certify them in some way to mentor, etc.
 - Space for training that SCORE will offer for free: auditorium-style rooms (holding 40-50) and space with computers

PK-12 Education

- Teens from Mid-Manhattan/Columbus HS Innovation Labs would like to see:
 - Extra-credit courses
 - College guidance
 - SAT prep
 - Access to mentoring for career prep and college planning
 - Spaces dedicated to art, with canvases set up where kids can create art; libraries are peaceful places, and not everyone has such a place to focus on art
 - Make sure that the programs we are offering are relevant to kids; partner with schools to make sure NYPL offerings are relevant
 - Regents tutoring
 - Teens need to be able to showcase work they do at the Midtown Campus
 - Ensure opportunities for spatial and programmatic integration between researchers and teens
 - Workshops that teach how to make children's books would be cool
- Suggestions for program offerings:
 - Personal finance: series of classes on budgeting, credit, how to get loans
 - Space for small group classes (less than 10 people), for example to accommodate a small language class
 - Classes for educators on how to use the collections
 - Need options for homeschooling families: teens and parents expected to use the collections and space during the day
 - The Library should not be a substitute for a strong public school library but should support school libraries
 - Many services should be found in the branches to help local communities that need stable anchors (if you are talking about a service-driven library, instead of a collections-based library, then those services should be moved closer to communities)
 - Literacy building toys, such as blocks that depict different stories (they order the blocks), stations where kids can build different literacy skills
 - Creative writing classes for elementary children
 - School admissions support: navigating the DOE to get into Pre-K, high school, etc.
 - More tween programming: often good programming ends at grade 5
 - Library should loan out objects such as telescopes, tools to measure heat at home, literacy games
- Suggestions for space planning:
 - Keep the Library open late to accommodate teens coming from far away
 - Need for varied and flexible spaces
- Access to collections and staff:
 - Accountable and transparent, grassroots process for decision-making
 - Ensure collections are made accessible to users other than researchers, such as teens
 - Access to children's books in multiple languages, as well as DVDs
 - Create a teen advisory board
- Technology needs:
 - Self-checkout
 - Educational technologies to support programming
 - Scanner to get images out of collections

Adult Education

- Specific classes/programmatic offerings of interest include:
 - More coding classes
 - App development
 - Help with new gadgets
 - Writing classes
 - Job-application classes
 - Meditation
 - Tree planting
 - Basic literacy, job-related literacy
 - 1:1 session with career counselors
 - Open book night, book discussion groups
 - Loan out online courses
 - Promote lynda.com
 - Programs that contribute to free knowledge projects (such as sorting through historical photographs, translations, Wikimedia commons), classes on sharing knowledge and creating metadata
 - Engage retirees in programs
 - Tech classes scheduled throughout the day
- Suggestions for class style and structure:
 - Keep classes small (up to 15)
 - Informal opportunities to interact after class and in labs
 - Ensure digital opportunities for education
 - Offer programs during longer hours
- Role of the Library/user intentions:
 - Most are here to help other people learn
 - People in almost any job need to be able to provide a written report
 - Discussion about Library as community-oriented space; some felt that libraries should offer social opportunities, others believe that education should remain the primary focus
 - Library provides community to learn from each other
 - Consider role of Library similar to university
 - Concerns that Midtown Campus programming will take resources away from the branches
 - Collaboration with other City departments to get information out to people
 - Evenly distribute resources across system
 - Consider museum education model (for example, the New-York Historical Society)
- Access to staff and collections:
 - Access to staff is key; ensure people are available and qualified to run classes
 - Local history collections might be useful for knowledge creation
 - Make use of special collections in adult education programming
- Space planning suggestions:
 - South Court auditorium: SIBL courses would be good there, and author/writer lectures
 - SIBL has small areas that are laid out well, work well for computer classes
 - Some concern about privacy of spaces
 - Quiet spaces are integral
 - Collective spaces should include flexible tables and chairs and should have laptops
 - Provide accommodations for moving books into spaces, rolling carts
 - Doors that are electronic and open out
 - New spaces should be to NYC building regulations