

BERNARDS TOWNSHIP LIBRARY
Strategic Plan
2021-2026

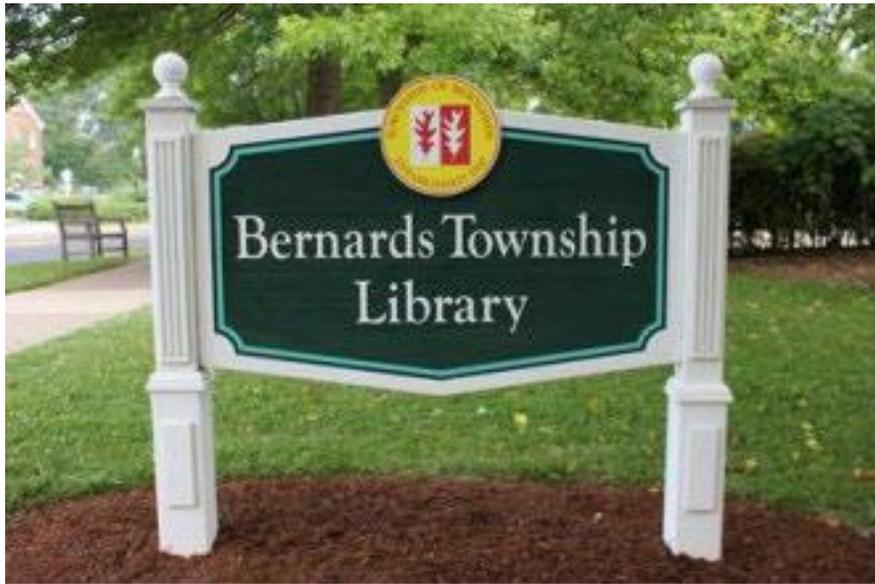


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments

A Word of Thanks

Message from the President of the Board of Trustees

Message from the Director

Executive Summary

Background

Strategic Planning Process and Methodology

Situation Analysis

Strategic Initiatives

Demographics

What's Next?

Appendix

Review of earlier Strategic Plan documents

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT)

Community Survey Executive Summary



**BERNARDS TOWNSHIP
LIBRARY**

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**Bernards Township Library
Board of Trustees - 2021**

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Kathleen “Kippy” Piedici

Lyn Begraft

A Word of Thanks

The Bernards Township Library wishes to thank the Bernards community and the Township Committee for their ongoing support for public library programs and services in our community.

We would also like to express our appreciation to the Bernards Township residents who participated in the community survey that helped our strategic planning process. We thank the staff of the Library that shared their ideas and insights with the strategic planning team.

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

I offer my personal thanks to the Board members and library staff for their dedication and hard work to complete this five-year Strategic Plan update. It's our vision of the future for the library.

The past 24 months has shown us that we must be resilient and flexible to meet the challenges of the ever-changing environment in order to offer outstanding service to our patrons and the Bernards Township community. Continuity of services is paramount.

We are committed to prudent fiscal management and continuous evaluation of services to sustain the library for future generations.

Kathleen "Kippy" Piedici
President, Board of Trustees

A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

This Strategic Plan update is a living document that provides a roadmap for the future of library services in Bernards Township. The Plan supports the Library's lifelong commitment to serving as a welcoming place to inform, enrich and connect our community. It is designed to guide the work of the Library, prioritizing the allocation of Library resources and responsible fiscal management that the Trustees are known for.

The last two years have been a time of unprecedented change for all of us. It has also been a time for tremendous growth for the Library. We learned to pivot quickly to offer library services online, providing a beacon of connection during a very difficult time. The survey of the community revealed how important all of our library services are, and will continue to be, despite social or economic disruption.

The most rewarding aspect of a strategic planning process involves working together with the community. I would like to thank the Library staff, the Library Board of Trustees, the Friends of the Library and the public who participated in the survey and who helped to build this Plan. With the help of this guide, we can continue the legacy of library services, while remaining flexible in a changing world.

