Executive Summary

The Montgomery County-Norristown Public Library's Patron Online Experience Survey was conducted from mid-December 2020 through February 5, 2021. The survey focused on how MC-NPL has been using digital technology to bring library services to patrons during the COVID-19 pandemic. Questions were designed to gauge the public's opinions about their experience with MC-NPL's online presence and centered on the 4 following areas: MC-NPL's website, Facebook, virtual programming, and electronic resources. 383 patrons participated.

Survey responses show that patrons view their online library experience favorably but also that improvements could be made in marketing and in some aspects of the library's online offerings. Based on these results, MC-NPL's staff has developed 4 goals.

1. Assess and where appropriate implement patrons' suggestions for improvement to MC-NPL's website, procedures, and processes.
2. To bolster attendance in virtual programs, address the factors cited by patrons for non-participation.
3. Reach out to other institutions who have had success marketing through social media.
4. Respond to patrons' requests for information and technical help.

Main Report

In-person library visits, a long-time staple in Americans' lives, have receded as the COVID-19 outbreak has led many Montgomery County, PA library officials to limit access to library buildings and limit in-person interactions. Consequently, many aspects of everyday library usage have migrated online.

MC-NPL staff continually explore and employ electronic means to strengthen access to library services and products during these unprecedented times. These means include:

- Website
- Social media
- Virtual programming
- Electronic resources (e-resources)

Methodology

The MC-NPL's Patrons' Online Experience Survey committee used the Google Forms survey platform. Benefits included cost savings (free), staff familiarity with the product, question skip logic and other features comparable to those of paid services.

Survey roll-out began in mid-December 2020 with paper forms inserted into books delivered by Extension at their general and WOW stops and through Circulation pick-up services (Holds). Extension requested a two-week lead time due to their biweekly delivery schedule. The

electronic version on the website, social media channels, and the newsletter went live from January 1-30, 2021. Sample size for each survey vehicle is shown in the next table.

Survey vehicle	Sample Size
Website	267
Newsletter*	39
Social media*	48
Curbside pickup (paper form) – Circulation	20
Curbside pickup (paper form) – Extension	9
*Based on link clicks	

Paper surveys returned in an envelope to a Main Library Book Drop bin, to a Bookmobile, or by mail were accepted through February 5, 2021.

To minimize the opportunity for individuals to submit duplicate survey responses, the survey was configured to be removed from the patron's browser after the respondent closed the survey. Once closed, the survey could not be reopened. However, multiple responses from a single individual were possible if for example, the respondent clicked on both the newsletter link and the social media link and took the survey twice. Thirty-eight duplicate entries were found. The duplicate entries were deleted and not included in the evaluation.

As an incentive, a $50 Amazon gift card was awarded to one lucky survey-taker who also provided their contact information. Funds for the prize came out of the library general fund.

Results
Website: Did they visit the website and was it a satisfactory experience?

When patrons turned to digital means to interact with library services, the most common platform was the website. Many of the survey respondents (**87.0%**) sought information on the library website sometime in the past three months. Given that the website was a widely used platform among the respondents, ascertaining the degree of patron satisfaction with their website visit was a clear objective of the survey.

Using a Likert scale of 1 to 10, where 1 was extremely dissatisfied and 10 was extremely satisfied, patrons were asked to rate their experience on the library website. Indeed, many patrons reported they had an extremely satisfied (**39.3%**) experience. Half of the responses fell into the 7-9 range, representing a high degree of satisfaction. A few respondents (**3.6%**)

reported having a negative experience, while no one reported an extremely dissatisfied experience. The remainder were either neutral or slightly positive about their experience.

This is not to say that the respondents had nothing critical to say about the website. Regardless of their degree of satisfaction with the website, some patrons (**14.9%**) checked the reply that said the website was difficult to navigate. Other patrons (**8.1%**) reported the website was too cluttered. A few said information was missing though what was missing was not explained. Some said the website contained inaccurate or out-of-date material," though again not detailing what exactly was missing or out of date. Additional free form comments added under "Other" reasons they were dissatisfied with their website experience ranged in subject from the perceived lack of modernity and user friendliness of the website to the lack of certain titles in the collection.

Social Media: Were library social media posts being seen and were the posts helpful?
The average reach for a typical organic Facebook post is around 5.2%[1]. For MC-NPL, the average reach in 2020 was also low (7.9%).   Roughly 1 in 13 MC-NPL fans see MC-NPL's Facebook content. The number of survey respondents who reported seeing an MC-NPL Facebook post is described next.

