



Turning Outward Program

Report to the Community

In 2018, the LaGrange Association Library participated in the Turning Outward Program coordinated by the Mid-Hudson Library System and endorsed by the American Library Association:

“Turning outward” is a step-by-step process developed by The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation. It entails taking steps to better understand communities; changing processes and thinking to make conversations more community-focused; being proactive to community issues; and putting community aspirations first.¹

Purpose

By hosting Community Conversations at the Library and in the town of LaGrange, the Library’s Turning Outwards Committee requested input from residents, community leaders, elected officials, and school administrators on their aspirations for the LaGrange community. This information will assist the Library in forming its Long Range Plan for 2020-2022 by either addressing needs directly through its services, programs, and materials, or through collaboration with community agencies, organizations, and local government.

Process

The Library’s Turning Outwards Committee was composed of the Library Director, President of the Library’s Board of Trustees, the Head of the Circulation Department, and the President of the Friends of LaGrange Library. Invitations to participate in Community Conversations were posted on the Library website, in the Library, in frequented areas in the community, and on social media. Personal invitations were mailed to elected officials, school administrators, and community leaders with telephone follow up.

Between May and September, eight Community Conversations were held: four in the Library; four in venues outside the Library. Participants included LaGrange residents, the Town Supervisor, Arlington School District administrators/faculty, the Rotary President, Library staff, and Library Trustees. Through a series of questions, participants were asked to share their aspirations for the LaGrange Community. Several common themes emerged from the conversations.

Themes

Overall, participants expressed a desire for a diverse, inclusive community with opportunities to bring people together. Residents do not know their neighbors and there are not enough opportunities for neighbors to interact because LaGrange is primarily a bedroom community. People go to neighboring towns on the weekends, as there is the perception that there is little to do in LaGrange.

Another strong theme that emerged was the need for a Senior Center and/or a Community Center with activities/events for all ages and improved public transportation to get there. Participants also noted that there is no centralized community calendar for all activities & events in the town/schools. There is also no coordinated outreach or welcome packet for new residents indicating what the Town has to offer.

Due to its geographical layout and predominantly Poughkeepsie addresses/zip code, LaGrange has no town identity. For most people, residents are not vested. High school students do not identify themselves as LaGrange residents. There is no sense of pride in their town. Little is known about local history of the area.

In addition, participants expressed the opinion that elected officials should be more visible in the community and that further economic development with local businesses that stay and thrive is needed. While it was felt that the Recreation Department does a good job, LaGrange does not need another park or ball field.

Actions

In response to the need for an accessible, cohesive community calendar of events, the Library has added *Burbio* to its resources at www.laglib.org. Burbio.com is a free website and app that puts library, school, and other local events all in one calendar.

The Library continues to support a diverse, inclusive community, by offering sensory story times and tactile programs for developmentally challenged children, teens, and adults in collaboration with local agencies. It serves as a social gathering place for seniors and adults through Bridge, Scrabble, knitting and book clubs, movie nights, and craft programs. Space constraints and physical location of the current building limit the types and number of programs and opportunities that the Library can offer to bring neighbors together. These issues will be key focal points in the 2020-2022 Long Range Plan for the Library.

Those Community Conversation themes outside of the Library's purview will be referred to the appropriate town agency or organization for review, e.g., LaGrange Town Council, LaGrange Historical Society, Department of Parks & Recreation. The LaGrange Library will make every effort to collaborate and partner with these entities and other local agencies/organizations to meet the recreational, educational, and enrichment needs of the community.

Conclusion

The Library welcomes input from the LaGrange community regarding its future direction and all are invited to attend the Board meetings, held on the second Thursday of each month at 7:00 pm in the Library. The meeting minutes are posted on our website at www.laglib.org for everyone's information. The Board encourages new members and public participation on its various committees, which are the driving forces behind the advancement of the Library. If you are interested in joining the Board or serving on one of its committees, please contact Library Director Mary De Bellis at 452-3141 or at mdebellis@laglib.org.

¹"Turning Outward Resources for Libraries", American Library Association, January 13, 2014. <http://www.ala.org/tools/librariestransform/libraries-transforming-communities/resources-for-library-professionals> (Accessed February 14, 2019) Document ID: 34eb7d56-c186-3014-39ee-85791199047a