*Lyn Begraft
Library
Director*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Bernards Township Library (BTL) today is a financially stable, successful, respected, and well-regarded public institution. The goal of this five-year strategic plan is to enable the Library to sustain its history of providing quality public library services, while preparing BTL to address future challenges and opportunities.

In undertaking the current strategic planning initiative, the Trustees of the BTL evaluated its strengths and weaknesses, analyzed library services and offerings, and solicited input from the community—all with the goal of aligning BTL services with community goals and needs.

Four strategic initiatives have been identified as critical to the future success of the library:

Strategic Initiative #1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improve and Enhance Patron Experience
Strategic Initiative #2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Raise the BTL Profile in Community
Strategic Initiative #3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Effectively Manage BTL’s Resources and Finances
Strategic Initiative #4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Build Advocacy

Bernards Township residents have wide access to content and information via the internet and social media. Through library membership, BTL is a link of this content for many of its users. Patrons have access to an abundance of the shared resources of approximately 49 libraries through the MAIN Consortium across four counties: Morris, Somerset, Hunterdon and Warren. In addition, a digitally sophisticated population of patrons can now access content they desire easily on smart phones, tablets and laptops.

BACKGROUND

BTL was incorporated 125 years ago and was located on the present site of the Ridge Family Restaurant. The Library featured two bowling alleys and those fees augmented the Library's operating funds. The Library eventually settled at the current location in the center of the township on South Maple Avenue.

BTL is a municipal library with an operating budget of 1/3 of mil tax rate on the "equalized assessed value" of the township's property values (per state statute). The non-profit, independent Friends of the Library group provides financial support as needed for programming and other library needs. The Library also receives private bequests from patrons.

Governance is provided by a nine-member Board of Trustees that oversees the library and follows municipal and state guidelines, including prudent fiscal management. Board meetings are open to the public and follow the Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA) guidelines.

As noted in the Executive Summary, BTL is a long time member of the MAIN consortium that operates a shared circulation system and promotes the sharing of resources/collections among its member libraries. In recent years, the Library has expanded its utilization of the shared services, resulting in cost savings.

BTL established a capital reserve fund in 2003 for payment of capital projects. The Board of Trustees has efficiently managed the annual operating budget, resulting in annual transfers into the reserve account. In 2019, the Board initiated a Capital Reserve study to understand the timing of future capital expenditures. The Trustees are using this study as a roadmap for capital planning.



STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS & METHODOLOGY

In 2021, the Board initiated a five-year strategic plan update to ensure that BTL continues to deliver the quality of services and offerings the community values have come to depend on.

The Board agreed on the following process:

- Formation of a Strategic Plan Committee (SPC), consisting of three trustees and the director
- Review of 2011 plan, the 2017 update, and the 2014 Marketing Plan
- Input from Board Members on Technology and Land and Building Committees
- Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats Analysis conducted by the Library staff and the SPC and presented and approved by the Board
- A Community Survey of households in Bernards Township
- Review of updated Bernards Township demographic data and Library statistics

SITUATION ANALYSIS

None of the concerns raised in the 2017 Strategic Plan came to fruition. The Board implemented a series of strategic initiatives and proactively made key operational changes. These actions strengthened BTL to face its current and future challenges.

Financial and Operational

- 1) Rigorous review of budget items, resulting in a robust capital reserve fund
- 2) Enhanced relationships with Township administration and departments, especially the Department of Public Works (DPW)
- 3) Approval of a Capital Reserve Study by the Falcon Group
- 4) Optimization of library services through the MAIN consortium

Technology

- 1) Development of a Technology Plan that continually evaluates and prioritizes technology needs
- 2) Creation of an Emerging Technologies Librarian position to bridge the digital divide and provide ongoing training to patrons

- 3) Introduction of state-of-the-art technology enhancements, i.e., contactless Self-Check, free Hotspot loans

Management

- 1) Staff training and development
- 2) Successful succession planning at senior library levels, resulting in a seamless transition to a new Director in 2019 and Adult Services Supervising Librarian in 2020
- 3) Evaluation of library staffing needs as positions become open

