

# Library funding support is an attitude, not a demographic

Library funding behavior is driven by attitudes and beliefs, not by demographics. Voters' perceptions of the role the library plays in their lives and in their communities are more important determinants of their willingness to increase funding than their age, gender, race, political affiliation, life stage or income level. The more that can be learned about library perceptions, the better the chances of constructing a successful library support campaign to improve library funding.

The Library Supporter Segmentation discussed in Chapter 2 identified important constructs that drive a voter's willingness to support an increase in library funding. The quantitative research uncovered many additional and related insights into voters' attitudes toward libraries.

This chapter will explore eight key insights:

- 1. Most people claim they would support the library at the ballot box—fewer are firmly committed to it.**
- 2. There is a lot that people don't know about their public libraries.**
- 3. Library support is only marginally related to visitation. Advocating for library support to library users focuses effort and energy on the wrong target group.**
- 4. Perceptions of the librarian are highly related to support. 'Passionate librarians' who are involved in the community make a difference.**
- 5. The library occupies a very clear position in people's minds as a provider of practical answers and information. This is a very crowded space, and to remain relevant in today's information landscape, repositioning will be required.**
- 6. Belief that the library is a transformational force in people's lives is directly related to their level of funding support.**
- 7. Increasing support for libraries may not necessarily mean a trade-off with financial support for other public services.**
- 8. Elected officials are supportive of the library—but not fully committed to increasing funding. Engaging Super Supporters and Probable Supporters to help elevate library funding needs is required.**

## 1. Most people claim they would support the library at the ballot box—fewer are firmly committed to it.

“Think ahead to the next election and assume that you were at the ballot box, ready to cast your vote. If there was a referendum, ballot initiative or bond measure for your local public library on the ballot, how do you think you would vote?”

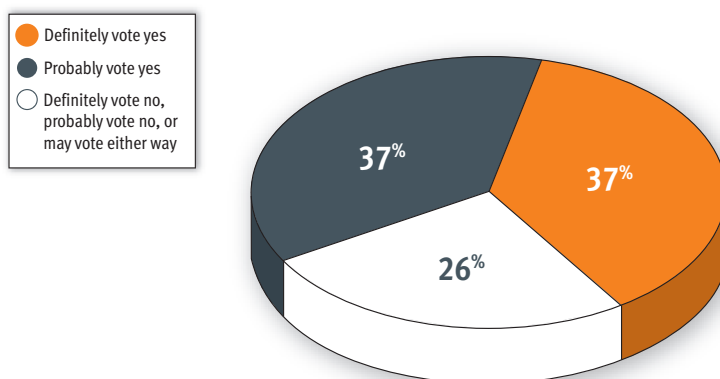
- A. I would definitely vote in favor of it
- B. I would probably vote in favor of it
- C. I may vote either way
- D. I would probably vote against it
- E. I would definitely vote against it

Just 3% of the voting respondents indicate that they would *probably* or *definitely* vote against a library levy when they were asked this question in the survey. A strong 74% had a favorable response, stating that they would *probably* or *definitely* vote yes and 23% may vote either way. But of those who indicated that they would probably or definitely vote in favor, the strength of commitment was evenly split. Thirty-seven percent (37%) of residents said they would *probably* vote yes. An equal 37% indicated they would *definitely* vote yes—a strong showing, but not enough to carry an election.

### Only 37% of voters say that they will *definitely* support the library at the ballot box

#### Total Voting Respondents

If there was a referendum, ballot initiative or bond measure for your local public library on the ballot, how do you think you would vote?



Source: *From Awareness to Funding*, OCLC, 2008

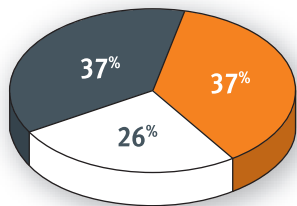
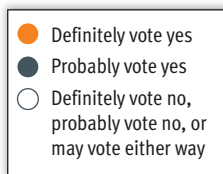
Relying on the *probably* favorable support of voters for funding libraries is not sufficient to drive the needed outcome at the polls. As discussed in Chapter 2, understanding and identifying which voters have barriers to supporting library funding, which voters are *probable* supporters and which voters are *definite* funding supporters is critical to mounting a successful library support campaign.

The segmentation analysis revealed that *definite* support varies across segments of the voting population and this formed the basis of the stratification of the Library Supporter Segmentation Pyramid. There is a measurable increase in the percentage of voters who are *definitely* likely to vote yes in a library referendum in upper tiers of the segmentation pyramid. The proportion of voters who will *definitely* vote yes for a library referendum is greatest in the top two tiers. Forty-seven percent (47%) of Probable Supporters indicate that they would *definitely* vote yes on a library levy; 80% of Super Supporters are *definite* library supporters.

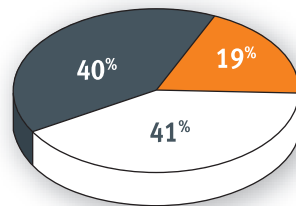
**‘Definitely vote yes’ is a critical measure of which voters are truly committed to providing financial support to the library**

**Total Voting Respondents**

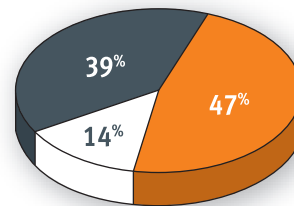
If there was a referendum, ballot initiative or bond measure for your local public library on the ballot, how do you think you would vote?



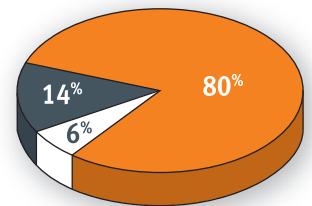
Total Voting Respondents



Barriers to Support



Probable Supporters



Super Supporters

Source: From *Awareness to Funding*, OCLC, 2008

A library support campaign targeted at voters in the top two segmentation tiers has a much higher likelihood of success in increasing the percentage of ‘yes’ votes than a campaign that attempts to reach the broader population.