About three-quarters (**72.6%**) of respondents said they used social media, such as Facebook. The table below shows that less than half of these socially active patrons (**44.6%**) reported seeing one or more MC-NPL Facebook post in the past three months. **91.1%** of this latter group reported that they found the social media posts helpful.

Table 1 Facebook Posts

Social Media Activity Among Respondents	No.
Respondents who use social media such as Facebook	278
Respondents on social media who did not see a MC-NPL Facebook post	154
Respondents who saw a MC-NPL post once or twice	23
Respondents who saw a MC-NPL post a few times	44
Respondents who saw a MC-NPL post often	32
Respondents who saw a MC-NPL post very often	25
Respondents who found MC-NPL posts helpful	113

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[1] Sehl, Katie, 2020, 'Organic Reach is in Decline-Here's What You Can Do about It,' *Hootsuite Blog.* 4 August. Available at: https://blog.hootsuite.com/organic-reach-declining/. (3/1/2021).

Programs: Would patrons participate in virtual programs? If not, then why not?
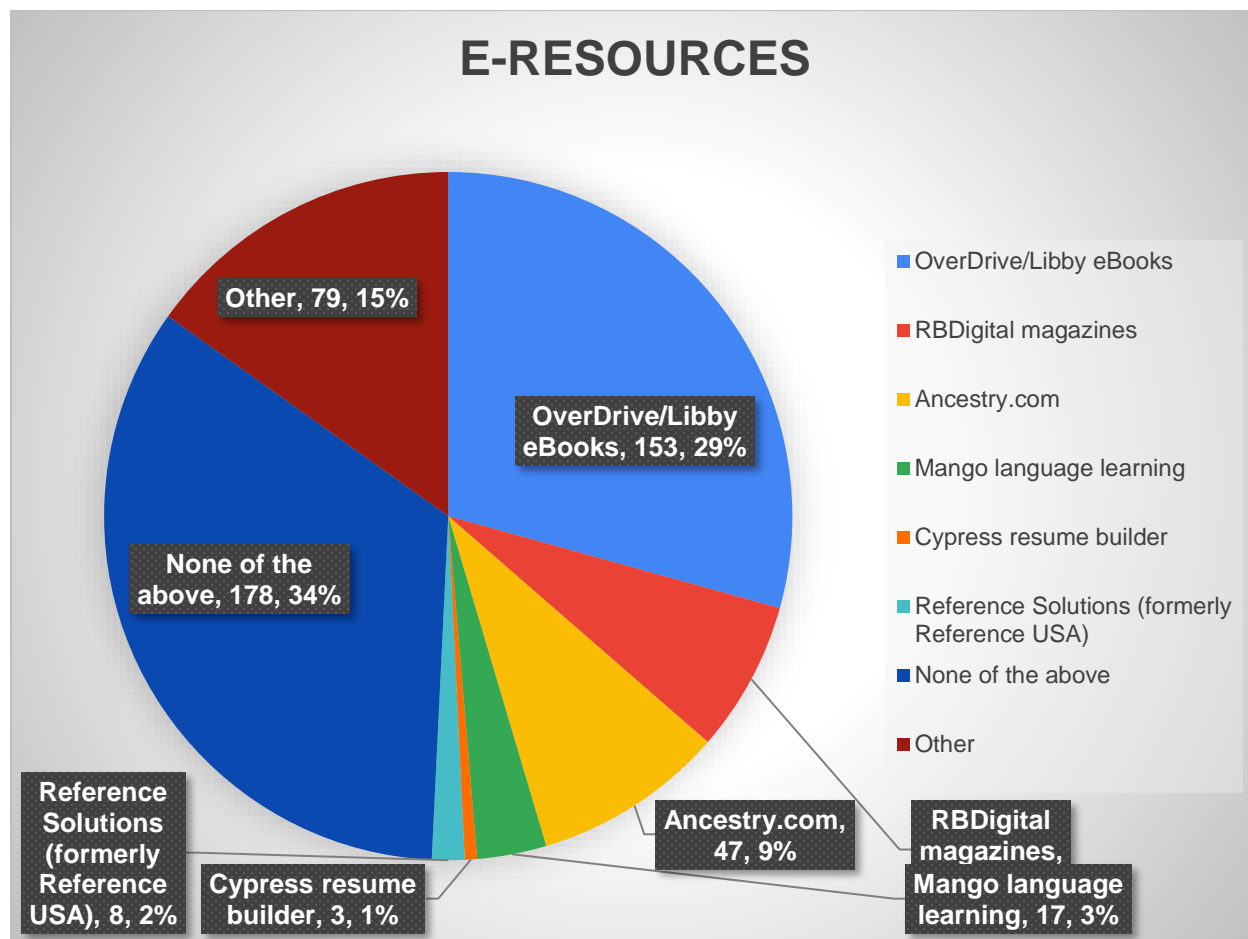
Patrons were receptive to the idea of virtual programs. Roughly 3-in-10 patrons **(28.7%)** reported that they would participate in an online program. Another group of patrons (55.6%) had a positive attitude toward virtual programs though their participation was dependent on the program topic. A small but significant group (**15.7%**) said they would not participate in a virtual program.

