

# *Strategic Planning Discovery Summary*

Upper Arlington Public Library



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### **Strategic Planning Discovery Summary**

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Upper Arlington Public Library (UAPL) engaged Benefactor Group to facilitate the initial phase of the strategic planning process. Through this phase, Benefactor Group:

- completed the discovery process;
- analyzed results; and
- documented key findings, including opportunities and challenges in the community, perceptions of the library, and subject areas/matters where the library can have an impact on the community.

This document outlines the method utilized in the discovery process, current perceptions of Upper Arlington and the Upper Arlington Public Library, strategic drivers for UAPL, and the results from the community-wide discussion.

### *Method*

Through the discovery process, Benefactor Group used a number of vehicles to understand the community, the library, and its stakeholders. Our team:

- reviewed library materials and documents, including the UAPL budget, UAPL 2018 Ohio Peer Library Survey, current strategic plan, annual report, organizational chart, Edge Peer Comparison, UA Community Interest and Opinion Survey, and UAPL annual statistics;
- conducted nine individual interviews with community influencers, leaders from the city, school district, and business community, and other key individuals;
- facilitated two focus groups with a total of 13 community influencers who provided significant verbal input and completed a written questionnaire;
- administered an online community survey with 384 respondents, including 26 staff members; and
- facilitated a community-wide discussion (referred to as a World Café) with 10 participants.

Benefactor Group worked with the UAPL's strategic planning committee to identify the appropriate stakeholders for both the individual interviews and the focus groups. The interviews and focus groups took place between March 2019 and May 2019 and were conducted by Steve Beshuk, Laura MacDonald, and Ron Guisinger of Benefactor Group.

To ensure a wide distribution and response, UAPL staff advertised the community survey in the following ways:

- emailed 2,300 to 2,400 library members and stakeholders;
- printed the survey link on library receipts;
- printed posters for display in the UAPL branches and at library events;
- posted information on online platforms, including social media and the websites of the UAPL and the City of Upper Arlington;

- posted flyers at local establishments (i.e., – Panera, Tremont Center, Colin’s Coffee, Crimson Cup); and
- distributed electronic flyers to schools and civic groups in Upper Arlington (i.e. – Rotary, Network UA, Senior Center).

The online survey was open from April 1, 2019 to April 4, 2019 for UAPL staff submissions. It was made available to the public from April 5, 2019 to May 6, 2019.

### Current Perceptions of Upper Arlington

To identify perceptions of Upper Arlington, Benefactor Group analyzed responses to specific questions in each instrument.

#### **What defines a good quality of life in Upper Arlington?**

The following themes were identified:

- city services and amenities, such as regular trash pick-up, snow plowing, or park maintenance;
- a sense that the community is responsive, passionate, and engaged;
- diversity and inclusion;
- friendliness;
- safety;
- high-quality public schools; and
- a variety of housing options

#### Selected Comments:

*“Most important thing here...you have a sense that someone would listen to you if you had something to say. There’s a sense of community and being a part of something that is responsive to you.”*

*“Here, there is a sense of pride in helping. I see it time and time again. There are very few places like this, where you can pick up the phone and you never get a ‘no.’ We take care of each other, step up.”*

#### **What do you most appreciate about Upper Arlington?**

- Participants appreciated UA’s **access to parks and recreation**; the community’s numerous parks and greenspaces allow residents to exercise and gather together.
- Many admired the overwhelming **friendliness**, mentioning how welcoming the UA community is to both new and longstanding residents.
- Upper Arlington accommodates an **intergenerational population**, offering many opportunities to learn from persons of all ages.
- Participants cited **the location** of Upper Arlington as a strength; residents have many options for recreation because of their close proximity to local amenities (e.g., restaurants, schools, libraries, and parks), as well as other metropolitan areas and institutions (e.g., OSU).
- **Safety** was mentioned a number of times, as UA’s high-quality police and fire department make citizens feel safe, and the area has an overall safe environment.
- UA’s **high-quality public school system** helps foster a promising, intellectual community that values education.

### ***What are the opportunities to achieve a good quality of life in Upper Arlington?***

- Foster **community connections**. Include programs and initiatives that promote open, respectful communication between neighbors; this will lead to a more welcoming, kind community.
- Build on the **success of the UA public schools**. Increase efforts to support UA public schools, such as tutoring, research, or volunteer opportunities for students. These efforts will continue to enhance UA's high standard of education.
- **Collaborate** across organizations. Collaboration with other agencies, organizations, and businesses will create a more engaged, efficient, and responsive community.
- Embrace **diversity and inclusion**. Introduce respectful dialogue about differences—whether it be in socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, age, or sexuality—through programs and community discussions.
- Expand **parks and recreation services and access**. New programs focused on nature, sustainability, and fitness will inspire a more active community. Sidewalk expansion will make it easier for pedestrians and cyclists to enjoy these recreation opportunities.

