Ramsey Free Public Library

Fostering Community. Innovating Collections. Serving All.

Ramsey Free Public Library Strategic Plan 2023-2026

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"It's a critical resource and the staff are beyond treasures. A truly special and valuable place."

Acknowledgments

"Just a great place. A shining asset to our community. Thank you for all you do, especially in times when libraries, public spaces, and public servants don't always get the respect they deserve."

Executive Summary

The Ramsey Free Public Library Strategic Plan is the result of many hours of collaboration including input from the library staff, the Board of Trustees, the Strategic Planning Committee, the Friends of the Library and the Ramsey community and its leaders. Together we have developed a new Vision and Mission for the library along with five key goals for the library.

Our Vision for the Future
The Ramsey Free Public Library fosters community engagement, provides opportunities for learning and discovery, and connects people with ideas and each other.

Our Mission
We enhance the quality of life in Ramsey by providing access to lifelong learning tools, fostering a welcoming and collaborative environment, and cultivating transformative experiences through diverse collections and services.

Core Values
Exceptional Library Service - We are committed to providing prompt, objective, confidential and knowledgeable service to our patrons in a welcoming, safe and comfortable environment.

Intellectual Freedom - We are committed to freedom of speech. The library's services and collections will represent different points of view and ideas. We embrace diversity.

Access for All - We are committed to providing library services and collections that are accessible and convenient to our patrons. We serve everyone fairly and equitably.

A Welcoming and Safe Environment - We are committed to fostering an environment that is welcoming and a safe space for all community members.

Community Engagement - We are committed to engaging, partnering, supporting and sharing resources with community organizations, businesses and other groups in our community.

"Keep up the great work! The Ramsey Library is a gem & a model for other libraries"

Library Achievements 2018-2022

Before the creation of this strategic plan, the library worked to identify needs and areas for improvement. Between 2018 and 2022, the library initiated a number of new programs, services, events and collections to provide improved service for the Ramsey community. Here is a brief summary of those achievements:

Technology
- Created a new library website.
- Conducted a technology overhaul of the organization. Implemented new computers, a self-print station, mobile printing , new charging stations, new laptops for the lending program, etc.
- Increased WiFi bandwidth.
- Implemented new online registration program for event registration: LibCal.
- Implemented MeeScan - a self-checkout station and app.
- Expanded social media presence and created a Youtube Channel and TikTok account.

Events
- Reduced redundant programming.
- Added new, annual, community wide events: LibraryCon, Winterfest, Harvest Festival, NJ Makers Day, Summer Concert Series, Spring Glow in the Dark Egg Hunt.
- Increased program attendance by 40% between 2018 and 2021.
- Increased number of community events the library participates in annually, including A Taste of Ramsey and the New Resident Mixer in addition to Ramsey Day and Home for the Holidays.
- Expanded range of events offered, including after hours concerts and open-mics, macrame crafts, trivia nights, etc.

Collections
- Implemented new digital collection services (Hoopla, Kanopy, NYTimes Online, WSJ Online) and increased investment in overall digital materials through Overdrive Advantage.
- Created a Library of Things collection, which offers a variety of items for borrowing, including tools, backyard games, STEM learning kits, musical instruments, and more.
- Created a digital archive of local history microfilm (local, historic newspapers) and high school yearbooks.
- Expanded collections showing significant growth potential: teen series books, Vox books, comics and Manga, video games and foreign language materials.
- Created new local history/topics collections: Local History, Local Authors and the New Jersey Collection.

Services
- Created VHS to DVD Conversion service.
- Began providing Ancestry.com access for patrons
- Restructured and expanded the ESL program.
- Implemented a pilot program to begin providing library cards to Ramsey school students delivered to them at the schools.

Facility and Workflow
- Hired new Outreach, Advertising and Special Projects Coordinator & a new Head of Circulation.
- Expanded staff training offerings and professional development.

- Redesigned teen space to provide more open/group study space.
- individual study carrels in the main area for adults.
- Adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic with virtual and outdoor services and events, doorside pickup and safety protocols.

Our Process

The strategic planning process involved several methods of information gathering and evaluation. The process began with an analysis of the U.S. Decennial Census (2020) and NJ School Performance Report to determine unique demographic trends and features of Ramsey.

In an effort to better understand the interests, needs, challenges and experiences of Ramsey residents, we conducted a community survey and met with community leaders and stakeholders.. First, we conducted a community survey online and in print. Notices were sent out via the library's email newsletter, social media and website. Printed surveys were made available at the library and distributed to different community groups and locations in town.

Next, we utilized small group or individual meetings with community leaders and stakeholders to reach a broad range of community members. We had conversations with key demographics, including senior citizens, local businesses, students, families and parents, religious organizations, individuals with special needs and more.

We also conducted a survey of library staff to solicit input from library employees. Initial planning stages also involved the library staff's leadership team, which included the Library Director, Assistant Director, Head of Youth Services, Teen and Adults Services Librarian and the Head of Circulation.

Following these portions, an in depth, internal analysis was conducted on library services, collections, facility, budget and contemporary trends in the library field. This analysis reviewed statistics in all of these areas to identify organizational trends, resource allocation and needs.

Following the gathering of this information, the library Director made an analysis of the findings and created initial summaries and recommendations. Meetings were then held with the staff leadership team and members of the Strategic Planning Committee to review those materials. Following changes and adjustments from those discussions, the plan was brought to the full library board for review and approval.

Goals, Objectives and Ways to Measure Success

Goals/Priorities (outcomes we want to achieve)

Goal 1: Position the Library as a Community Hub for Reading, Shared Experiences and Discovery
Create diverse collections that respond to community needs and interests. access to materials in a variety of formats. Foster interest in reading, shared experiences, and discovery.

Goal 2: Create a Library That Engages, Services and Supports Everyone
Foster an atmosphere of inclusion. Create a welcoming environment.collaborate and create partnerships with local organizations.

Goal 3: Increase Awareness of Library Services and Support for the Library
Increase visibility of the library through increased outreach, multifaceted promotions and communication collaborations. Explore additional avenues of funding, shared services and other cost saving measures.

Goal 4: Position the Library as a Leader in Technology Access and Literacy
Provide access to new technologies. Offer training and lifelong learning opportunities in technology literacy. Expand the Library of Things collection.

Goal 5: Regularly Review and Enhance the Library Facility to Improve Sustainability and Adaptability.
Review physical space regularly. reate adaptable/multi-use spaces that can respond to changing community needs.