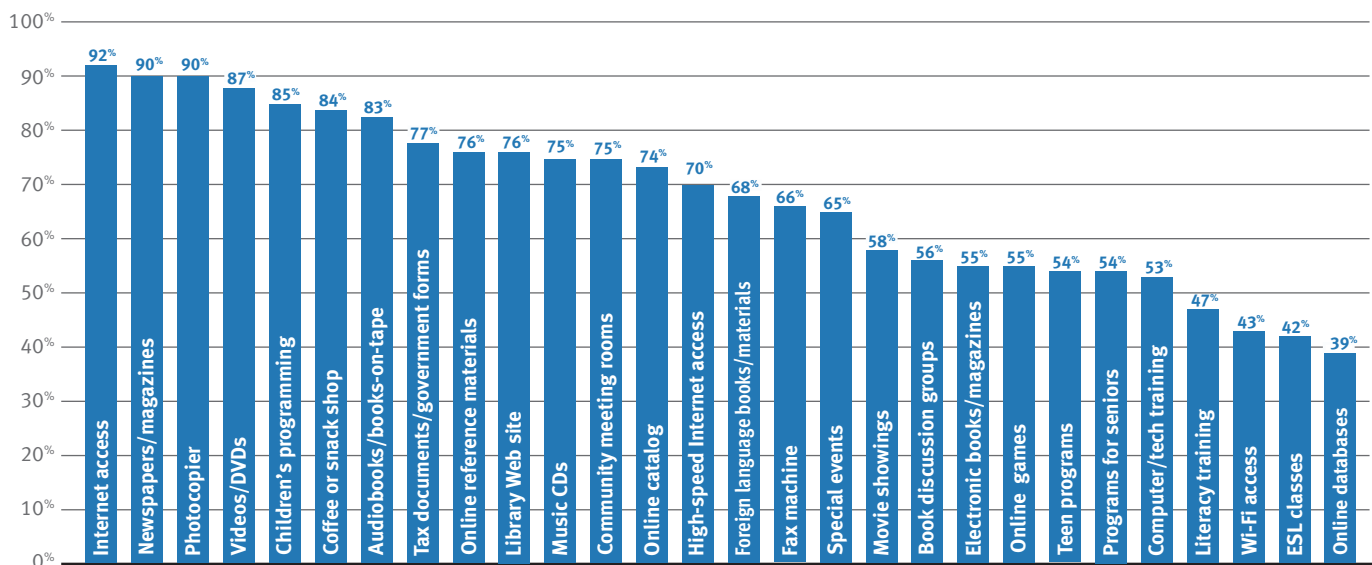
## 2. There is a lot that people don't know about their public libraries.

People are generally unaware of many of the services provided by their local libraries. Respondents indicate awareness of traditional offerings: books, newspapers and magazines, photocopiers, videos/DVDs, etc. And the majority of respondents are aware of services providing public access computing and Internet access. However, respondents have much lower awareness of many of the value-added community-focused programs, such as programming for seniors and teens, literacy training and book discussion groups. Awareness of the availability of online databases, electronic books and electronic journals/magazines is also low, despite the growing proportion of the public library's collections budget spent on electronic content.

### Awareness of services provided by the local public library

#### Total Respondents

Below are some services or types of information that public libraries may or may not offer. For each one, please indicate whether or not your local public library offers this.



Percentage of total respondents who said their local public library offered the service  
 Source: From *Awareness to Funding*, OCLC, 2008

An important insight uncovered by the research is that this lack of awareness may not be a deterrent for funding support. Unfamiliarity with the full range of library services does not dampen the positive attitudes about library funding held by Probable Supporters and Super Supporters. Even when unaware of the range of programs offered by their libraries, Probable Supporters and Super Supporters view the library as an important asset to the community. Familiarity with the full range of library services was not a determinant of library funding support for the library's top funding supporters.

### 3. Library support is only marginally related to visitation. Advocating for library support to library users focuses effort and energy on the wrong target group.

Frequency of library visitation is not a determinant of funding support.

Respondents were asked how often they visited their local public library in the past 12 months. On average, the voting respondents visited their library 13.2 times annually. While overall visitation rates indicate that voters are users of the library, analysis indicates that the frequency of library visits has almost no relationship to a respondent's willingness to support the library at the ballot box. In fact, the correlation between frequency of visitation and library funding support was only 0.06. (A correlation of 0 would indicate no relationship.)

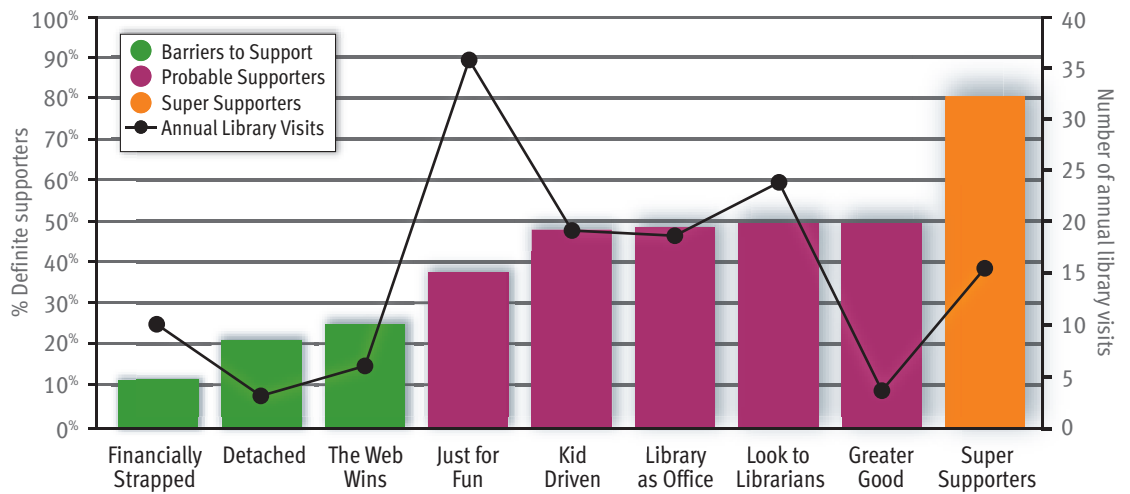
*There is no correlation between frequency of library visits and library funding support.*

#### Library visitation and *definite* library support by segment

##### Total Voting Respondents

How many times have you visited your local public library in the past 12 months?

If there was a referendum, ballot initiative or bond measure for your local public library on the ballot, how do you think you would vote?



Percentage of voting respondents who would *definitely* vote 'yes' for a library referendum  
 Source: *From Awareness to Funding*, OCLC, 2008

## Library funding support is an attitude, not a demographic

To illustrate the important finding that library support is not driven, or limited, by frequency of library visits, consider the usage and support profiles for two of the segments, Super Supporters and Just for Fun.

