

**Community and Library Analysis**

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## **Introduction**

Libraries often complete a comprehensive review of their community when aiming to make changes to benefit their patrons. Located in the heart of Fredericksburg, Virginia, the Fredericksburg Branch of the Central Rappahannock Regional Library system serves a widely diverse community. This report will delve into the demographics of the city that this library serves and the current usage of the branch. Additionally, it will explore the existing resources that are available within the community, as well as current library offerings. From this information, this report will suggest an addition to the Fredericksburg Branch that may help the library better meet the needs of the community.

## **Community Background**

The city of Fredericksburg is a highly diverse community in a variety of ways. According to the United States Census Bureau, the population of this independent city is around 27,982 people (Bureau, n.d.). Furthermore, the city is home to people of varying economic, educational, and cultural backgrounds. The median income per household is about \$83,445 and 43.5% of residents possess a bachelor's degree or higher (Bureau, n.d.). Additionally, 3,472 residents reported to be Hispanic or Latino and 16% of the population spoke a language other than English at home (Bureau, n.d.). While the majority of residents appear to be economically fortunate, Fredericksburg is home to a growing community of working class individuals. The United States Census Bureau reports that around 64.3% of residents are employed (Bureau, n.d.). Notably, only 38.5% of the population are homeowners (Bureau, n.d.). To contrast, the city's renter population pays around \$1,462 per month on average (Bureau, n.d.).

While the Fredericksburg Branch is a member of a regional library system that includes multiple counties, the city allocates a budget specifically for this branch. Fredericksburg's budget is a direct reflection of the usage and expenses of the branch. For the fiscal year of 2024, the city of Fredericksburg approved a budget of \$1,470,000 (Central Rappahannock Regional Library, 2023). This proved to be an increase of \$70,000 but remained under the requested amount (Central Rappahannock Regional Library, 2023). Bolstering the increase in funding, the Fredericksburg Branch has maintained an increase in circulation, representing 12.26% of the library system's total checkouts (Central Rappahannock Regional Library, 2023). While it is clear through the increase in checkouts that the library is well used and respected within the community, the city does not provide the adequate funding required to meet the needs of its patrons. As a result, the library aims to maximize their reach by carefully cultivating programs and events to meet the needs of their community.

### **Community Resources**

The following information is based upon personal observations unless otherwise noted. The city of Fredericksburg is a well-connected community that is committed to creating a welcoming environment. Residents of this community are committed to the wellbeing of their neighbors, often volunteering at the local food bank, shelters, and other public spaces. Beyond the library's walls, the city maintains community park spaces, restrooms, and gardens for accessible outdoor recreation. The Fredericksburg Police Department maintains an active role within the community, offering a variety of programs to residents including classes on car seat safety and Coffee with a Cop (Fredericksburg Police Department, n.d.). Additionally, Fredericksburg is home to some of the nation's oldest churches and supports community outreach events from religious groups. Local historical and higher educational organizations,

such as the George Washington Foundation and the University of Mary Washington, often offer community activities, public lectures, and funding to city-sponsored events.

In addition to local organizational outreach, Fredericksburg's local newspaper, the *Free Lance Star*, maintains a presence within the community. This resource provides residents with information regarding their surroundings and often serves as a source of advertisement for community outreach events. Additionally, the *Free Lance Star* updates multiple online news sources, including their website, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, to broadcast news to a variety of readers. City residents also have access to healthcare, as the Mary Washington Hospital maintains a central location and satellite offices within the city's boundaries.