Measurable Objectives
1. Position the Library as a Community Hub for Reading, Shared Experiences and Discovery
    a. Increase visits to the library.
    b. Offer diverse and dynamic events and classes.
        i. Measurements
            1. Increase attendance.
            2. Increase the number of events that expand cultural and historical awareness.
    c. Increase participation in the Summer Reading Program.
    d. Build collections that are responsive to community needs, reading trends and diversity.
        i. Expand the number of items available in digital collections and allocate more funds for these materials.
            1. Explore different avenues for providing digital A/V materials.
        ii. Conduct a diversity audit of collections.
        iii. Reduce physical media collections and expand children's physical materials and other collections showing growth.
2. Create a Library That Engages, Services and Supports Everyone
    a. Create an atmosphere of inquiry and inclusion and create an environment that embraces the diversity of the community and staff.
        i. Engage in regular training in these areas.
    b. Build collections and services from the results of a diversity audit.
    c. Conduct an annual community survey.

    d. Conduct a review of our services and access for individuals with special needs and design services to respond to deficiencies.

    e. Increase outreach and develop some services outside the physical library building.

        i. Identify a range of organizations, associations and businesses in the community and create action for creating sustainable partnerships.

        ii. Foster relationships between the library and community organizations and facilitate relationships among these organizations.

    f. Research homebound delivery service.

3. <u>Increase Awareness of Library Services and Support for the Library</u>

    a. Join or participate in a variety of community organizations.

    b. Increase participation in community events.

    c. Increase in-person outreach to schools.

    d. Expand the program to provide library cards and library information to all students in Ramsey schools.

    e. Diversify advertising strategies and utilize a range of promotional avenues.

    f. Maintain a strong and consistent social media presence.

    g. Research and implement additional avenues of funding, including grants, and fundraisers

    h. Pursue partnerships and shared service agreements with other libraries and beyond.

    i. Recruit individuals to join the Friends of the Ramsey Library.

    j. Explore the creation of a library foundation.

4. <u>Position the Library as a Leader in Technology Access and Literacy</u>

    a. Research and implement new technologies along with access and training.

    b. Restart technology training opportunities (one-on-one sessions and/or classes).

    c. Overhaul A/V technology for running community presentations, events and classes in the library's community room.

    d. Expand the Library of Things collection in all areas, including technology.

5. <u>Regularly Review and Enhance the Library Facility to Improve Sustainability and Adaptability</u>

    a. Redesign interior space to emphasize open spaces, adaptable spaces, mobile furniture and shelving and open lines of sight.

    b. Research and develop a 5- and 10-year capital improvement plan.

    c. Redesign library outdoor space and create outdoor programming space.

    d. Replace HVAC system

    e. Review the library's facilities every two to three years by a consulting firm.

"It's a critical resource and the staff are beyond treasures. A truly special and valuable place."

Ramsey Demographics

American Community Survey:
- 2020 Census: 14,798
- Ages
  - Under 5: 4.7%
  - Under 18: 26.4%
  - Over 65: 14.8%
- Race
  - White only: 84.8%
  - Black: 0.4%
  - Asian: 7.4%
  - Hispanic: 7.0%
- Foreign Born: 15.1%
- Median Household Income: $156,058
- Per Capita Income: $67,956
- Language Spoken at Home Other Than English: 15.5%
- Households: 5,357
- Education, High School or Higher: 96.8%
- Education, Bachelor's or Higher: 70.7%
- Living with disabilities under 65: 3.2%
- Travel to work mean: 36 minutes
- Persons in Poverty: 1.3%

School Report Card:
- Economically disadvantaged: 6.6%
- English Learners: 2.9%
- Individuals with Disabilities: 13.2%
- White: 78.2%
- Hispanic: 9%
- Black: 1.4%
- Asian: 8.4%
- Total enrollment: 2,582
- Language Spoken At Home:
  - English: 91.4%
  - Spanish: 4.8%
  - Korean: 1.1%
  - Other: 2.7%

Sources:
American Community Survey (via the US Census) and the NJ School Report Card for the Ramsey District.
https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/2020-2021/district/detail/03/4310/demographics?lang=EN
U.S. Census / American Community Survey / Ramsey Borough
https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/ramseyboroughnewjersey

"Thank you so much to the children's librarians! You have helped our children more than you will ever know."

Community Survey Main Findings

The library conducted a community survey, which was offered both in person at the library location as well as an online survey that we promoted on all of our normal promotional avenues. We received 188 responses for our survey, which has provided us with a wealth of information about how our patrons perceive the library and how they interact with the library. We were able to receive information on who is using our library, what services they are utilizing, where they feel the library is succeeding and where they think the library can make improvements. We asked respondents to respond to 21 questions, most of them multiple choice with a few open ended questions.

Who Responded to Our Survey?
We received 188 responses to our survey, the large majority of whom are Ramsey residents (94.7%) and are Ramsey Library Cardholders (93.6%). 73% of the respondents were female and the majority came from people aged 35 - 64 (62.3%). We were not able to get a good response rate from those 34 or under (4.3%). Of respondents, 59.7% were already signed up for the library's email newsletter. With these factors, it is clear that the responses we received are greatly weighted toward individuals who are already library users. Better information regarding non-users was gathered in our community leader interviews, which will be discussed later in this report.

What items did people mention using the most and the ones they used the least?
The top items that people said they borrowed from the library were fiction books (78.7%) and nonfiction books (70.2%), followed by children's books (35.6%), DVDs (38.8%), eBooks (26.1%), Library of Things items (26.1%) and Young Adult materials (23.4%). It may be that the children's book number would have been higher, but because of the way the options were listed, some people may have checked off Fiction or NonFiction instead of children's materials. So there may be overlap between those categories. The least used items were video games, local history materials, digital comics and Manga, streaming music and ESL materials. While those had a low usage rate from this survey, all of those are small or niche collections, some of which have actually increased in circulation in recent years. This may be more a reflection of those collections being small or niche rather than on the downward trend. While DVD circulation still scored high on this survey, and still amounts for the 4th largest circulating collection in our library, all audio-visual materials have been on a downward trend in circulation for the last few years.