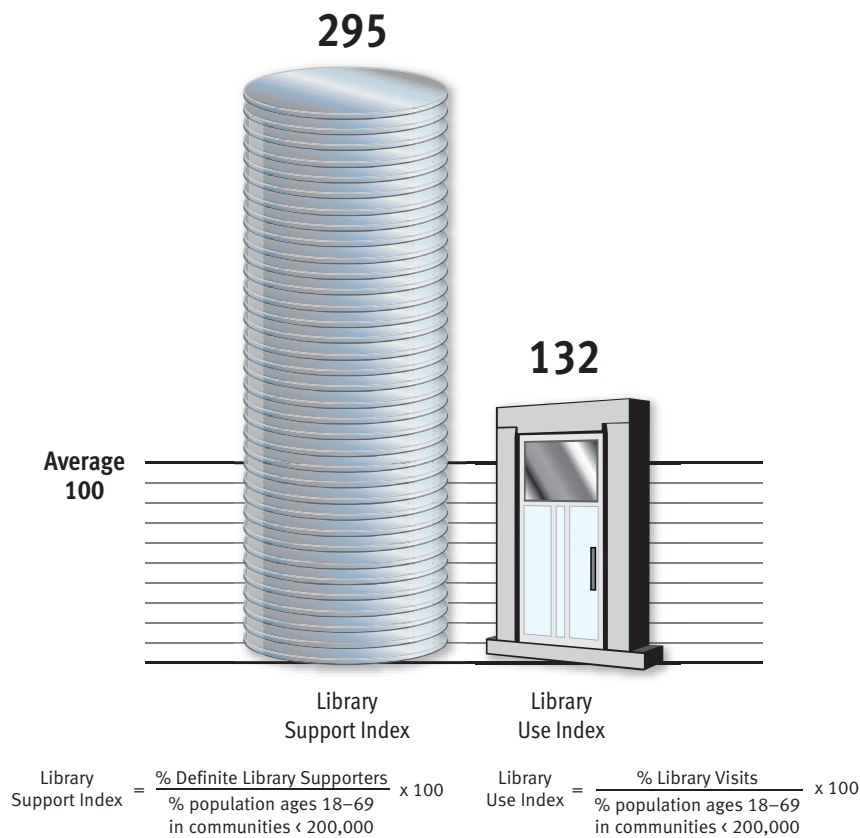
The most committed library funding supporters, the Super Supporters, do not visit the library any more frequently than other segments. Super Supporters show the greatest commitment to library funding support—almost three times the average—yet their frequency of library visits is only slightly above average.

### Super Supporters account for, by far, the most financial support for libraries despite only somewhat higher usage

#### Super Supporters segment

If there was a referendum, ballot initiative or bond measure for your local public library on the ballot, how do you think you would vote?

How many times have you visited your local public library in the past 12 months?



An index of 100 is average  
Source: *From Awareness to Funding*, OCLC, 2008

Conversely, the Just for Fun segment of Probable Supporters reports by far the most frequent use of the library with more than three times the average. However, this segment is only somewhat more likely than average to *definitely* vote in favor of a library funding measure.

The most frequent library visitors are not the right target market for a library funding campaign. Library support is driven by voter attitudes and beliefs, not by awareness of library services or the frequency of library usage.

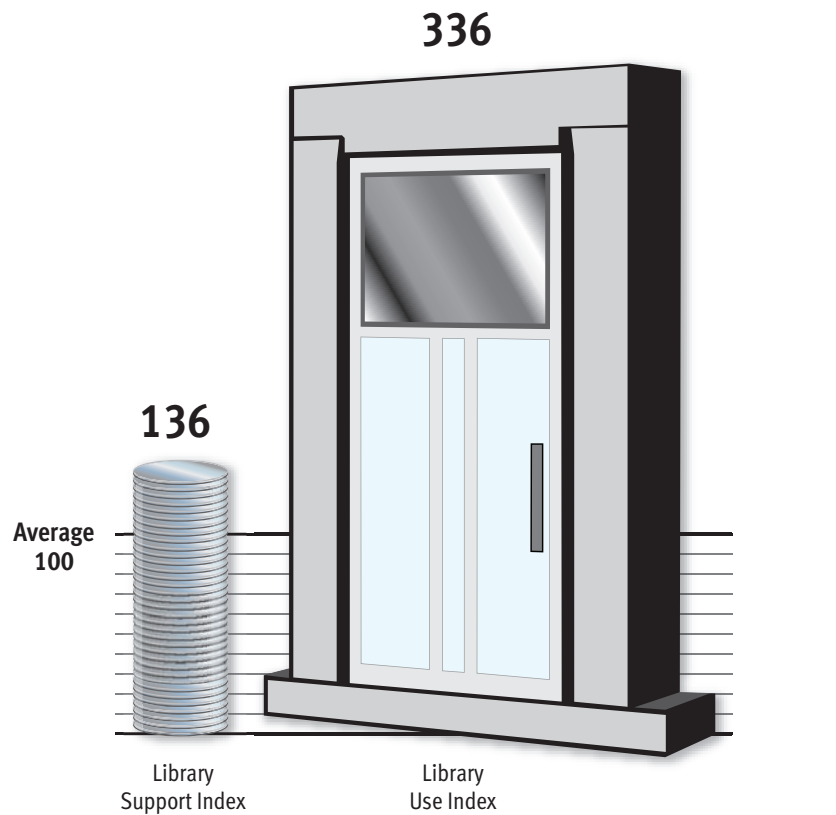
**Just for Fun respondents are the heaviest users but the least likely of the Probable Supporters to *definitely* vote to fund the library**

*Just for Fun segment*

If there was a referendum, ballot initiative or bond measure for your local public library on the ballot, how do you think you would vote?

How many times have you visited your local public library in the past 12 months?

*The most frequent library visitors are not the right target market for a library funding campaign.*



$$\text{Library Support Index} = \frac{\% \text{ Definite Library Supporters}}{\% \text{ population ages 18-69 in communities } < 200,000} \times 100$$

$$\text{Library Use Index} = \frac{\% \text{ Library Visits}}{\% \text{ population ages 18-69 in communities } < 200,000} \times 100$$

An index of 100 is average  
 Source: *From Awareness to Funding*, OCLC, 2008

## 4. Perceptions of the librarian are highly related to support. ‘Passionate librarians’ who are involved in the community make a difference.