### **How the Library Currently Serves the Community**

The following information is based upon personal observations and experiences. The Fredericksburg Branch has carefully procured a number of opportunities that aim to meet the needs of their community, beginning with the library's hours of operation. As one of the city's primary public spaces, this branch staffs extended evening hours on weekdays and has remained open on Saturdays. This shift in hours allows the community to take advantage of the library's spaces, as many local groups utilize meeting rooms and other areas to host events. Additionally, the extended hours aim to aid customers experiencing homelessness as many local shelters do not open their doors until the late evening. Beyond the hours of operation, the Fredericksburg Branch maintains a number of accessibility options so that all customers can utilize the library's resources. The library maintains outdoor and indoor book drops, curbside pickup, and has recently transitioned to fine-free checkouts. These allow the library and library materials to remain

In addition, the Fredericksburg Branch offers a number of programs that aim to meet the needs of their customers. The library's programs are planned to suit patrons of every age and demographic. Examples of offered programs include storytimes, hobby-based activities for children and adults, book clubs, genealogy workshops, tax clinics, lawyer in the library services, lunch-and-learns, and more. In addition to offered programs, the Fredericksburg branch offers customers access to technology, internet connection, print resources, and a welcoming environment. This library provides customers with access to private spaces in the form of study and meeting rooms. Furthermore, the Fredericksburg Branch is home to one of the only large meeting spaces in the city and library system. These spaces are available for patrons to reserve and provide the flexibility for outside groups to meet in a free public space. Additionally, these spaces serve as a safe space for customers experiencing homelessness and have proven to be a necessary resource.

### **What is Next**

Due to the current demand for private spaces, the Fredericksburg Branch should move to add additional meeting rooms. Additional meeting spaces would benefit a large population, if not all customers, as they are consistently booked for various reasons. To meet this need, the library may consider transforming quiet reading rooms, specifically on the third floor, into separate meeting spaces. During my time as an employee at the Fredericksburg Branch, I have observed that many of these quiet reading rooms are underused. Therefore, a transformation may allow the space to become more valuable to customers. The library may consider shifting these spaces to accompany a range of group sizes. Specifically, additional meeting spaces for eleven or more people are in high demand and cannot always be accommodated with the current space.

Similarly, the library may consider the purchase of “study pods” to add private spaces and reduce the overbooking of meeting rooms. These study pods may hold one or two people and would come equipped with a desk and chair, adjustable lighting, charging options, and a locking door. Customers would be able to reserve a pod as they would a meeting room. The addition of pods may benefit customers choosing to book alone or with a small group of people. Specifically, customers experiencing homelessness and local students may benefit from the addition of study pods. Pods would be especially beneficial at the Fredericksburg Branch, as this library serves the largest population of customers experiencing homelessness and local students within the system.

## **Conclusion**

The Fredericksburg Branch is situated within a very large and diverse city. Members of this community range in financial, educational, ethnic, and cultural status. Despite differences within the population, the city of Fredericksburg maintains a well-connected atmosphere with many opportunities for members to connect and amenities that can be enjoyed by all. As a result of the demographics of the community, the Fredericksburg Branch has carefully cultivated programs, materials, and spaces that aim to benefit everyone. To further serve its community, the branch should move to add more meeting and study spaces to the library. By meeting the physical needs of customers, the library would be able to create an environment in which each patron feels seen and respected. This would positively impact the outreach of the library and bolster the status of the branch as a welcoming community center.

## References

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**Reflection**

Based on the suggested corrections, I made adjustments to the in-text citations of a number of statements throughout my analysis. First, I added the necessary in-text citations to statements that were based on information provided by the United States Census Bureau. These added citations provided a reference for each individual statistic. Additionally, I added references to information provided through my own knowledge. These citations referred to large chunks of information, as I am currently employed at the Fredericksburg Branch and have made many observations throughout my time at the research desk. Finally, I made a change to a statement that required additional clarification. This change was grammatical, but benefitted the flow of the paragraph.

Through this assignment, I learned how to accurately cite sources in APA style. Due to my background in history, I have always used the Chicago method of citation. This switch to APA was a slight learning curve, and this assignment allowed me to practice citing different kinds of sources in this style. I also learned how to cite my own knowledge, as this is not something that is required or recommended in the Chicago citation style. Additionally, I learned how to think critically regarding weighing the needs of the community with the budget and space of the library. I have not considered how to juggle budget constraints with the demands of the public, as this is not something that is required in my current position. Through this assignment, I was able to step into a more administrative position. This allowed me to apply strategies that I have learned in class to a real-world example through the lens of library administration.