Which digital collection services did people say they used?
Libby had the highest use with 45.7% saying they use Libby, which offers the largest collection of eBooks and eAudiobooks. Hoopla came in next at 29.8%, NYTimes online 3rd with 15.4%, Kanopy next at 11.2% and the WSJ online at 9% and Ancestry at 8.5%. In contrast, 30.9% responded that they did not use any digital collection service. Things to note - Ancestry was brand new to the library's offerings at the time of this survey, so full awareness may not be there. For the age groups that responded in combination with other feedback we received, there may still be a digital divide for patrons knowing how to use some of these services and being aware of their existence. That being said, digital circulation has continued to increase by double digits every year for the past 4 years.

Library Events, Classes and Performances
69.7% of respondents reported having attended at least one event at the library. We offered many categories for types of events to choose from on which ones they attended, applying a checkmark to any that applied. The results showed diverse engagement with nearly all of the different programs that we offered. Of all the program types, these were the ones that respondents listed as having attended or valued the most:

- Special events for kids and families - 34%
- Crafts for kids - 30.9%
- Lectures, art classes, workshops and special events for adults - 26.6%
- Summer Concerts - 26.6%
- Large, Community events (like Boo Bash and Winterfest) - 25.5%
- Performances - 23.9%
- Storytimes - 21.3%
- Author Visits - 20.2%
- Summer Reading events - 20.2%
- Take-home crafts - 19.1%

It is clear from these responses that events focused on children and families were the most popular types of events we offer, which is reflected in the number of events we offer to this group and the attendance levels we receive for those events. However, our adult events and performances also receive a lot of interest as did our Summer Concerts and Large Community events. This diverse interest is reflected in our program attendance numbers, which have increased every year over the past 4 years, with an exception for the first year of the pandemic.

What other library services did respondents say they valued the most?
For this question, we listed options to choose from that include services that are not collection or event based - so everything else the library offers. The top categories for services being used were as follows:
- BCCLS interlibrary loan - 73.9%
- Staff assistance/research assistance/readers advisory services - 50.5%
- Study/public space - 28.7%
- Library of Things collection - 23.9%

Others that scored well include WiFi access, the Quiet Study Room, copying/scanning/printing and reading newspapers and magazines. Services like Notary services and VHS to DVD conversions also had reported usage, but both of those are niche services. BCCLS still ranks very high among patrons and the ability to get materials from other libraries ranks extremely high. I believe that improvements BCCLS made to delivery by building its own delivery service has helped to improve BCCLS ILL use as wait times for requested items has been cut down from 5 to 7 days to 1 to 3 days.

Most Important Library Services
We asked respondents to rank what they felt were the most important services the library offers, giving respondents the option to choose more than one category. BCCLS ILL once again scored high in this area, as did many others:
- Borrowing physical items - 91%
- BCCLS Interlibrary loan - 75.5%
- Good Customer service - 61.2%
- Digital items and collections - 54.3%
- Educational/cultural/entertainment events for kids - 52.7%
- Educational/cultural/entertainment events for adults - 43.1%
- Indoor seating/public/study space - 41%
- Events for teens - 33.5%
- Research/Staff Assistance - 36.2%
- Museum Passes - 34%

- Library of Things - 33.5%

Once again, the numbers show that there is diverse use of our different services and what people feel are important services. The diversity of different services that the library offers was reflected in comments that were received later in the survey showing an appreciation for having a diverse set of services, programs and collections available. Overall, borrowing materials still seems to make up the core of our services, but good customer service, events and public space are all also important to our patrons.

What services would you like to see the library offer or improve?
This question was open-ended and so respondents can put in whatever they wanted here. The answers were varied, but we reviewed all answers to come up with a list of the suggestions that were most common among the respondents. First, the actual highest response we got was for essential 'no improvements needed' or some variation of that, which came in at 18%. Other suggestions were as follows:
- Improve the library grounds - 13.3%
- Improve the physical collection - 12.8%
- *Bring back/improve the museum pass program - 11.2% (at the time of this survey, the library had not fully brought back our museum pass program following the pandemic. The program has now been fully restored)
- More events for adults - 10.1%

Overall, it seems most of our respondents are happy with the things we currently offer. Of the other suggestions, each of those categories had different descriptions of how they would like to see improvements, but they generally fall into those categories mentioned above. The Museum Pass program response was an aberration as the program was not running at that time. The library grounds is perhaps the most straightforward answer on what needs improvement. The physical collection response had several different suggestions as to what they would like to see, mostly focusing on certain genres they would like to see more or less of. More events for adults may be the result of lack of awareness of the programs the library currently offers, as we offer a very robust level of events for adults, which are also cited as one of the library's strengths in another question.

How do you hear about library services and events?
Promoting events and services is always a challenge for libraries and for the Ramsey Free Public Library. We asked this question to see which sources seem to be the most popular among this group of respondents:
- Library website - 59%
- Email newsletter - 45.7%
- Flyers/signs inside the library - 35.7%
- Outdoor sign - 32.4%
- Word of mouth - 25%
- Library staff - 21.8%
- Facebook - 24.5%
- Ramsey based Facebook Groups - 13.3%
- Instagram - 12.2%
- TikTok - 1.1%

As our respondents were almost exclusively current library users, this may not give us a great picture of how to reach non-users. However, we can see what this group of current patrons are using to learn about library

services, with the website and newsletter being particularly helpful. More work will be needed to identify means of reaching non-users, which the library is already engaged with.

How Often Do You Visit?
These were the top responses:
Once a month - 35.6%
Once a week - 35.1%
More than once a week - 16.5%

What time of day is best for you to visit the library?
Weekday afternoons: 61.7%
Weekday mornings: 32.4%
Sundays: 32.4%
Saturday mornings: 27.5%
Saturday afternoons: 26.6%
Weekday evenings: 25.5%

This gives us an interesting picture of library use by time of day. This mostly aligns with the data we see from our door counter and from general observation. Sundays may hold a unique position in that the daily attendance for those days isn't always higher by proportion, but the idea of being able to visit the library on a Sunday has an appeal which may inflate that number. That being said, the library does receive robust visits on Sundays, especially in the Summer.

How Valuable is the Library as a Community Service?
90.4% of respondents listed the library as Very Important.