While frequency of library visitation and awareness of the full range of library services are not key determinants of library funding support, respondents’ perceptions of the public librarian have a strong influence on funding support. Survey respondents rated the librarians at their local public libraries across a number of attributes. Analysis of the responses shows that a strong positive rating for the librarian across five of these attributes has a strong influence on library funding support. These five attributes can be combined to describe the ‘passionate librarian’:

*Perceptions of the public librarian have a strong influence on funding support.*

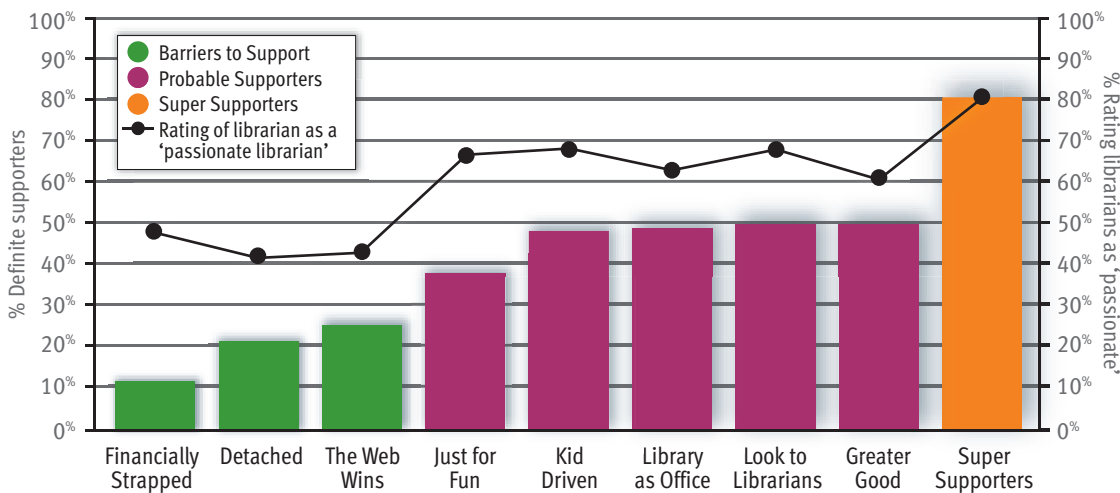
- True advocate for lifelong learning
- Passionate about making the library relevant again
- Knowledgeable about every aspect of the library
- Well-educated
- Knowledgeable about the community.

### The ‘passionate librarian’ and *definite* library support

*Total Voting Respondents*

Please rate the librarians at the public library in your community on the following traits using a 10-point scale, where a 10 means ‘Describes them extremely well’ and a 1 means ‘Doesn’t describe them at all.’

If there was a referendum, ballot initiative or bond measure for your local public library on the ballot, how do you think you would vote?



Percentage of voting respondents who would *definitely* vote ‘yes’ for a library referendum  
 Percentage of voting respondents who rated their librarian as a ‘Passionate Librarian’ with an agreement rating of 8, 9 or 10  
 Source: *From Awareness to Funding*, OCLC, 2008



Voters who rate the librarian highly on the traits that comprise the ‘passionate librarian’ are more likely to say they would *definitely* vote yes for a library referendum, ballot initiative or bond measure.

Super Supporters have the highest percentage of respondents (81%) who rate the librarians at their local public libraries highly on the attributes that make up the ‘passionate librarian.’ The percentage of voters who fall into the Barriers to Support tier of the segmentation pyramid who rate their local librarians highly against the ‘passionate librarian’ attributes is significantly less at just 45%.

## **5. The library occupies a very clear position in people’s minds as a provider of practical answers and information. This is a very crowded space, and to remain relevant in today’s information landscape, repositioning will be required.**

The research survey explored how voters perceive the library relative to other brands, categories and activities that could potentially provide similar services, intellectual experiences or emotional benefits. The goal was to understand the emotional and intellectual rewards attributed to the library and analyze the position the library holds in the mind of potential voters relative to possible alternatives.

Respondents rated their local public libraries in terms of how well they provided a number of different intellectual and emotional rewards. For example, respondents rated the library’s ability to ‘help you make informed decisions,’ ‘provide an escape from your own world’ or ‘make you feel safe and secure.’

Respondents also rated other brands, categories and activities that could potentially provide the same rewards, e.g., *Encyclopedia Britannica*, watching a documentary, reading blogs, traveling to a foreign country, Wikipedia.com, or visiting a museum or an art gallery.

Using a correspondence analysis technique, data across all the emotional and intellectual rewards were analyzed to understand how public libraries performed and how they compared to alternatives. Responses were analyzed and mapped on a two-dimensional framework, the Emotional and Intellectual Rewards Framework.

The axes that define the Emotional and Intellectual Rewards Framework were not predetermined, just as the segmentation pyramid tiers and segments were not predetermined but were driven by the survey data.

## The Emotional and Intellectual Rewards Framework

Correspondence analysis provides a framework for understanding the intellectual and emotional rewards provided by the U.S. public library relative to possible alternative brands, categories or activities. The data analysis resulted in a two-by-two framework with four defining axis points—‘Transformation,’ ‘Information,’ ‘Purpose’ and ‘Escape.’

**The x axis**—the range of intellectual and emotional rewards perceived to be provided by a service relative to its ability to transform, ‘Transformation,’ or its ability to inform, ‘Information.’

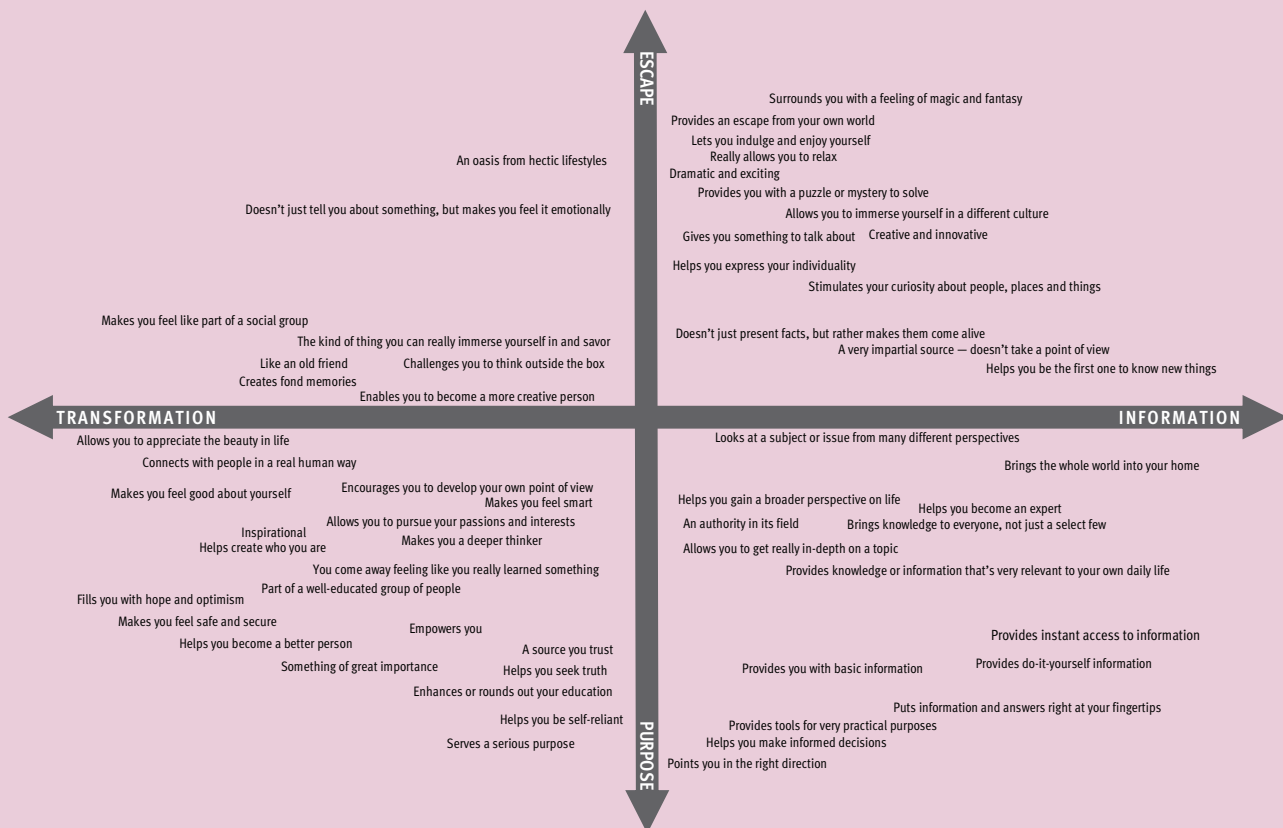
- Emotional and intellectual rewards most closely related to **‘Transformation’** are plotted on the left half of the framework. These include such attributes as ‘helps you create who you are’ and ‘enables you to be a more creative person.’
- Emotional and intellectual rewards most closely related to **‘Information’** are plotted on the right half of the framework. These include such attributes as ‘provides do-it-yourself information’ and ‘helps you be the first one to know things.’