Marketing and Communications

- 1) Strong branding coupled with improved online and social media presence
- 2) Robust patron email list that allows regular communication of programs and services
- 3) Creation of a Marketing Library Assistant position

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Strategic Initiative #1: Improve and Enhance the Patron Experience

- 1) Build on BTL as a community hub by providing a welcoming atmosphere and professional staff
- 2) Adopt new technologies that make sense for the library
- 3) Identify new offerings
- 4) Expand online and in-person programming
- 5) Promote diversity in the collection
- 6) Explore ways to leverage community talent

Strategic Initiative #2: Raise the BTL Profile in the Community

- 1) Establish a Communications Committee
- 2) Create a Marketing and Public Relations Plan

Strategic Initiative #3: Effectively Manage BTL's Resources and Finances

- 1) Evaluate and optimize library staffing as openings occur and personnel needs evolve
- 2) Provide ongoing training to staff and Trustees
- 3) Continue to leverage the services offered by the MAIN consortium
- 4) Effectively manage the operating budget to seek cost savings opportunities

- 5) Seek outside expertise (as needed) for capital projects
- 6) Look for ways to grow the Capital Reserve fund beyond operational savings
- 7) Apply for grants that make sense for the library

Strategic Initiative #4: Build Advocacy

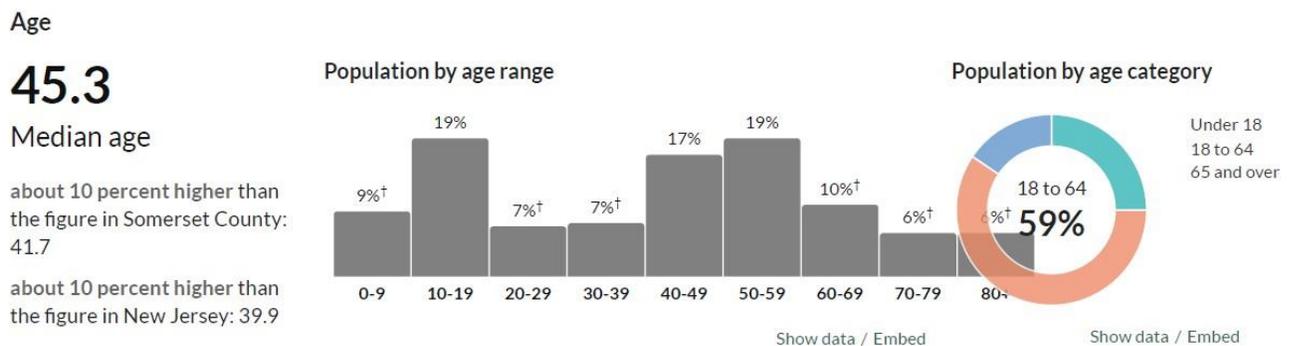
- 1) Identify local expertise to build a base of advocates
- 2) Use Marketing and Public Relations initiatives to advance BTL interests and profile within the community
- 3) Work closely with the Friends of the Library on funding projects
- 4) Continue to partner with local groups to create advocates

BERNARDS TOWNSHIP DEMOGRAPHICS

Bernards is a mature, stable, and affluent community-oriented township with low crime. Its schools and neighborhoods attract well-educated and affluent families. Its population growth is slow, but steady, at 4.4%. The current population is about 27,000 and has become more diverse in the last 10 years.

Source: 2021 National Census

Bernards Township population is comprised of 59% adults 18-64; 28% are under the age of 9 and 22% are over the age of 60.



Citation: U.S. Census Bureau (2019). *American Community Survey 5-year estimates*. Retrieved from *Census Reporter Profile page for Bernards township, Somerset County, NJ* <<http://censusreporter.org/profiles/06000US3403505560-bernards-township-somerset-county-nj/>>

Bernards Township is a community of married families – 81% of the 9,696

households are married couples; the majority of males (63%) and females (58%) are married.