What are the main strengths of the library?
This was another open ended question, so we received many responses with a variety of suggestions. We reviewed the data and have listed the most common responses that we received, along with a list of the other responses. Here are the most common responses:

(number of responses is listed next to the topic/suggestion)

- **Great staff - 80**
- **Friendly atmosphere - 32**
- **Location/Hours/Accessibility/Parking - 23**
- **Collections - 22**
- **Diversity of services and offerings - 21**
- Community Hub/Community Space - 18
- Events and Activities for all ages - 18
- Kids Events/Services - 14
- Library Director - 14
- BCCLS - 12
- Innovative Offerings/Thinking - 10
- Library of Things - 10
- Maggie - 9

- Digital Collections - 6
- Building - 5
- Quiet Study Room - 3
- Jeff - 2
- Museum Passes - 2
- Others with one person suggesting:Encouraging Reading, Free, Social Media, British DVDs, Public Computers, scanner, copier, Ancestry/Online research tools, Virtual events, No fines, Website

Overwhelmingly, the library staff and good customer service seem to resonate as strengths of the library. A friendly atmosphere, which goes hand in hand with a welcoming staff, is also high among the listed strengths. Other top picks for library strengths include diversity of services and offerings, the library collections, the library as a community hub and public space, activities for all ages and for kids. Innovative services along with the Library of Things pair together well and are both cited here as top picks, along with membership in BCCLS and interlibrary loan. Finally, it appears that our physical location, parking lot and accessibility is a draw for patrons, which was cited significantly high up on the list.

Suggested Resources
We also asked respondents what they would like to see at the Ramsey Library, what can be improved or what things they would like to see more of. Once again, this was an open ended question so we received a variety of responses. What follows is a summary of the most common responses as well as a few other responses that seem to tie into other data we have received in surveys.

Top suggestions:
- Bring back the museum program (this was temporarily suspended during the pandemic and had not yet been reinstated by the time of this survey. That has now been completed) - 4 recommendations
- Computer and Tech Assistance - 4 recommendations
- Offer a passport creation program - 3 recommendations
- Improved adult nonfiction/research books section - 2 recommendations
- More popular children's authors/new children's materials - 2 recommendations
- Resources to connect patrons to a social worker/social services - 2 recommendations

All other suggestions were singular in nature and are too lengthy to list here. However, here are a few suggestions that seem to tie into other feedback we've received:
- Children's programming focused on creative writing
- A section on organizations in town and their purpose
- Info about Ramsey businesses
- Events for kids on nights and weekends
- More Library of Things items
- Small meeting rooms with sound proofing

With these responses, many are varied and nothing stands out as cited by many people. However, a few standouts like tech training, which is something we previously offered, might be something to consider moving forward. There may also be an opportunity for localized information that meets the needs of several suggestions - info to help those in need of social workers and social services, information about local organizations and what they do and information on local businesses.

Other Comments

Finally, we added one more question for any additional comments. Nearly all of them were very positive and reflected an appreciation of the work being done by the Ramsey Free Public Library for the community. A few suggestions were also included. Samples of quotes can be found at the bottom of each page.

"I think the library staff, especially the director, does a great job which enhances our community very much."

Community Leader/Representative Interview Findings

As part of the process to gather information from the community, the library tried to select a broad swath of local communities and groups where we could interview a representative. The idea being that this person may be able to give us qualitative insight into the needs, challenges and interests of the community or group they represent or are a member of. We also talked about what are the best ways to communicate with their group/community, what they knew about the library already and any other information they thought to provide as part of this process. While there are many communities and groups the library could have interviewed, we had to narrow things down to a manageable number that could be feasibly interviewed by staff and volunteer library board members. The groups/communities we narrowed the list down to included the following:

- Senior citizens
- Ramsey business community
- Spanish speaking community
- Religious community
- Local nonprofits
- Special Needs/RIFE
- Local government
- Students/under 18 years of age
- Parents
- Schools / Media Specialists

While each group and organization had some goals and needs specific to them, there were a few common findings between the many of the groups. Here are some of the most common findings from these interviews:

Common Findings
- Physical space
  - The library's physical space came up frequently as both something that is highly valued as well as something that can be improved. Many saw the library space as a community meeting and collaboration space, especially for teens and students. Interest in using the meeting room was mentioned several times. There were also several suggestions to create private meeting rooms, including from the business community and schools. It was also recommended that the teen space is a good one, but could be redeveloped to make it more comfortable and inviting for older students to hang out.
- Communication and Awareness
  - Awareness of the library remains a challenge for Ramsey and indeed, most public libraries. Some suggestions on how to increase awareness include: utilizing Twitter (the schools use this as their primary communication tool), informational presentations to local organizations, participation in community events and utilizing the various email lists around town that are specific to individual groups.
  - Participate in lots of community events
  - Print promotions for senior citizens
- Partnerships and Outreach
  - All groups expressed interest in some measure of partnership
- Library of Things
  - There was an acute interest in the Library of Things from nearly all of the groups we worked with. They either were intrigued by the idea, were already users, or had suggestions for how we could partner with different groups to share some of those collections with them. We have

already begun this type of process with the schools, school media specialists and the Girls Scouts. Groups thought this was an innovative idea and the collection should be expanded and people made more aware of its existence.

- Attracting Teens to the Library
    - Comfortable hang out space
    - Event suggestions - Open mic / poetry slam / movie night / test prep help sessions / maker space elements
    - Best way to communicate - TikTok, Instagram, through school social media
    - Maker space and maker tools / 3D printing / etc.
    - Teens enjoy audiobooks (digital) as well as physical books vs eBooks
- Serving Senior Citizens
    - Events during the day
    - Transportation can be a barrier
    - Tech instruction assistance requested
    - Partnership between Senior Center, Ramsey Leisure Club and Library
    - Large print collection
    - Print based advertisements
    - Event recommendations - health/fitness, lectures, food tastings, lectures, music 'from their era', etc.
- Special Needs Groups
    - Need larger physical space for diverse offerings
    - Provide events that target individuals with special needs
    - Events and displays to provide awareness and education on special needs individuals
    - Work with schools and their existing programs for individuals with special needs
- Business Community
    - Provide information and reminders to businesses on what the library offers that can benefit businesses
    - Present benefits of library use to Chamber of Commerce members at their networking meetups
    - Can utilize their email lists to communicate with businesses and promote the library
    - Participate in community events to promote the library
    - Possible ideas for programs: monthly showcase of different Ramsey businesses every month, informational presentations on business topics
- Schools/Media Specialists
    - Good relationship with library already
    - Schools and media centers can help promote library events and services
    - Twitter is the best way to communicate with parents
    - TikTok is the best way to communicate with students
    - Physical books and digital audiobooks are the most popular items for students
    - Library as a meeting/safe/comfortable place for kids is important
    - Collaborate on displays for students to see items on the same subject at both locations
    - Present to other local groups to let them know what the library can do for them
    - free/discounted printing for students
    - Study space for students before school opens
    - Visits to schools, especially to show off Library of Things
    - Work together on STEM projects, classes, equipment, etc.
    - Maker space for teens/older kids
    - Language classes for kids

