



## 2025 Community Engagement Report

For more than 50 years, the Bartlett Public Library has been the best place in our community for residents to come together to learn and discover. Our library has a special hometown feel where everyone is welcome, an environment fostered by our amazing staff who go above and beyond to help each person who comes through our doors.

We've accomplished this while remaining one of the most fiscally responsible library districts in the region. As a result, compared to our neighboring library districts, we spend the least per person we serve with the lowest staff expenses.

However, our facilities are aging and we don't currently have the funding to address the major improvements desired by the community. Built in 1983 with two later additions, the outdated building and antiquated furniture keeps our library from being the inviting community space it could be.

In an effort to determine the priorities of our residents, the Bartlett Public Library District renewed its community engagement activities this summer and began taking active steps in July to engage the public and solicit feedback on a potential solution to our infrastructure challenges. So far, we have received feedback from more than 321 members of the community through in-person presentations, an online survey, and a scientific phone survey on what improvements they would like to see to their library and how they would like to fund those improvements.

Using information provided by the district and their experts, we developed a "menu" of potential individual projects and potential infrastructure solutions with funding levels. The district has been closely listening to the community as individuals considered and ranked each item on the menu to share their priorities.

During our latest phase of community engagement, we developed messaging, recruited a community-based committee to lead these efforts, coordinated a discussion with the community committee, conducted a scientific phone survey (this spring), and held 4 public engagement sessions (one virtually) at different times and days of the week to ensure all community members could participate.

Feedback from the community was documented during this time through notes taken of all direct communications, feedback provided on paper and digital forms at the Community Committee meeting and public engagement sessions, responses to a publicly available feedback form available on the district's website, and spreadsheets generated from the results of the scientific phone survey.

### **Messaging**

We developed messaging to properly communicate how we got to this point, what our successes and challenges have been, and how to approach the path forward. This messaging detailed recent progression and improvements as well as the district's space and infrastructure challenges and limited opportunities as a result. The seven key takeaways from the messaging are below, and a full copy of the messaging is provided with this report.

- For more than 50 years, the Bartlett Public Library has been the best place in our community for residents to come together to learn and discover.
- Our library has a special hometown feel where everyone is welcome, an environment fostered by our amazing staff who go above and beyond to help each person who comes through our doors.
- The feedback from our community is positive, giving high marks for our helpful staff, quality programming, and central location.
- We've accomplished this while remaining one of the most fiscally responsible library districts in the region.
- However, our facilities are aging and we don't currently have the funding to address the major improvements desired by the community. Built in 1983 with two later additions, the outdated building and antiquated furniture keeps our library from being the inviting community space it could be.
- That's why our community has come together to collaborate on a long-term solution that responsibly addresses our infrastructure and space challenges, increases our efficiency and sustainability, and raises property values for everyone in the community.
- Together, we will inspire curiosity in every member of our community, bringing them into our library where they can learn, discover, and build relationships with each other.

### **Community Committee**

We developed a committee of individuals who will provide direct, informed input throughout this effort. The committee is made up of a cross-section of library district stakeholders, including business owners, elected officials, library patrons, seniors, and community leaders. The committee has been formalized and tasked with the responsibility of actively gathering feedback from the community to determine what they would like to see for the future of the library. The first Community Committee meeting took place September 16. Committee engagement will continue throughout this process.

### **Public Engagement**

The district held 3 in-person public engagement sessions and 1 virtual session at different times and days of the week to provide all members of the community an opportunity to attend. These events were promoted through direct mail, emails and social media. These sessions presented the latest information about the library, discussed the successes and challenges ahead, and actively solicited input from the community on potential individual projects and potential infrastructure solutions with funding levels.

Public engagement sessions were held:

- Thursday, September 18 at 6 pm at the library.
- Saturday, September 20 at 10am at the library.
- Monday, September 22 at 6 pm at the library.
- Thursday, September 25 at 7 pm virtually through Zoom webinar.

Verbal discussions occurred during these meetings and additional collaboration opportunities were made available as well through feedback forms and the district's website.

### **Feedback Report**

Attached is a detailed report of the feedback that was collected during this phase of the process, which includes feedback from the Community Committee, the public at public engagement sessions, and the public via the online feedback form on the district website.

## Scientific Phone Survey

The district conducted a public phone survey, called the menu survey, earlier this year to gauge support for each potential individual project and each potential infrastructure solution with funding levels. For each item discussed, respondents were given information on each item as well as estimated costs. The survey was taken before the full public had been educated on the projects or fully informed of the district's needs. This was done in order to obtain an accurate representation of the public's unbiased, intuitive reactions to the projects, infrastructure solutions, and funding levels contained in the survey.

The results from the menu survey are provided with this report.

## Engagement Analysis

In forming our analysis of this phase of engagement, we reviewed all data points provided by members of the community. First, through the menu survey, which gives us a scientifically accurate snapshot of the intuitive reactions of members of the community to the items being discussed. Second, through the public engagement sessions and online engagement, which give us the more passionate responses from community members very invested in their library who have taken some time to consider these issues. Third, through the Community Committee, whose responses come after significant discussion, allowing us to track the movement of opinions as individuals become more engaged and educated on these topics.

An important data point for processes like this is the favorability of the library district, because the success of any future effort is tied to how residents feel about the district. Here, the phone survey provides good news: 85% of residents rate the district favorably, compared to only 8% who rate the district unfavorably. This gives the district a net favorability rating of +77%, which is extremely positive. Clearly, Bartlett residents support their library and are appreciative of the work being done by the district.

## Potential Individual Projects

Nearly every individual project shows support, with some projects receiving net support in the +40s and +50s. This is a great indication of positivity in the community and support for the potential improvements being considered.