Households

9,696

Number of households

Somerset County: 118,193

New Jersey: 3,231,874

2.7

Persons per household

about the same as the figure in Somerset County: 2.8

about the same as the figure in New Jersey: 2.7

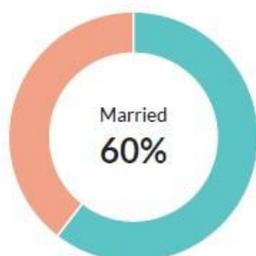
Population by household type



Married couples
Male householder
Female householder
Non-family

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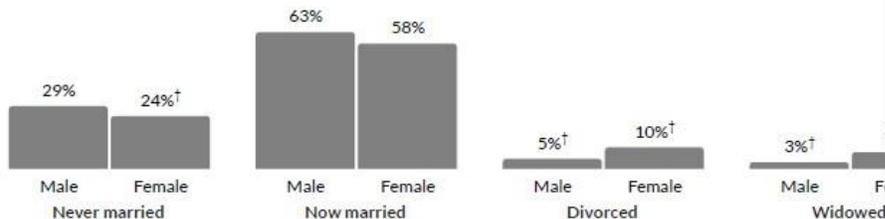
Marital status



* Universe: Population 15 years and over

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Marital status, by sex



Citation: U.S. Census Bureau (2019). *American Community Survey 5-year estimates*. Retrieved from *Census Reporter Profile page for Bernards township, Somerset County, NJ* <<http://censusreporter.org/profiles/06000US3403505560-bernards-township-somerset-county-nj/>>

This is a well-educated community with 75% of the residents having a bachelor's degree and 40% having post-graduate degrees.

In homes with children ages 5-17, English is predominately spoken. The other languages are Spanish, Indo-European and Asian. 23% of the population were born outside the US, primarily Asia (64%). This is consistent with the town's overall demographics.

Educational attainment

97%

High school graduate or higher

a little higher than the rate in Somerset County: 94.5%

about 10 percent higher than the rate in New Jersey: 89.8%

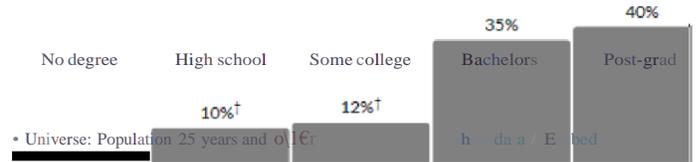
75.1%

Bachelor's degree or higher

about 1.4 times the rate in Somerset County: 54.7%

nearly double the rate in New Jersey: 39.7%

Population by minimum level of education



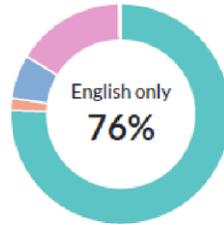
Language

N/A

Persons with language other

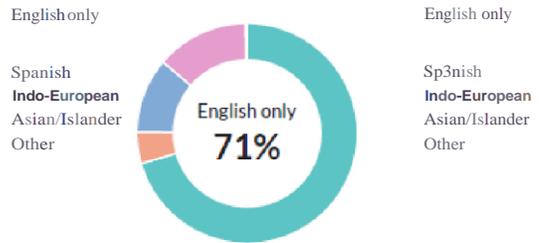
than English spoken at home

Language at home children 5-17



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Language at home, adults 18+



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Place of birth

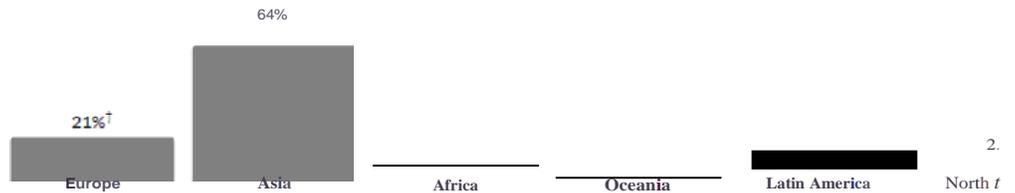
23%

Foreign-born population

about 90 percent of the rate in Somerset County: 25.1%

about the same as the rate in New Jersey: 22.4%

Place of birth for foreign-born population



Citation: U.S. Census Bureau (2019). *American Community Survey 5-year estimates*. Retrieved from *Census Reporter Profile page for Bernards township, Somerset County, NJ* <<http://censusreporter.org/profiles/o6000US3403505560-bernards-township-somerset-county-nj/>>

WHAT'S NEXT?