- ○ Helpful that the library allows tutoring
- ○ More Read-a-Long books
- ○ Separate and inviting teen space
- ○ Bilingual books, especially Spanish/English
- ○ Increase awareness of students on what the library offers
- ○ Area/events for kids to display their artwork/projects
- ● Religious Community / LatinX Community
  - ○ Lutheran church goals - combating misinformation, getting people to be aware of the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals
  - ○ Library as a place to network and interact with other members of the community is important
  - ○ More one on one conversations with local organizations can help build awareness/partnerships
  - ○ Most valuable library service is free access to all manner of books and ideas
  - ○ St. Pauls - focus on LatinX community
    - ■ More ESL programming
    - ■ Bigger selection of Spanish books and resources
    - ■ Events and storytimes in Spanish
    - ■ Promote services in both English and Spanish
    - ■ Laptop lending / wifi access / printing, fax, scanning
- ● NonProfits
  - ○ DIY cookie making kits
  - ○ Adding more to the library of things / clearing space from that area so it can browsed easier
  - ○ Event where kids can make crafts for seniors / joint program
  - ○ Already have great relationships and partnerships with the library

"I think the RPL is a huge asset in our community - aside from the schools it was one of the factors that made us choose to live in Ramsey. Having a strong library (particularly a fresh, updated childrens' section) is critical. We should expand our childrens' room."

Staff Survey Findings

<u>Staff Survey Summary</u>

A survey was made of the Ramsey Free Public Library staff members to add their suggestions, recommendations and comments to the strategic plan. These are the most common findings. Answers are listed in descending order from the highest to lowest number of responses.

What do you think are the most important services the Ramsey Public Library currently offers? Please select the top three (3) things you feel are the most important services we provide.
1. Physical Collections
2. Events and Programs
3. Good Customer Service
4. Library of Things

What do you think are the main challenges that the library currently faces?
5. Physical space for storage, patrons and other library uses (most common answer)
6. Public awareness of the library and its services
7. Decrease in physical material borrowing and the challenges of digital lending (cost of items, limited availability of some materials, lack of ability to purchase individual digital movies, tv and music items for lending)

Are there any services that are currently offered that you feel should be discontinued?
1. None
2. Cut back on music and movie purchases and collections

Are there services the Ramsey Library does NOT currently offer that you feel should be considered to offer?
1. None
2. Passport services
3. Small meeting room spaces
4. Technology training
5. Fax services
6. Services for special needs individuals

What areas of service do you feel will be the most important in the next 3-5 years for the library? Where should the library focus its resources?
1. Meeting room space and physical space in general - places where patrons can conduct Zoom meetings, ESL tutoring, group study, etc.
2. S.T.E.A.M. programs, digital technology, online resources and collections
3. Special collections and services - VOX books, Library of Things,
4. High quality programs and events for all ages and individuals with special needs
5. Passport services

Are there any collections where you feel improvements should be made or enhanced? Physical or digital.
1. Improvements to digital collections + more copies of popular digital items
2. Nonfiction books

3. Improved organization & design of our Storytime-to-Go kits
4. They are being made now

Do you have any suggestions regarding library programs, events and classes? Certain topics we should explore or programs we should offer?
1. Events showcasing different cultures throughout the year, not just on holidays
2. Video game program for teens (like Teen Cafe program series)
3. Tax help for seniors
4. Robotics, more STREAM, coding, animation, language classes, sewing
5. Speakers from different cultures and backgrounds including science, economics, business etc. Also maybe more fundraising events

Do you have any suggestions on promoting library programs, services and collections in the community? How can we make Ramsey residents more aware of our services and more likely to use them?
1. Our current PR is doing well and trying new things
2. Local newspaper and other print based options
3. Collaborate with local organizations and promote through them and through partnerships
4. Continue and expand presence at local events to promote library
5. Brief announcement made before or after each program the highlights of the Library services

What do you think are the Ramsey Library's main strengths?
1. Great customer service
2. Events and programs, especially children's programs
3. Collections
4. Beauty of interior design

What do you think are the Ramsey Library's main weaknesses?
1. Lack of space - meeting room space, small meeting rooms, comfortable reading space, storage for staff, staff working space, event space, etc.
2. Too many signs and displays
3. Library parking lot

Do you have any recommendations or suggestions for changes in the way the organization is managed, organized or otherwise structured?
1. Things are being managed well currently
2. Professional staff can help more at circulation
3. Space is a problem, could be utilized more efficiently
4. Don't completely phase out things like playaways, magazines and other traditional items
5. More communication with staff as most staff are part-time

Do you have any other thoughts or suggestions?
1. No / like working at this library
2. Staff meetings quarterly, not twice a year
3. Professional staff should work the circ desk on a limited, but regular basis

Collections Analysis

Collections Analysis

National library trends have generally shown a pattern of diminishing circulation of physical materials, while having significant growth in digital borrowing. More specifically for physical collections, audio/visual collections have tended to have the largest drop off in circulation. For our library, an analysis was conducted tracking and comparing the circulation of our collection in all of the years from 2018 to 2021. This analysis broke down the collection into a variety of subcategories, both for digital materials and physical materials. While there are many factors that impact the circulation of a specific collection, including the Covid-19 pandemic that has had significant skewing of numbers across all library use metrics, these numbers do reveal trends in borrowing from our collection that can be helpful. As with national trends, circulation of digital materials has increased significantly over this period, while circulation of most audio visual materials has sharply decreased. That being said, there are nuances and specific circumstances to the borrowing trends for each collection, which will be referenced in our analysis. Here is a statistical summary and key trends from this analysis:

General Summary
- Total circulation in 2021 was 157,036 items. Digital circulation made up 34,099 of that total, which is nearly 22% of the overall circulation.
- Total circulation (physical + digital) has dropped by 7% between 2018 and 2021.

