Developing a New Patron Code of Conduct

Community Engagement Report

Executive Summary

In March 2016, community members expressed concern with revisions to the Kingston Frontenac Public Library's (the Library) Patron Code of Conduct, which had been approved by the Library's Board of Directors (the Board). Due to this concern, the Board deferred the implementation of the revised Patron Code of Conduct until further public consultation could be done. In 2018, MASS LBP, working on behalf of the Library, engaged with community organizations and members of the public in Kingston and the Frontenac Counties. Together, organizations and individuals were asked to explore the following questions:

- What should be included in a Patron Code of Conduct, which behaviours should be addressed, and how?
- How can the Library make the spaces safer and more welcoming to everyone?

Over 900 individuals shared their thoughts and opinions about what the Library should consider as it revises the next Patron Code of Conduct. This report details the activities and findings of the engagement process.

Summary of Findings

1. Many participants thought that the Library's Patron Code of Conduct should be comprehensive and transparent with a focus on using positive language and emphasizing mutual respect between the Library's patrons and staff.

2. While many participants support the development of a Patron Code of Conduct, many thought that the Library should emphasize expected behaviours, use verbal warnings, and refrain from asking patrons to leave the library, unless a patron is being aggressive or doing something illegal.

3. To avoid stigmatization and discrimination, many participants thought that, once developed, the Library should consistently and fairly enforce the Patron Code of Conduct.

4. Many participants understood that library staff are not formally trained as social or mental health workers. Yet, they also recognized that the Library, like many others across North America, faces new challenges in serving their communities, namely the opioid crisis, a lack of supportive and affordable housing, rising rates of poverty in urban centres, and increasing rates of mental illness. As an important community and public resource, many participants suggested that library should develop relationships with healthcare and social service organizations to better connect patrons with the resources they need.

Background

In April 2016, the Board of Directors of the Kingston Frontenac Public Library (KFPL) approved revisions to their Patron Code of Conduct, which generated considerable public concern from community organizations and members of the public who thought that these revisions stigmatized people experiencing homelessness and people living in poverty. The Board deferred the implementation of the revised Patron Code of Conduct in order to consult with more people and include a wider variety of perspectives.

The first steps towards developing a consultation strategy began in 2016 and continued into 2017 when the Board of Directors struck a Community Engagement Committee to develop a Community Engagement Policy, which was presented to the board in March 2017. The policy can be found here.

In March 2018, the library began engaging the Kingston and Frontenac communities about the development of a new Patron Code of Conduct. The community engagement process consisted of three major pillars:

12 Conversations with community organizations

Public workshop May 5, 2018 (17 participants)

Public survey (891 participants)

In total, over 900 people participated in the consultation process. This report reflects what was heard throughout the consultations.

What should be included in the Patron Code of Conduct

A Patron Code of Conduct is typically a document that provides guidelines for how a library will ensure the safety of its patrons and create a safe and respectful environment. Although Patron Codes of Conduct are commonly used by libraries across North America, there are many different ways to write a Patron Code of Conduct.

Many participants thought that the library should develop a comprehensive and transparent Patron Code of Conduct

The Patron Code of Conduct should include:

1. A statement of the library's purpose
2. A list of expected behaviours of library patrons
3. A list of prohibited behaviours and their consequences
4. An appeal policy for patrons who want to appeal a library ban

Emphasize Positive Language

On the other hand, some participants expressed concern about developing a detailed Patron Code of Conduct. Instead, they recommended that the Patron Code of Conduct be framed positively.

To this end, participants recommended that:

- The Patron Code of Conduct only include a welcoming statement and a list of expected behaviours.
- The Patron Code of Conduct be a short document that emphasizes mutual respect between patrons and staff.

Some Concerns

At the same time, a few participants thought that the library should not have a Patron Code of Conduct for the following reasons:

- The only behaviours that should be prohibited in the library are illegal behaviours and activities, which are already prohibited by municipal, provincial, and federal laws. Hence, they thought that a Patron Code of Conduct would be redundant.
- Codifying expected and prohibited behaviours is not welcoming and risks limiting access to library space.