The challenge for the Board of Trustees is to find ways to extend the Library's tradition of excellence, as well as to continue to create new and better ways to deliver services in today's rapidly changing library and information environment. At the same time, the Board and staff cannot lose sight of the Library's traditional role as a place for quiet reading and research that is an important aspect of our patrons' view of the Library.

APPENDIX

Review of Earlier Strategic Planning Documents

In 2017, the Board set up a committee to review the 2012-2015 Strategic Plan and the 2014 Marketing plan to evaluate the progress the Library made towards reaching the stated goals and objectives of these plans and strategic initiatives. The original ten strategic initiatives were condensed into five. The committee identified areas that were implemented, areas that were pending and those that should be tabled or shelved. The Board was then able to adjust priorities resulting in new and improved tactics.

The current Committee assessed the time frame from 2017 to 2021 and tracked the progress of those strategic initiatives and the changes in the Township and the population. This Situation Analysis and the market research via the Community Survey helped the Board develop the 2021 Strategic Initiatives laid forth in this plan.

2012 Strategic Plan	2017 Strategic Plan Update	Current Update on the 5 Strategic Initiatives of 2017
<i>Strategic Initiative# 1 Space Assessment</i>	<i>Strategic Initiative#1 Funding Strategies</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversify Library Funding • Grassroots/Friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applications for available grants ongoing
<i>Strategic Initiative#2 Public Awareness</i>	<i>Strategic Initiative#2 Marketing & Partnerships</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of services • Outreach to underserved populations for Teens; Culturally diverse communities; Adults 35-54; Adults not close to library; Seniors • Strategic partnerships • Align services with community goals for economic development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2014 Market plan implemented • Promotion of the library activities/services and the collection can be expanded • Increase programs at non-library locations, i.e. the Hills, Assisted Living • Promote BTL outreach to various communities and look at opportunities to work with adults 35-54

<i>Strategic Initiative#3 Outreach to Underserved Populations</i>	Strategic Initiative#3 Staffing and Leadership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Succession planning • Expanding role of Trustees/Fundraising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successfully added staff and transitioned positions as BTL needs evolve
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tie new BTL initiatives (ex. Self Check) to staffing, library expenditures/improvements
<i>Strategic Initiative#4 Partnerships & Collaborations</i>	<i>Strategic Initiative#4 Technology Planning</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology committee and annual plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology committee provides ongoing planning and implementation of technology initiatives (ex. Self Check)
<i>Strategic Initiative#5 Align BTL with community goals for economic development</i>	<i>Strategic Initiative#5 Space Assessment</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximize space and refurbish, maintain physical plant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Library design – Iovino Architectural plan in 2020 • Land & Building – Capital Reserve study
<i>Strategic Initiative#6 Technology Planning Strategic Initiative#7 Diversify BTL Funding Strategic Initiative#8 Grassroots/Friends Strategic Initiative#9 Staffing & Leadership Strategic Initiative#10 Trustees/Fundraising</i>	The other 5 initiatives 2011 were subsumed into the above five key groupings	These are discussed in greater detail in the Situation Analysis

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) ANALYSIS

The Trustees, with input from the Library Staff, identified the following Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats during brainstorming sessions in March/April 2021.