Collection Category	2021 Circulation
Adult Fiction	27,521
Adult NonFiction	14,106
Reference	2
Juv Fiction	28,517
Juv NonFiction	6,347
Teen Fiction	5,926
Teen NonFiction	172
World Language	881
Adult Audio	3,474
Adult Playaway	1,465
Adult DVD	18,028
Adult Music	8,227
Games	1,159
Juv DVD	4,281
Juv Playaway	410
Juv Music	316
Teen Audio	15
Adult Periodical	1,252
Juv Periodical	44

Teen Periodical	n/a
Hot Spots	53
Museum Pass	n/a
Kit	0
Library of Things	741
Physical Item Total	**122,937**
eBCCLS/Libby	26,921
Hoopla	4,773
Kanopy	1,129
NYTimes Online	1,139
WSJ Online	137
Digital Item Total	**34,099**
Grand Total	**157,036**

Collection Use Comparison: 2018 - 2021						
Category	**2021**	**2020**	**2019**	**2018**	**Percent Calculation**	**Percent Change 2018 to 2021**
Adult Fiction	27,521	18,961	30,725	29,529	93%	-7%
Adult NonFiction	14,106	9,896	17,647	17,627	80%	-20%
Reference	2	7	11	26	8%	n/a
Juv Fiction	28,517	19,081	31,778	32,843	87%	-13%
Juv NonFiction	6,347	4,596	7,276	6,442	99%	-1%
Teen Fiction	5,926	3,516	4,740	5,121	116%	16%
Teen NonFiction	172	150	197	210	82%	-18%
World Language	881	490	726	743	119%	19%
Adult Audio	3,474	2,780	6,429	7,086	49%	-51%
Adult Playaway	1,465	1,298	2,216	2,260	65%	-35%

Adult DVD	18,028	16,475	27,911	30,909	59%	-41%
Adult Music	8,227	5,284	9,941	9,855	83%	-16%
Games	1,159	886	606	876	132%	32%
Juv DVD	4,281	3,557	7,516	8,800	49%	-51%
Juv Playaway	410	309	721	583	70%	-30%
Juv Music	316	215	547	417	76%	-24%
Teen Audio	15	26	33	35	43%	-57%
Adult Periodical	1,252	664	1,482	1,471	85%	-15%
Juv Periodical	44	44	119	58	76%	-24%
Teen Periodical	n/a	n/a	0	0		n/a
Hot Spots	53	77	72	62	85%	-15%
Museum Pass	n/a	n/a	153	132		n/a
Kit	0	98	501	872		n/a
Library of Things	741	11	140	n/a	529%	429%
Physical Item Total	**122,937**	**88,421**	**151,487**	**155,957**	79%	-21%
eBCCLS/Libby	26,921	25,312	15,518	12,684	212%	112%
Hoopla	4,773	4,099	1,531	n/a	312%	212%
Kanopy	1,129	n/a	n/a	n/a		n/a
NYTimes Online	1,139	n/a	n/a	n/a		n/a
WSJ Online	137	n/a	n/a	n/a		n/a
Digital Item Total	**34,099**	**29,411**	**17,049**	**12,684**	269%	169%
Grand Total	**157,036**	**117,832**	**168,536**	**168,641**	93%	-7%

Top Circulating Collections (2021 statistics)
- Juvenile Fiction - 28,517
- Adult Fiction - 27,521
- eBooks - 18,989
- Adult DVD - 18,028
- Adult NonFiction - 14,106

Collections Trending Upward
- Digital Collections - up 169%

- ○ Borrowing of digital items has risen by double digits every year between 2018 and 2021, which continued on an existing trend. The largest percentage of digital items borrowed is eBooks followed closely by streaming audiobooks. This follows national trends showing similar demand for digital content. There are several caveats to mention as part of these numbers:
    - ■ The costs are extremely high for eBooks and streaming audiobooks from publishers and providers. Oftentimes, copies purchased by libraries either have a limit for how many times that item can circulate or a cap on the amount of time a library has the item (12 to 24 months most often). After the time has expired or the number of checkouts reached, the library would need to purchase another copy. With the costs for these materials being at least double in cost in comparison to physical materials, and the requirement to replace the items after a short time period, results in digital materials taking far more funds to maintain than a physical collection.
    - ■ Currently, no option exists for libraries to purchase individual popular movies, TV shows or music to make available for patrons. Instead, libraries purchase blanket access to a service like Hoopla or Kanopy, which provides streaming content. However, libraries have no say in what content is available on these platforms. Producers are movies, music and television shows are also far less likely to want to make this content easily available to libraries or even the companies that provide the content to libraries. As a result, the demand for A/V digital content is lower as available titles are very limited.
- ● Library of Things - up 429%
    - ○ This collection only began in 2021 as its a comparatively small collection, with 751 items circulated in 2021. However, the growth potential is very significant.
- ● World Language Materials (physical) - up 19%
    - ○ We saw this trend in previous years and have invested slightly more in this collection in the last few years.
- ● Comics and Manga
    - ○ There is no comparative data available as this was not tracked previously, but circulation for all Comics and Manga in 2021 was 4,251. This was certainly an increase from previous years, especially for Manga and children's comics/Manga.
- ● Video Games - up 32%
    - ○ This collection was revamp and new items added and different gaming consoles having materials made available. Previously, we only purchased Wii games, now we purchase materials for all contemporary systems.
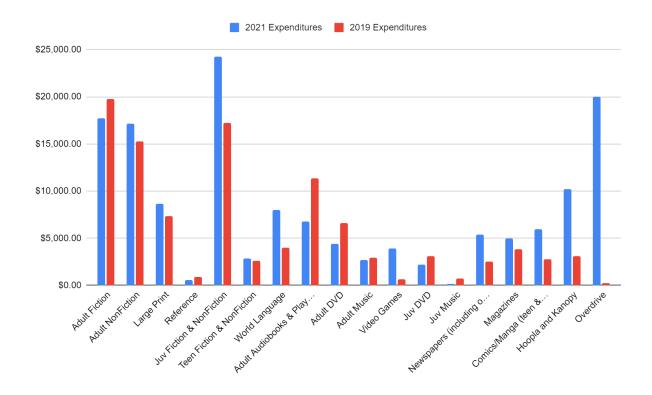
Collections Trending Downward
- ● Physical audiobooks - down 51%
- ● Juvenile DVDs - down 51%
- ● Adult DVDs - down 42%
- ● Playways - down 35%
- ● Adult NonFiction - down 20%