While most projects are supported, the community does show specific preferences when prioritizing the projects. The order below is based on a combination of the menu survey, public engagement, and community committee responses. The order is different than what was reported previously, as that analysis was based on just the menu survey data. Now, with full community engagement data available, we are able to provide a full analysis.

The community's top priorities are Books & Shelving and Technology.

- Books & Shelving has the highest net favorability (+53%), is the highest priority for the community committee, and is the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest priority for the general public, especially prioritized by middle-aged residents, females, whites, moderates, and those who regularly utilize the library.
- Technology has high net favorability (+43%) and is the highest priority for the general public, especially seniors, males, Hispanics, Asians, conservatives, and those who occasionally utilize the library.

Next in priority are Building Layout & Accessibility, Youth Spaces, and Programming Spaces.

- Building Layout & Accessibility has solid net favorability (+22%) and is the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest priority for public engagement attendees and 3<sup>rd</sup> highest for the community committee. It is the highest priority for liberals and those who rarely utilize the library, and is high priority for younger

residents, seniors, males, Hispanics, whites, moderates, and those who occasionally utilize the library.

- Youth Spaces has solid net favorability (+26%) and is the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest priority for the general public. It is the highest priority for younger residents and Blacks, and is high priority for females, middle-aged residents, Hispanics, conservatives, those who occasionally utilize the library, and those who regularly, rarely, and never utilize the library.
- Programming Spaces has the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest net favorability (+48%) and is the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest priority for the community committee. This project is unique in that it is ranked only 9<sup>th</sup> by the general public despite its high favorability, indicating the community would be happy to see improvements in this area, but those who interact less frequently with the library do not see it as among the highest priorities.

Next is Sustainability and Study Rooms & Quiet Spaces.

- Sustainability has solid net favorability (+26%), is the highest priority for public engagement attendees, and is the highest priority for those who never utilize the library. It is also high priority for Asians and liberals.
- Study Rooms & Quiet Spaces has strong net favorability (+38%) and is high priority for Blacks.

The final priorities are Adult & Teen Spaces, Meeting Spaces, a Drive-Up Window, and Outdoor Spaces.

- These projects receive among the lowest favorability and are lowest ranked in priority.
- Three of the projects receive net positive favorability, while the other (Drive-Up Window) receives negative net favorability (-12%), though it rises to 6<sup>th</sup> in the project rankings.
- In general, the data indicates the community would be fine if improvements are made in these areas, though not at the expense of higher priority projects.

### **Potential Infrastructure Solutions & Funding Levels**

Once again, we see strong positivity in the community's responses. The public shows strong support for providing additional funding to improve the library, with 74% supporting one of the infrastructure solutions & funding levels and only 21% favoring no additional funding for the district.

The data also shows the overall funding range tested during this phase is palatable to the Bartlett community. While people certainly have their preferences, which we will describe next, the levels of support shown during this phase compared to the response data from other districts shows Bartlett is looking at an appropriate range of funding that matches the community's overall appetite.

The top choice is the Additions + Renovation solution. This infrastructure solution, tied to the Medium Funding Level, is ranked highest by the general public and public engagement attendees, ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> highest by the community committee, and is nearly break even in net favorability (-1%). The support from the general public in the phone survey is notable, because in most districts, the infrastructure solution tied to the lowest funding level is typically ranked highest, with the other options receiving net negative favorability. This solution is supported most by seniors, females, whites, Hispanics, moderates, liberals, those who regularly utilize the library, and those who occasionally utilize the library.

The next choice is a New Library, coming in a close 2<sup>nd</sup> behind the top choice. This infrastructure solution, tied to the High Funding Level, is ranked highest by the community committee and 2<sup>nd</sup> highest by the general public. This solution's net favorability is lower (-15%), though the most expensive option always has the lowest favorability in surveys, and it's notable that those same respondents ranked this solution

2<sup>nd</sup> highest despite the lower favorability. This solution is supported most by younger residents, Blacks, and those who rarely utilize the library.

The final choice is Renovation. This infrastructure solution, tied to the Low Funding Level, receives high net favorability (+25%) and is ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> highest by public engagement attendees, but it ranks last among the general public, even behind No Additional Funding.

Those who prefer No Additional Funding tend to be more male, Black, Asian, conservative, or have never utilized the library.

### **Developing the Final Plan**

Overall, the feedback during community engagement is strongly positive. The community is very supportive of the library and recognizes the need to make investments into improvements.

The community strongly wishes to see improvements to the library's Books & Shelving and Technology. They would also like to see improvements to Building Layout & Accessibility, Youth Spaces, and Programming Spaces. And, if funding is available, they would next prioritize Sustainability and Study Rooms & Quiet Spaces.

To accomplish these improvements, the community most supports building additions and significantly renovating the current library. However, the community is not entirely opposed to a new library—if time is spent engaging the community and educating them on the challenges the library faces in the current building and the benefits to the community if a new library is built, they show a willingness to increase their support for this higher-level infrastructure solution. The community is not interested in pursuing only a renovation without additions.

Based on the strongly positive feedback from the community during this engagement process, the district may move forward with a referendum as soon as the upcoming March 2026 election if desired. A ballot question based on a plan that builds additions and significantly renovates the current library and accomplishes the top improvements desired by the community would have very high odds of being successful. Should the district wish to move forward with a ballot question based on a plan to build a new library, it is possible to pursue this in the March 2026 election, though it would require a strong educational effort to ensure the community fully understands why the district feels this is a best path forward. The district may choose to take additional time to engage and inform the public, then pursue a referendum for a new library in the November 2026 election.