**The y axis**—the range of intellectual and emotional rewards perceived to be provided by a service relative to its ability to support a practical goal, ‘Purpose,’ or its ability to provide an escape from everyday life, ‘Escape.’

- Emotional and intellectual rewards most closely related to **‘Purpose’** are plotted on the bottom half of the framework. These include such attributes as ‘helps you make informed decisions’ and ‘helps you become an authority in your field.’
- Emotional and intellectual rewards most closely related to **‘Escape’** are plotted on the top half of the framework. These include such attributes as ‘dramatic and exciting’ and ‘an oasis from hectic lifestyles.’

### Emotional and Intellectual Rewards Framework

Total Voting Respondents



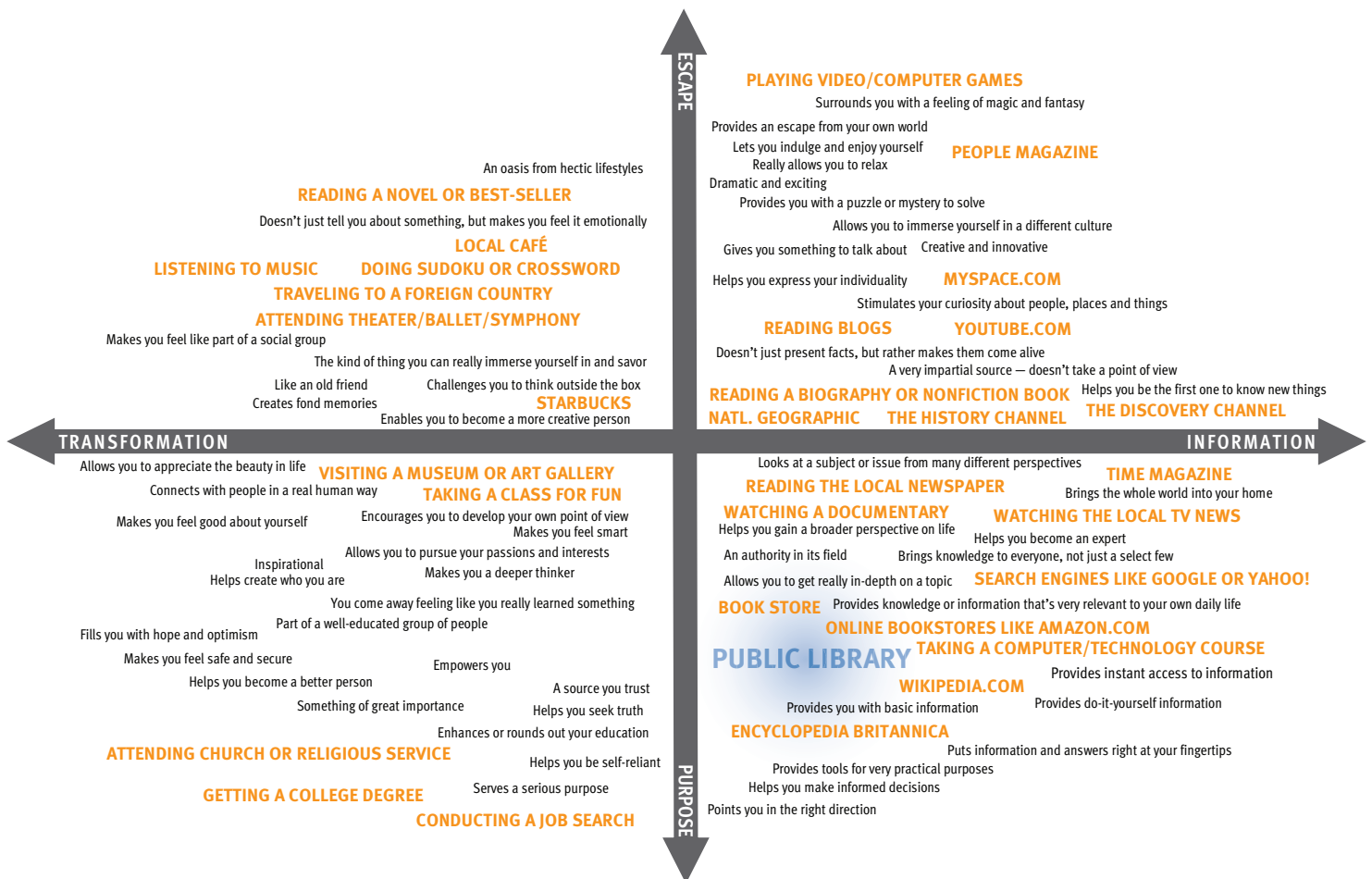
Source: *From Awareness to Funding*, OCLC, 2008

All brands, categories and activities rated by the survey respondents were plotted on the Emotional and Intellectual Rewards Framework. These brands and categories included Starbucks, The History Channel, YouTube.com, attending theater/ballet/symphony, getting a college degree and visiting the public library. Their relative position on the framework below corresponds to the emotional and intellectual rewards derived from performing that activity or using that service. For example, ‘watching a documentary’ is associated by respondents with the rewards ‘makes you feel smart,’ ‘helps you gain a broader perspective on life’ and ‘helps you become an expert.’ ‘Playing video/computer games’ is associated by respondents with ‘surrounds you with a feeling of magic and fantasy.’ And the brand ‘Starbucks’ is associated with emotional rewards of ‘enables you to become a more creative person’ and ‘challenges you to think outside the box.’