Thoughtful Language

In addition, several participants made the following recommendations about the language used in the Patron Code of Conduct:

- The Patron Code of Conduct should avoid vague language because it leaves room for subjective interpretation. In particular, participants cautioned the library from using the following terms without definition: inappropriate, unacceptable, and undesirable.
- The Patron Code of Conduct should use plain, clear, and easy-to-understand language.
- The Patron Code of Conduct should be available in multiple languages commonly spoken in the community.

What should the Patron Code of Conduct address?

While most participants support the development of a Patron Code of Conduct, many thought that the library should emphasize expected behaviours and refrain from asking patrons to leave the library either temporarily or because of ban, unless the patron is being aggressive or doing something illegal.

Many participants also recommended that the library develop a clear and transparent escalation policy for penalizing patrons. With the exception of a few behaviours or activities, library staff should begin by speaking with patrons or give them a verbal warning and only escalate to asking the patron to temporarily leave the library or consider a ban if the patron does not comply with the request.

The following behaviours received direct commentary and feedback from the public. See the appendix for survey results.

1.   **Rude and aggressive behaviour**

Most participants thought that both rudeness and aggressiveness should be addressed in the Patron Code of Conduct and that the severity of the consequence should match the severity of the behaviour.
- Most participants thought library staff should give patrons who are rude a verbal warning, and ask them to stop.
- Most participants suggested that staff either ask patrons who are being verbally or physically abusive to temporarily leave the library or to consider banning the patron for a period of time.

Some participants thought that the library should use a more positive framework and focus on encouraging respectful behaviour.

A few participants suggested that the library clearly define the terms 'rudeness' and 'aggressiveness' to avoid any consequences being subjectively applied to patrons.

In addition to promoting a respectful environment, many participants thought that, as a public space, the library's Patron Code of Conduct should include an anti-discrimination policy or statement.
- A few participants suggested that patrons first be given a verbal warning and that library staff explain why the comment or behaviour is discriminatory. In the case that the patron does not stop, they should be asked to temporarily leave the library.

- A few participants recommended that the library develop a statement of inclusion that should be posted throughout the library.

2. **Speaking loudly**

Several participants indicated that they appreciate using the library as a quiet space and that loud conversations can be distracting. However, many participants also recognized that many patrons use the library for group work, and that some conversation may occur.

To satisfy the needs of all library patrons, participants recommended that the library, when space permits, consider creating separate zones for particular library usage.

In instances when patrons are speaking loudly, most participants thought that library staff should give them a verbal warning and ask them to lower their voices.

3. **Eating and Drinking in the Library**

Most participants thought that eating and drinking should be permitted in the library.

In instances where participants thought that eating and drinking should be addressed by the Patron Code of Conduct, most felt that patrons should be given a verbal warning. Participants did not think that this behaviour was disruptive enough to warrant asking the patron to temporarily leave the library.

A few participants recommended that the library create a designated eating area in each branch to allow patrons to eat without disrupting others.

4. **Sleeping in the Library**

Many participants thought that either the library's patron code of conduct should not include a policy on sleeping or that any policy on sleeping should apply minimal or no consequences.
- Most participants felt that sleeping was not a behaviour for which a patron should be asked to leave the library for.

A few participants distinguished between patrons who accidently nod off, or who take a quick "study nap," and patrons who intentionally use the library as a place to rest or sleep. In instances where library staff thought that a patron was intentionally using the library to sleep, participants recommended connecting those patrons with local health care and social service providers who could better meet their needs.

A few participants raised concerns that a policy that prohibited sleeping stigmatized individuals experiencing homeless and people living in poverty

A few participants indicated that no form of sleeping should be accepted in the library.

5. Scents and Odours

Most participants recommended that the library promote a scent-free environment and that patrons wearing perfume be reminded of the policy.
- Many participants thought that the library should only address scents in their policy due to potential allergic reactions.
- Several participants voiced concern about implementing a scent policy that required enforcement given the subjectivity of identifying strong scents. Instead, promoting a scent-free environment was preferred.