Non-participation appears to be due to a lack of awareness rather than reluctance. Roughly 4-in-10 of all respondents (**41.3%**) reported that they were previously unaware that the library offered virtual programs.

Reasons for not participating in virtual programs	Number of responses
Did not know the library offered virtual programs	158
Not seen any programs of interest	58
Screen fatigue	49
Too busy or schedule conflicts	18

Electronic Resources: Were MC-NPL patrons using the library electronic resources?
Since MC-NPL offers electronic resources (also known as "e-resources") on its website, we wanted to see which of the e-resources were popular with our patrons.
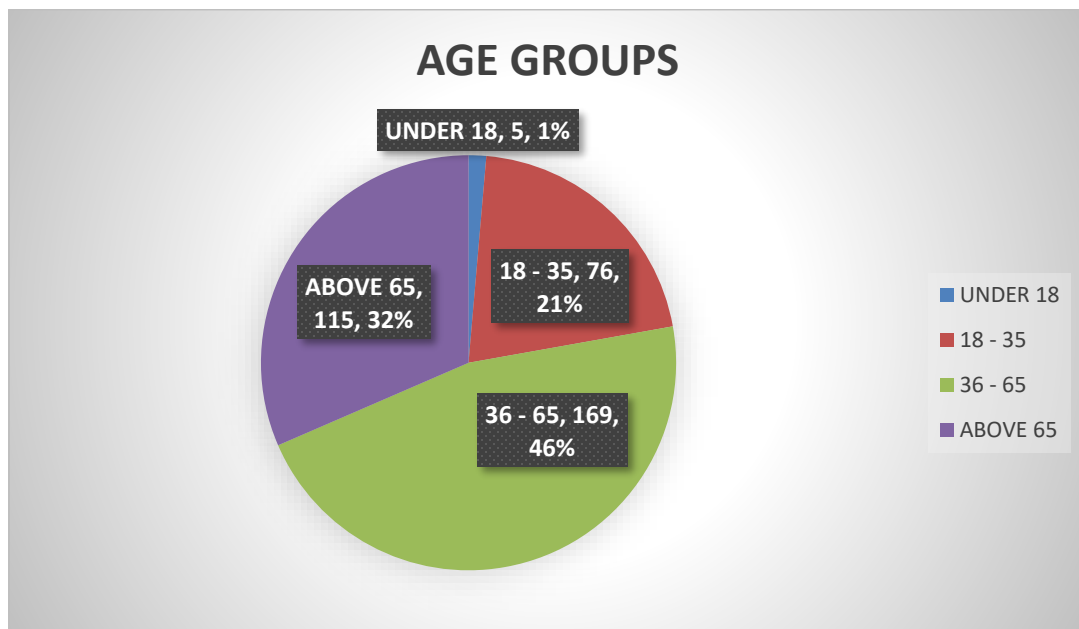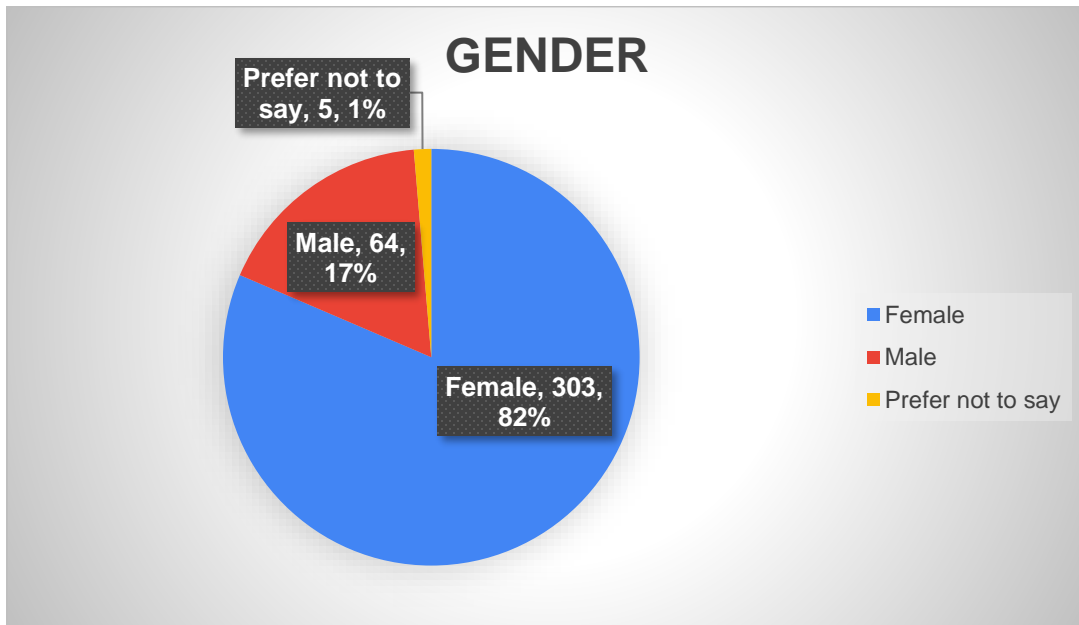
Just over 1/3 of the survey respondents (**34%**) do not utilize our e-resources. The respondents that do use our e-resources (**29%**) preferred Libby/Overdrive the most. At **15%**, respondents selected "Other", mainly mentioning the online catalog. Ancestry.com fell into fourth place at **9%**, followed by RBDigital at **7%**, Mango at 3%, Reference Solutions at **2%** and Cypress resume builder at **1%**. Note that these statistics do not reflect actual electronic resource usage among the general county population.