## Emotional and Intellectual Rewards for the Public Library

### Total Voting Respondents

Please rate how well the words or phrases describe the selected brands/categories/activities using a 10-point scale, where a 10 means ‘Describes it very well’ and a 1 means ‘Doesn’t describe it at all.’



Source: From Awareness to Funding, OCLC, 2008

## Library funding support is an attitude, not a demographic

The public library is associated by respondents with the intellectual and emotional rewards represented in the lower-right-hand quadrant. The library is perceived as a service that provides ‘information with a purpose.’ As the framework illustrates, this perceptual territory, ‘information with a purpose,’ is a very crowded space. There are many other information and learning services located in the same quadrant including Wikipedia.com, online bookstores like Amazon.com, search engines and bookstores. These brands and services are redefining the role and definition of information.

The public library historically ‘owned’ the emotional and intellectual dimension of purposeful information, sharing the perceptual space with relatively few alternatives. But since the advent of the Internet, this is no longer the case. Competition for the information seeker’s business and loyalty is intense. The public library now shares its ‘information with a purpose’ quadrant with many alternatives. And many of these alternatives are spending significant financial resources to solidify their positioning.

The research suggests that the public library’s strong associations as a ‘place for information’ may not only limit the library’s ability to gain mindshare and marketshare with information seekers, but the current positioning may also be one of the factors hampering the success of library funding initiatives.

The research indicates that transformation, not information, drives financial support.

## 6. Belief that the library is a transformational force in people’s lives is directly related to their level of funding support.

Aggregation of results across all survey respondents indicates that the public library is viewed as a service that provides the emotional and intellectual rewards of ‘purposeful information.’ But a review of results of those voters who said they would *definitely* vote in favor of a library referendum provides a very important distinction.

The degree to which the public library was perceived as transformational is significantly higher among the most committed funding supporters (voters who said they would *definitely* vote yes for a library referendum, ballot initiative or bond measure). There are 16 emotional or intellectual rewards that the most committed funding supporters associate with the public library. Of this list of 16 attributes, half are in the ‘purposeful transformation’ quadrant of the Emotional and Intellectual Rewards Framework:

- Helps create who you are
- Makes you feel good about yourself
- Allows you to appreciate the beauty in life
- You come away feeling like you really learned something
- Fills you with hope and optimism
- Empowers you
- Helps you seek truth
- Serves a serious purpose.

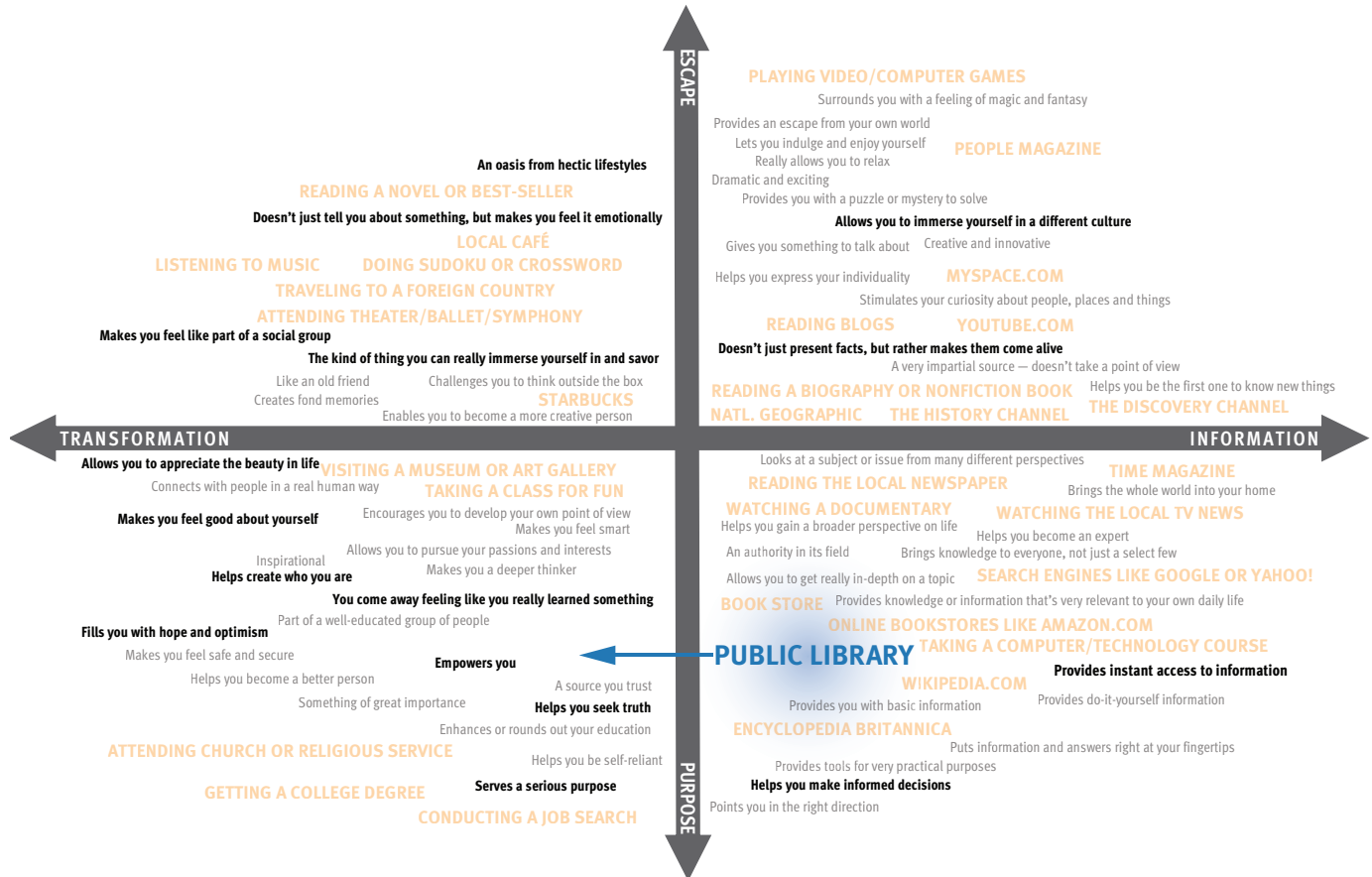
*The library is perceived as a service that provides ‘information with a purpose,’ a very crowded space.*

*Belief that the library is a self-actualization tool is directly related to level of funding support.*

## Perceptions of the public library held by people who will definitely vote in support of library funding

### Respondents who would definitely vote yes for a library referendum

Please rate how well the words or phrases describe the selected brands/categories/activities using a 10-point scale, where a 10 means 'Describes it very well' and a 1 means 'Doesn't describe it at all.'