<p>STRENGTHS</p> <p><i>Quality customer service due to the flexible, knowledgeable and professional staff</i></p> <p><i>Welcoming community hub</i></p> <p><i>Access to a broad collection from up to 39 libraries</i></p> <p><i>Strong programming for everyone</i></p> <p><i>Positive relationship with local government and local organizations</i></p> <p><i>Effective leveraging of technology</i></p> <p><i>Robust millage that supports the Library</i></p> <p><i>Prudent financial management and strong reserves</i></p> <p><i>Engaged, forward thinking Board of Trustees</i></p>	<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <p><i>Insufficient marketing/communications activities to the Bernards community leading to limited community awareness of some library services</i></p> <p><i>Aging physical facility</i></p> <p><i>Narrowly focused Friends of the Library</i></p>
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<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <p><i>Reconfiguration and renovation of library to reflect changing needs</i></p> <p><i>Expansion of the collection for diversity and appeal</i></p> <p><i>Addition of payment options for patrons</i></p> <p><i>Continuous building of technology offerings</i></p> <p><i>Ability to increase public awareness with expanded, consistent marketing and public relations activities</i></p> <p><i>Cultivation of additional partnerships with area businesses, and local community groups</i></p> <p><i>Identification of additional funding sources</i></p> <p><i>Expansion of programs and services to increase community appeal</i></p>	<p>THREATS</p> <p><i>Looming capital expenditures</i></p> <p><i>Statutory millage not keeping pace with library expenses</i></p> <p><i>Shifts in local political environment/new leaders with different agendas</i></p> <p><i>Increasing technology costs</i></p> <p><i>Acts of God (pandemic, storm of the century)</i></p>
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COMMUNITY SURVEY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Market research was conducted in late August through October 20, 2021 to solicit community input and gain insights in how Bernards residents used and regarded BTL offerings and services.

The survey was promoted through print media, signage in the library and in local retail establishments, through email and online (Library website, social media, library computers and SelfCheck machines) communications. It was also included on the Township website and the Bernards Township Schools system (Friday Folders, etc.).



Strategic Insights

Building and Expanding Marketing & Communication: BTL has a loyal and enthusiastic base of patrons, yet even high users of BTL services would increase usage with more awareness of library services. Expanding this goodwill into the broader Bernards Community is a key opportunity.

Adopting Technology & Optimizing Staffing: BTL users embrace technology but haven't replaced their use of traditional library services, including accessing the expertise of librarians.

Refreshing and Maintaining the Physical Facility: BTL is a community hub in an affluent community. Planning for the future should include consideration of maintaining the appeal of the physical building while making needed infrastructure improvements.

Innovating and improving the BTL experience: BTL users enthusiastically adopted the new pandemic offerings and indicated they wish they can continue them. BTL can build on these successes to keep the library fresh and valuable while seeking new ways to enhance the patron experience.

Who Uses BTL/Who Participated?

The survey participants are engaged, enthusiastic and satisfied.

- The survey garnered significant support with **894 participants**. The **majority (92%)** were BTL members/library card holders
- Adult participants mirror the town demographics except for the 19-29 year

olds with only 9 participants. 48% of participants are 30-59 and 45% are 60 years and older

- Most (81%) are heavy users (66% using once a month, 15% using 9-12 times/year)
- 90% were somewhat/ very satisfied and 97% would recommend the library

What do they use the library for?

BTL is a source of literature and information and they will use more of our offerings in the future

- Respondents primarily use the library (79%) for traditional library access to books, DVDs, etc. This is complemented by their usage of subscription magazines and newspapers (34%) and digital library offerings (36%)
- In-person and virtual programming (50%) is the next most used service
- Library users also value the service provided by librarians (43%)
- Computers/internet/Wi-Fi is an important library offering used by 41%
- Given the large number of respondents with children it is not surprising that 42% use the children's services/library and 23% teen programming

What do they want?

Satisfaction with BTL is high (90%) and these participants can be reached by email or BTL social media

- The respondents are highly satisfied with the offerings (75%); those who will not use more of our offerings have access to what they need either through BTL or other sources
- Respondents value librarian assistance: 40% use librarians for assistance and 70% say they will use them more in the future
- 175 respondents went to the additional effort to suggest new offerings with most being social/programming in nature
- Overall, the survey shows that they expect to use more of the traditional/books, DVDs (89%); Subscription magazines & newspapers (68%) and Digital library (84%)
- 86% expect to use more museum passes, 86% and 89% will engage in more in-person & virtual programming for all ages
- 259 respondents answered the question of what services from the past year they would like to see from the past year with self-check and virtual programming/Zoom most often cited