Demographics: Who participated in the survey?

The survey was open to any person who either accessed the online library by visiting the website, interacting with a library social media post, or opening the library electronic newsletter; or received books through curbside pickup during the applicable time span.

The pie charts and the figure below show the survey group's demographic breakout:

Figure 1 Geographical distribution of the surveyed patrons

Comments: What was in the comments?

Patrons added an additional 159 free form comments that ran the gamut from requests for technical help, to website improvement suggestions, and gratitude for "kindly service." Responses were manually categorized based on the general nature of the comments. The predominant trending comment was that the patrons were appreciative and thankful for the staff and library services.

Trending Comments	No. of similar comments
Enjoyed the services and/or thanked the library staff	99
Library process improvement suggestions	20
Website comments or improvement suggestions	19
Request for technical support	6
Assorted other comments	15

Even statistically insignificant free form responses can provide valuable insights when coupled with a set of standard survey responses. Some of the patrons' suggestions such as "app for library books, text reminders when books are ready for pickup" and "an email about what new books are in the library" are already in place. Another suggestion for reinstituting online critical reviews of books has been turned on.

Finally, some patrons stated that the website was difficult to navigate or too cluttered. These patrons agreed with the 14.9% of respondents who checked the standard website survey choice of "Difficult to navigate." However, other patrons exclaimed that the website was excellent and a bonus.

Recommendations

The word is getting out about library services and programs, but a substantial number of people do not hear the message, especially through social media. Create a plan to address people's reasons for not participating and to bolster attendance. Consider an increase in marketing activities for virtual programs. One lesson learned from marketing the survey is that we need to reach people who are not actively involved with the library and its services and programs.

Staff should address patrons' comments with respect to improvement suggestions along with their requests for technical help. Due to privacy concerns, we are unable to respond directly to individual patrons, but we can place our responses on the MC-NPL website.

The survey illustrates there is room to grow reach on social media. This growth can be accomplished by asking community contacts to extend the viral reach of our posts or by using a paid subscription of post boosts and other ad forms. It is no secret that social platforms push pay-to-play models for businesses. However, such models are not recommended at this time. Also, consider reaching out to other institutions who have had success with social media. There are clear challenges with relating a non-profit library to users' social media habits. Not a lot of people are seeing MC-NPL Facebook posts, but those that do find them helpful.