Source: From Awareness to Funding, OCLC, 2008

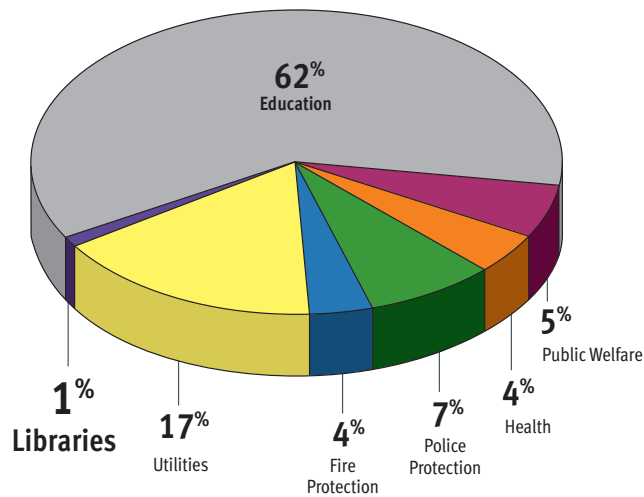
The most likely library funding supporters do not view the library as a source of information, but rather as a source for transformation. Even the rewards identified by *definite* library supporters that are more associated with information, such as ‘allows you to immerse yourself in another culture’ and ‘doesn’t just present facts, but rather helps them come alive,’ provide useful insights into the mindset held by this group.

The associations held by the stronger financial supporters are connections that are both personal and community-oriented. Leveraging the perception of the library as a transformational force for both individuals and the community is a powerful motivator. A library support campaign must aim to reposition the library as a transformational influence in the minds of Probable Supporters and elected officials. More will be discussed about this connection in “Chapter 6: Mobilizing Probable and Super Supporters—what makes the difference.”

## 7. Increasing support for libraries may not necessarily mean a trade-off of financial support for other public services.

Analysis of local funding for public libraries and other public services shows that the public library receives just under 1% of the total local operating budget (source: U.S. Census Bureau). This percentage has remained relatively constant over the last several years. The question arises, then, whether it is appropriate or advisable to mount a concerted effort to increase library funding and, if successful, will such an increase take dollars away from other local services? The research suggests that a funding trade-off may not be necessary.

### 2004 local government expenditure



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

*The public library receives just under 1% of the total local operating budget.*

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

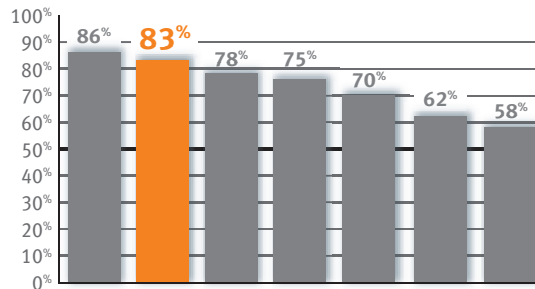
Voting respondents who say they will *definitely* vote yes in support of a library referendum often indicate that they are also willing to support an increase in taxes to fund other local public services as well.

A side-by-side comparison of the willingness of a voter segment to increase taxes to fund local public services, including the public library, shows that a willingness to fund one service is often similar to their willingness to support other local services.

The most committed library funding supporters, Super Supporters, show a strong intent to vote yes in support of library referenda: 83% agreed strongly that they would be willing to raise their taxes to fund the public library. Community support from Super Supporters does not just include support for the public library. In fact, Super Supporters of libraries are also 'super' in their financial support of other locally funded public services. Eighty-six percent (86%) of Super Supporters agree they are willing to increase taxes in support of the fire department with the same rating; 78% are willing to increase taxes for public schools; and 75% will support a tax increase

for police. In fact, over half of all Super Supporters indicated they would support a tax increase for each of the public services surveyed.

**Super Supporters**

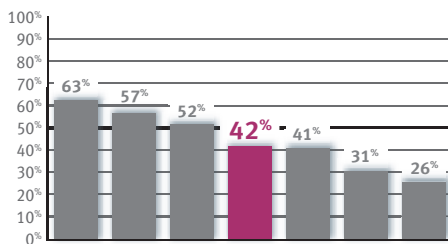


Source: *From Awareness to Funding*, OCLC, 2008

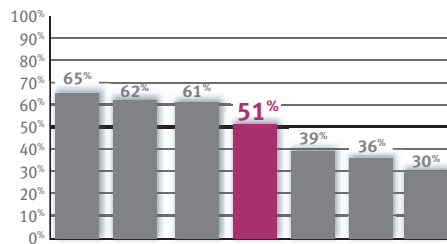
While Probable Supporters' willingness to support tax increases does not match the level of Super Supporters, many Probable Supporters agree that they are willing to increase taxes for their public library. As with library Super Supporters, many Probable Supporters are also willing to increase taxes for other public services. For example, over 55% of the Look to Librarians segment of Probable Supporters indicate agreement with an increase in taxes for library funding; 45% would also support an increase in taxes for police, fire, schools, public health and parks.

Probable Supporters show a generally consistent attitude toward supporting tax increases across many local public services.