### ***What are the challenges for Upper Arlington?***

The following themes were identified:

- affordable housing;
- aging populations;
- diversity and inclusion;
- economic development (i.e., limited space for development—95% of UA is residential housing, and there is not enough land for further expansion, and also concern about the amount, type, and location of development);
- health and wellness challenges, including mental health and drug use; and
- income inequality.

#### Selected Comments:

*“There is too much economic development.”*

*“Our aging population...we're growing significantly on the edges. The city has put in services for residents to age in place. They sometimes struggle to maintain their residences.”*

*“We had an African-American nanny, and the police were called on her twice at pick up. Our friends had a Black Lives Matter sign stolen. They got a postcard later that ‘all lives matter.’”*

### **Current Perceptions of Upper Arlington Public Library**

To identify perceptions of UAPL, Benefactor Group reviewed responses to these specific questions:

#### ***Satisfaction with Upper Arlington Public Library***

Individual interviewees and community survey participants were asked to rate how satisfied they were with the Upper Arlington Public Library.

| Community Survey                   | %   | Individual Interviews              | %   |
|------------------------------------|-----|------------------------------------|-----|
| Very Satisfied                     | 68% | Very Satisfied                     | 63% |
| Somewhat Satisfied                 | 25% | Somewhat Satisfied                 | 25% |
| Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied | 4%  | Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied | 13% |
| Somewhat Dissatisfied              | 2%  | Somewhat Dissatisfied              | 0%  |
| Very Dissatisfied                  | 1%  | Very Dissatisfied                  | 0%  |

**What is UAPL’s current focus?**

Selected Comments:

*“Welcoming and inclusive of everyone. A variety of people. Space that people can go to explore ideas and interests.”*

*“That gentle gathering and convening they provide...in my opinion, is a very serious part of what their future mission should be.”*

*“The first resource in the community for almost any type of information. Whether it’s children, adult education, or music, UAPL ... is trusted.”*

Peer Library Comparison:

Compared to its peers, UAPL has:

- strong circulation and program attendance;
- an average number of visits;
- low demand for internet and computer usage;
- large number of users (its registered users exceed the city’s population);
- very high total circulation;
- a high percentage of budget spent on staffing, a low percentage spent on “other” activities such as programs, and an average percent spent on materials; and
- below-average salaries.

**What is the current impact of UAPL?**

Participants felt that the Upper Arlington Public Library:

- serves as a community center—or “center of the community”;
- responds to community needs;
- collaborates with other organizations;
- provides access to technology; and
- offers a wide breadth of programs.

Selected Comments:

*“I’m part of Equal UA, and the Library has been with us from beginning—communicating, facilitating. Without them, we would not have been as successful as we are.”*

*“Our community doesn’t have a community center; this library is as close as we’ve come.”*

## Strategic Drivers for Upper Arlington Public Library

To identify UAPL's strategic drivers, Benefactor Group reviewed responses to these specific questions:

### ***UAPL's Potential Future Impact on Quality of Life in Upper Arlington***

- Promote **diversity and inclusion**. Achieve this by offering new services, maintaining an open and welcoming library environment, and considering programs that educate residents about our differences (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, age).
- Become a **gathering place**.
- **Collaborate** with other entities and organizations, such as the city, school district, or prominent community groups (e.g., Equal UA).
- Continue **current services**, which include UAPL's educational programs, trainings, resources, partnerships with other libraries, and safety measures.
- Expand the **selection and frequency of programs**. Participants gave specific examples, such as exploring the benefits of becoming a "lending library," providing music-centered programs, offering tutoring services, and so on.
- Increase **technology opportunities**. Expand access to current technologies, and provide educational opportunities (e.g., trainings, classes) for residents to become adept at these technologies.
- Continue to retain **responsive staff**.
- Accommodate visitors **of all ages**.
- Provide **intergenerational activities**—such as programs or discussions that connect senior citizens with individuals of the next generation.
- Offer "**life-long learning opportunities**."

### ***Opportunities to Strengthen UAPL***

- Continue to **collaborate** with other organizations (e.g., collaborate with the school system by providing tutoring services, volunteer opportunities, after-school programs, and access to research tools and technology).
- **Communicate** UAPL's program offerings more frequently and through new avenues.
- Create more **multifunctional spaces**, particularly outdoors.
- **Extend library hours**, particularly on weekends and weekday afternoons.
- Offer **health and wellness resources** (e.g., sex and drug education, fitness classes, mental health and wellness programs, vaccinations, check-ups, blood drives, etc.).
- Provide a wide range of **youth-facing programs**.
- Create additional **gathering spaces**.
- Ensure **safety and accessibility**.