2019 vs 2021 Collection Spending
The library has sought to shuffle spending in our collections budgets to reflect borrowing habits and trends. This has resulted in notable shifts away from physical A/V materials and toward eBooks and digital audiobooks. Other fluctuations have generally been made with collection trends in mind or when the library

expects growth in a new or improved collection, which receives additional funding to meet those goals. Here is comparison of the spending on different collections between 2019 and 2021:

Conclusion

In reviewing our library's internal data along with national trends in libraries, we've drawn the following conclusions and recommendations regarding the library's collections:

- Increase funding to digital collections, slightly bigger than their share of overall circulation (due to the higher cost)
- Reduce spending in physical media collections - CDs, audiobooks and DVDs
- Reduce spending for physical magazines
- Increase spending for teen fiction books, Manga, and video games
- Improve discoverability of collections - placement, displays, etc.
- Improve promotion of collection offerings to community
- Reduce overall size of the following collections: music, audiobooks, DVDs, playaways, adult nonfiction, oversize materials

"Every year RPL seems to get better and better. RPL is one of the greatest resources and aspects of our town."

Programs and Services Analysis

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted the library in every facet of what the library does for the community. This is true for just about every library in the state and the nation in one way or another. For our library, we initially saw massive reductions in use across the board, from visits to the library to program attendance to circulation. Since that time, some of our services have come close to being back to 2019 levels or in some cases have even surpassed those levels. In other cases, we are still struggling to reach previous levels and reimagine ways to attract usage. Circulation has come close to 2019 levels, though there was an increased shift toward digital item use beyond what was already taking place. Our offerings for programs and events began to surge in 2019 with a big redesign of how we offer and promote events. At first, these numbers dipped during the pandemic and lockdown periods. However, in 2021 we actually saw the highest attendance for programs in recent years - over 14,000 in attendance vs over 10,000 in 2019. The 2019 figure is also a big jump from 2018 and other recent years, so this trend is significant and sustaining - more people are attending events at the library than possibly ever before. This comes even though we have reduced the overall number of events we offer starting in 2019. Instead, we have focused on providing higher quality events and along with some annual large events that attract several hundred people.

Programs and Events
Attendance at library events rose by 40% between 2018 and 2021. This includes a 60% rise in adult attendance and a 34% increase in attendance at children's events. However, we did also see a slight dip in attendance at teen events, which went down by about 17%. For our events, our strategies for increasing attendance for adults and kids seems to be producing results. This includes making higher quality events, including several annual, large scale events, improved promotions and rotating program types and topics.

Communication and Outreach
During the pandemic, one area the library was able to make significant expansions was in our social media presence. Since 2020, the library has created a Youtube Channel with dozens of custom videos and content, as well as a new TikTok account for the library. We also worked to greatly increase the quality and frequency of creating content for our Instagram and Facebook accounts. The library also created a new, full time staff position to work on outreach, advertising and social media. Since that time, we have expanded our outreach to Ramsey schools and have begun to expand on outreach to different communities, at community events and with local organizations. We have also begun to diversify our advertising efforts, combining a mix of social media content, networking with local organizations, new online advertising avenues and special promotions.

Snapshot of Library Use and Services
Range: 2018 to 2021

Category	2018	2021	Percentage Change
Children's event attendance	6,253	8,384	+34%
Adult event attendance	3,246	5,187	+60%
Teen event attendance	551	457	-17%
Total attendance	10,050	14,028	+40%

Visits to the Library	141,122	65,460	-54%
Public Computer Use	5,496	2,780	-49%
Reference Questions Answered	3,628	1,820	-50%
Notary Services	61	49	-20%
ESL Attendance	196	246	+26%
Website Visits	31,000 (2019)	49,615	+60%
Summer Reading Participants	531	179	-76%

The library provides a wide array of services beyond collections and events. This includes things like answering reference questions, public computer access, notary services and ESL classes and tutoring. In many of those areas, use of those services has declined significantly since 2018. However, the pandemic interrupted and impacted services in ways that we are still uncovering. Moreover, the latest numbers we have available for comparison are for the 2021 year, which still had significant impacts occurring from the pandemic. As a result, it may be difficult to extrapolate good conclusions from this data. That being said, there are some things we can take away from this data as well as the presumed impact of the pandemic:

Conclusions and Goals:
- Increase library use by teens
  - Our overall attendance for teen events has alway been low, even before the pandemic. Teens are traditionally a difficult group to engage at the public library. This is an area to focus on for new ideas for events and services along with new strategies for communicating with this demographic.
- Explore ways to encourage patrons to return to using the library in person following the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.
  - Explore new services, events and ways to utilize the library space that meets contemporary needs
  - Explore solutions from other libraries on bringing patrons back into the library following the onset of the pandemic
- Improve communication strategies with the community
  - Increase in-person outreach at community events
  - Network with more community organizations
  - Explore possible partnerships with local organizations

Facility Evaluation 2022 Summary

Summary

Over the past several years, the library staff and board have reviewed the library facility for needed upgrades and repairs. Some of this work was brainstorming from board members and other work was feedback from department heads on staff and the Director. Those initial thoughts went into first creating a Five Year Capital Plan in 2019. This work was delayed during the initial stages of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, two HVAC related floods in the building along with continual repairs needed to the library's mural and HVAC system spurred the library to engage an architect and engineering firm to formally review the library facility and make recommendations. The facility review found significant needs in the area of the library's HVAC system. Engineers also made recommendations regarding upgrading the library's lighting to LED and more energy efficient bulbs and structure. There were a few other minor areas where repairs were recommended, but much of the rest of the facility was deemed in good condition as a renovation of the building took place in 2011. However, department heads from staff, the executive committee of the Library Board and the Library Director all worked on assessing the needs of patrons, community and staff when reviewing the facility as well. It was determined that additional space was a top priority. Additional space was needed to provide additional study and reading space, for library events, and for staff working space and storage. Initially, a plan to develop a 2nd floor within the existing structure of the building was developed. However, the Library Board determined that this was not a project the library would pursue at this time, but that smaller projects should be investigated to meet the needs identified throughout this process. These are the priorities identified in the facility review process:

Top Building Priorities
1. Replacement of HVAC System
2. Interior floor plan redesign and upgrades - including creating adaptive and flexible spaces, increased storage space, painting, new flooring, etc.
3. Redesign and upgrade outdoor space of library grounds
4. Create structure for regular reviews of the facility
5. Create 5-10 year capital improvement plan

"I think this is one of the best libraries, due to the Director! Although I lived in Ramsey since 1982, and was President of FORL many times, when I moved to Wyckoff to downsize, I was able to retain a Ramsey card, and attend all the programs, for which I am forever grateful. I will miss this library when I move to MA next month to be with my family."