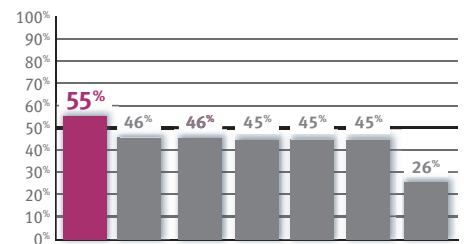
**Greater Good**



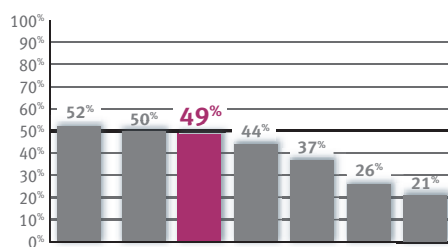
**Kid Driven**



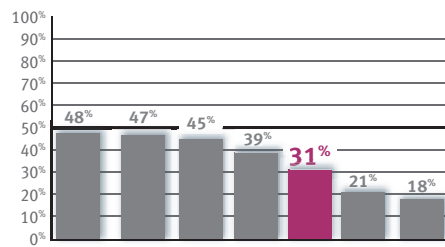
**Look to Librarians**



**Just for Fun**



**Library as Office**

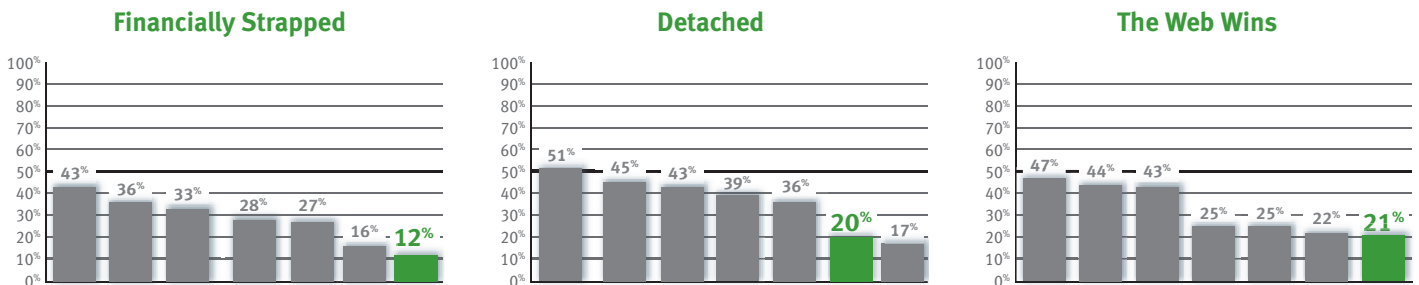


Source: *From Awareness to Funding*, OCLC, 2008



## Library funding support is an attitude, not a demographic

The tier of voters with significant barriers to supporting funding for the public library, the Barriers to Support tier, also indicates a lower overall support for tax increases for other local services. While 51% of the Detached segment respondents agree that they would support a tax increase for the fire department, no other local service received majority support from any segment on this tier. In general, respondents across all Barriers to Support segments are less likely than Super Supporters and Probable Supporters to be in favor of tax increases for community services.



Source: *From Awareness to Funding*, OCLC, 2008

The willingness to provide financial support across a wide range of public services by Super Supporters and Probable Supporters was reinforced during qualitative field research. Focus group participants did not consider that raising awareness of the library funding meant a decrease in importance of other local services. In fact, many focus group respondents spoke passionately about the need to ensure that the library was considered alongside safety and education in the context of all local funding discussions. Many noted that the relationship between schools and the library as partners in a child's education made it important for both services to receive funding.

A targeted campaign aimed at increasing funding support for libraries in the Super Supporters and Probable Supporters segments does not necessarily call for a decrease in support for other locally funded public services. In fact, placing the library in the consideration set along with other key local services can increase the level of awareness and importance of the interrelationship with other local services.

## 8. Elected officials are supportive of the library—but not fully committed to increasing funding. Engaging Super Supporters and Probable Supporters to help elevate library funding needs is required.

As outlined in Chapter 3, elected officials hold many of the same views about their public libraries as do the voting population. Overall, they are more committed to the success of their libraries. They visit the library more frequently and rate it higher than most voters. Elected officials are similar to Probable Supporters in their overall attitudes about public library support and funding.



However, positive associations do not necessarily translate into support for funding increases. Elected officials value the public library and sympathize with its financial situation. Sixty (60%) percent of elected officials say they would *definitely* support putting a library referendum, ballot initiative or bond measure on the ballot. Still, the majority of elected officials (73%) think their library has enough day-to-day operating funds.

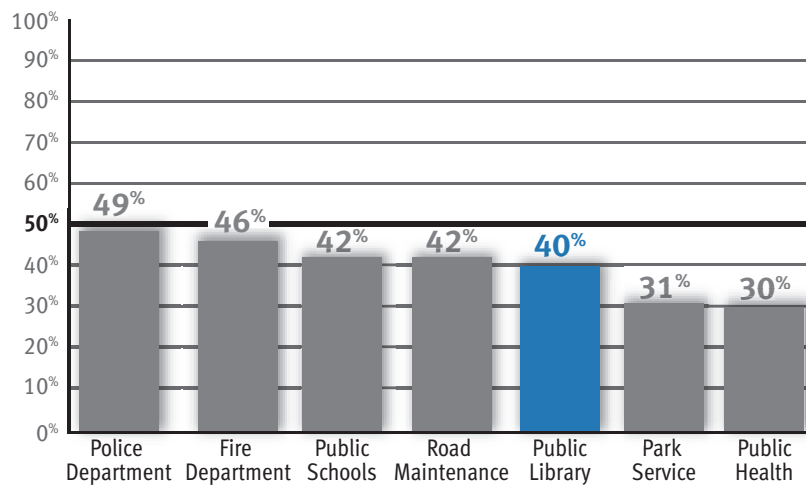
A comparison of the willingness of elected officials to increase taxes for the public library and for other public services shows that when asked about funding across the board, the elected officials are not likely to pay more in taxes.

It is important to note how similarly elected officials viewed funding increases across most local services. Just nine percentage points separate the level of funding support across the top five services. Police (49%), fire (46%), schools (42%), road maintenance (42%) and the public library (40%) are all in a similar percentage range. Convincing local elected officials to increase taxes for any of these services is not an easy task.

### The library places in the bottom half of the list of public services that elected officials are willing to support with a tax increase

#### *Elected officials*

For each service, please rate how much you agree with the phrase “I’d be willing to pay more in local taxes to better fund this service.” Please use a 10-point scale, where a 10 means you ‘Completely Agree’ and a 1 means you ‘Completely Disagree.’



Percentage of elected officials with an agreement rating of 8, 9 or 10  
Source: *From Awareness to Funding*, OCLC, 2008

The library is often not a top priority for elected officials. They are managing a long list of important public services that are in need of financial support and many face strong pressure by their constituencies to limit local tax increases.

## **Library funding support is an attitude, not a demographic**

Elevating the financial needs of the library by positioning it as vital community infrastructure, rather than a 'nice to have' service, is required. As local officials weigh the costs and benefits of increasing taxes or allocating funds, the profile and value of the library relative to other services must be increased. Engaging community support from the most likely library financial supporters can be an important factor in elevating this discussion. Engaging the support of Super Supporters and Probable Supporters to increase the attention of their elected officials on tax support for libraries is essential.