### Selected Comments:

*"They do a lot of great stuff, but it's hard to communicate all of it."*

*"It can be a place that's overwhelming. You almost don't want to go in to ask for help. What are the entry points for non-engaged citizens?"*

### ***Future Priorities for UAPL***

- Integrate qualities of a **community center**.

- Expand and maintain consistently **updated resources**.
- **Increase hours of operation**, particularly on weekends and weekday afternoons.
- Provide a **diverse range of programs**, particularly for elementary students, middle schoolers, and teenagers (e.g., outdoor activities, story time, or Equal UA programs).
- Increase access to **technology** and opportunities to learn about technology.
- Offer **community-building** opportunities.
- **Communicate** more frequently and consistently (via library marketing, public relations, etc.).

#### **“Non-Traditional” Services to Consider**

- **Collaborate** with other organizations.
- Create new **discussion groups**. For example, UAPL could have a “Topic of the Month” discussion group, where patrons explore specific topics through books, movies, and guest speakers.
- Increase **arts and cultural events**. UAPL could host live music events, art classes, cooking classes, multicultural classes, sewing or knitting classes, theatre performances, and art shows.
- Offer **environment- and sustainability-related** workshops and programs.
- Provide a **wider mix of programs** and events—from hosting guest speakers, to providing space for community events, to creating a place for health and wellness discussions.
- Build a **café**; offer access to food.
- Assist with **administrative services**: printing, scanning, faxing, notary services, passports, or TSA pre-check screening.
- Introduce new **health and wellness resources** (e.g., sex and drug education, fitness classes, mental health education and programs, vaccinations, check-ups, or blood drives).
- Create spaces and opportunities for **engagement with nature**.
- Offer more **resources for checkout**; this could include tools, games, sewing machine, musical instruments, hardware and gardening tools, cooking materials, bike locks, microscopes, business clothes, and videos games.
- Provide **technology** support services (e.g., workshops and classes, technology repairs, and television set-up services).

#### Selected Comments:

*“They should be a connector. They don’t need to take it on, but they should be a safe haven...a drop box.”*

*“Recycling is changing in the world. Maybe the library could be a location where some hard-to-do recycling occurs.”*

*“I think it’s the perfect organization to lead the charge against drug usage.”*

#### **Possible Challenges**

- Revenue growth is anemic and does not sustain library operations.
- Over five years, reserves have dropped from seven months of operational funding to just over two months—a troubling decline.

- Earned and contributed revenue play a larger role in funding discretionary programs and services, but there is no one staff person clearly responsible for driving this.

### **Community Discussion**

Benefactor Group team members, in partnership with the UAPL staff, facilitated a World Café community discussion, where participants share thoughts in interactive small groups. This exercise, which emphasized free-form ideation, supplemented and strengthened Benefactor Group's other discovery work. Attendees were divided into two groups. During the first round of discussion, participants identified what can have the greatest impact on the quality of life in Upper Arlington. From the elements identified, the group chose the four most important: diversity, celebrations, life-long learning, and community building. Participants then discussed how UAPL could play a role in improving those four elements and identified the specific activities that would help. The activities suggested for each element are below.

#### ***Diversity***

The identified activities included:

- civil discussions;
- programming;
- housing diversity;
- connections to events within the metropolitan community; and
- sharing Upper Arlington's diversity.

#### ***Celebrations***

The identified activities included:

- large and small celebrations, which UAPL could host;
- food celebrations; and
- collaborations with current groups (e.g., Upper Arlington High School Capstone Groups).

#### ***Life-Long Learning***

The identified activities included:

- publicizing current activities more;
- trainings, particularly in technology and electronics;
- more frequent classes and workshops; and
- community center activities.

#### ***Community Building***

The identified activities included:

- DIY workshops;
- additional publicity about UAPL's services; and
- unconventional borrowing and rentals.

### **Conclusion and Next Steps**

Through the thoughtful input of the community, the Upper Arlington Public Library has identified current perceptions of Upper Arlington, as well as current perceptions of the





library's services and role. Through this discovery process, UAPL has also gathered residents' input on potential strategic drivers.

As a next step, the organization will distill its numerous aspirations into strategic objectives, prioritize the different objectives, and determine the plan design—including tactics, goals, timelines, and owners.