2022 Contemporary Trends in Libraries

1. **Combating Censorship, Book Bans, and Disinformation**
   a. Book Banning and Censorship
      i. Libraries are seeing the highest level of book challenges and bans since the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom began tracking these attempts more than 20 years ago. Each year between January 1 and August 31, 2022, ALA documented 681 attempts to ban or restrict library resources, and 1,651 unique titles were targeted. In 2021, ALA reported 729 attempts to censor library resources, targeting 1,597 books, which represented the highest number of attempted book bans since ALA began compiling these lists more than 20 years ago. Additionally, more than 70 percent of the 681 attempts to restrict library resources targeted multiple titles. In the past, the vast majority of challenges to library resources only sought to remove or restrict a single book.

2. **Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion**
   a. This trend encompasses both the American Library Association as an organization, as well as the New Jersey Library Association, but also all libraries in the country. ALA and NJLA both have strong statements as well as guidelines for promoting diversity, inclusion and equity in materials, program offerings and services across libraries. This manifests largely as ensuring that libraries express that each member of the community should feel represented, welcome and empowered by the offerings of the library. This means developing collections that include materials/services/programs that speak and represent all members of the community, including race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, political affiliation, etc.
   b. Collection Diversity Audit - ALA and NJLA both recommend that libraries conduct diversity audits of their collections and services. This is a process to review what is being offered by your library and to measure the level of diversity and representation in your services and collections.

3. **Rise in Digital Material Usage and Cost to Libraries**
   a. This is likely the biggest challenge facing libraries today - the shift to digital content, but more importantly, the cost of that content. Publishers have been reluctant to allow libraries to circulate digital content in the same ways libraries have traditionally circulated print content. Over the years, the major publishers have increasingly moved their models for libraries to ones where the costs for a single item can be double or triple that of the print version and also include caps to usage of those materials. Publishers provide the licensing to other companies like Overdrive, who then make them available to libraries for purchase. However, the publishers set the terms on how those materials can be purchased and used. Over the past few years, the system has largely become one where libraries can only purchase eBooks that are either limited by how many times it can be circulated or by a set period of time (1 or 2 years for example). Following that time period or circulation amount, libraries would have to purchase another copy, once again at a price that is 2 or 3 times as expensive as a regular title. Finally, libraries are purchasing a temporary license for these materials, but aren't actually able to own a copy like they would a printed book. There are other models out there, but none provide the same flexibility and cost efficiency of printed materials. For instance, Hoopla offers a set collection where libraries simply pay a small amount each time an item gets borrowed. However, the library has no control over what materials are in that collection, often meaning those collections are severely lacking and not responsive to local populations. This is a challenge for individual libraries and their budgets, but also for consortiums, states and libraries nationwide. Statewide

legislation has been attempted to keep prices down, but thus far two attempts have failed. This will be the signature challenge of libraries in the coming years.

4. **Drastic Reduction in the Borrowing of Media Items**
    a. Libraries across the country have almost all seen circulation for items like CDs and DVDs dramatically decrease. BCCLS has seen a similar trend, with a recent internal study showing a 103% drop in circulation of physical audio-visual materials between 2019 and 2022. That being said, DVDs are still the 4th highest circulating item in our library's collection and our CD collection may be propped up slightly by other libraries eliminating items or collections altogether. Unlike books and audiobooks where there is at least an option to purchase individual titles for your patrons, this does not yet exist for movies, music or television. The only options currently available are ones like Hoopla and Kanopy, which offer set collections that libraries pay a small amount each time a patron borrows an item. They do offer movies, TV and music, but only the content that they are able to obtain from contracts with content producers. To date, these collections are very limited. This will also be a very significant challenge to libraries moving forward, with not many options currently available.

5. **Library of Things Collections**
    a. This is not a new thing for libraries, but has recently become very popular, especially since the Covid-19 pandemic. There has been a dramatic increase in libraries offering unique collections of materials (tools, games, STEM kits, learning aids, etc.). Part of this may be due to the impact of the pandemic and a need for resources that can be used outside of the library. However, there has always been a need for unique items, but not necessarily thinking of the library as the place for lending those materials.

6. **Library Physical Space - Community Space, Flexibility, Diverse Capabilities**
    a. The physical space of the library has always provided space for study, reading and group work. As there are very few, if any, public indoor spaces that are free to use, simply the physical space of a public library will remain a crucial feature. However, libraries are now looking to maximize their available space for a multitude of uses that community members can benefit from. Here are just some of the ways libraries use their space to benefit the community:
        i. The library as a community central hub - nearly all indoor spaces in most communities are not ones that are freely accessible to the community, at least without the requirement to purchase something. The library as a free and open space for people to simply take advantage of at no cost is a resource that has very few, if any parallels in contemporary society. This is an essential resource for all communities.
        ii. Maker Space and Collaboration Spaces - designated or mobile spaces where students and others can have access to tools and technology in order to learn, tinker and develop. There is also a trend toward remote work and other virtual activities, which require access to the Internet and a physical space with which to work. Libraries can fill this role with meeting rooms, public seating, private study rooms and more.
        iii. Other options: technology training, ESL tutoring, passport services, cooling and emergency shelters, community events, classes, and much more.

7. **Serving Underserved Populations**
    a. The American public library has always been a place where people of all identities and means can freely use materials to better themselves, entertain or otherwise utilize. While not a new idea, it is important for libraries to continue to work to identify populations that may be underserved for a number of reasons. These reasons could include things like financial status, transportation barriers, language barriers, immigration status, LGBTQ individuals, individuals with special needs, etc. Both the American Library Association and the New Jersey Library

       Association have whole divisions and committees set up to provide guidance to libraries on serving these communities.

8. **Reducing Barriers to Access**
   a. Libraries have in recent years looked to review the way in which they serve their communities and how they are structured for the purpose of making library access as easy and welcoming as possible for all members of the community. This has often manifested as libraries eliminating fines for overdue materials. Other trends have included creating fully digital experiences for patrons - obtaining a digital library card, borrowing materials digitally, receiving assistance from staff virtually, etc.

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"This library is wonderful."

Ramsey Free Public Library .....Outdoor Holiday Decorations

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