Many participants thought that the library's Patron Code of Conduct should not address odours, particularly body odours. Several participants thought that any policy addressing body odour discriminated against individuals experiencing homelessness or living in poverty.

6. Bags

Most participants thought that there should be no limit on the number of bags that patrons bring into the library.

If a bag limit is included in the Patron Code of Conduct, participants thought that:
- Patrons should not be asked to leave the library for bringing more bags than permitted.
- The library should offer a storage solution for patrons who have more bags than permitted. Specific examples included storage lockers or a bag check service at the front desk.

A few participants voiced concern that a policy limiting the number of bags a person brought into the library discriminated against people experiencing homelessness or people living in poverty.

7. Other suggestions

Many participants indicated that the library should also prohibit:
- Illegal activities (ie: consuming alcohol, drugs, harassment, violence, etc.)
- Destruction or damaging of library property

- Viewing of adult content in the library

Many participants thought that the library should continue to enforce the Policy on Children in the libraries

Implementing the Patron Code of Conduct

A Patron Code of Conduct is a tool used by library staff to encourage certain behaviours and resolve any potential issues that might arise in the library. As such, participants shared their thoughts on how the library should implement and enforce the new Patron Code of Conduct.

1. **Increase the Visibility of the Patron Code of Conduct and its Contents**

Most participants did not know what policies were included in the library's Patron Code of Conduct and many were unaware that the library currently used a Patron Code of Conduct.

To increase public awareness about the Patron Code of Conduct and its contents, several participants recommended that the library post:
- The Patron Code of Conduct in the lobby of each branch.
- Signage reminding people of rules or suggesting good behaviour.

2. Enforce any Patron Code of Conduct consistently and fairly

Several participants thought that library staff should enforce the Patron Code of Conduct consistently and fairly.
- Participants voiced concern about library staff selectively applying policies to individuals who are experiencing homelessness and people living in poverty. To avoid discrimination, participants suggested that the library only address issues of conduct and not focus on the perceived socio-economic status individuals.

3. Adopt a Patron-centred Approach with a Focus on Connecting Patrons to Community Resources

A few participants recommended that library staff adopt a patron-centred approach that takes into account the context and circumstances of each patron and staff would use their discretion when enforcing the Patron Code of Conduct, notably with vulnerable patrons.

Participants also suggested that library staff connect vulnerable patrons with appropriate supports or community services.

Making the Library Safer and More Welcoming

Participants generally agreed that as a public institution, the library should be welcoming to everyone. For this reason, many participants believe that the library's Patron Code of Conduct should clearly state this in its opening paragraph.

Many people recognized that the library is currently doing good work in the community, and feel that the library is safe and welcoming. At the same time to make the library safer, participants suggested that the library do the following:

1. **Develop Relationships with Service Providers**

Many participants recognized that the KFPL, like many libraries across North America are facing new challenges in serving their communities, namely the opioid crisis, a lack of supportive and affordable housing, rising rates of poverty in urban centres, and increasing rates of mental illness. At the same time, many participants understood that library staff are not formally trained as social or mental health workers.

To address these new challenges and support library staff in their work, many respondents suggested that the library build relationships with service providers in Kingston and Frontenac County. These relationships will allow the library to connect vulnerable patrons with appropriate services and support library staff by providing them with tools and resources.

In particular, participants recommended that:

- Library branches share pamphlets from service providers in the community.
- Library branches host information sessions led by services providers to increase public awareness about available community resources.
- Work with a social worker in library branches to support both vulnerable patrons and library staff.

In particular, the following organizations were mentioned as potential community organization and service providers for the library to consider developing relationships with:

- Street Health Clinic
- Addictions and Mental Health Services
- Public Health Kingston
- Kingston Community Health Centre
- Kingston (Aware) Committee for Action on Women's Addictions
- Peer Support Services of Eastern Ontario
- Community Risk Watch Table

- Local shelters

2. Promote and develop programming

Many participants recognized that the library already offers a variety of programming that serves their community. Participants encouraged library staff to promote their programs to the public and to grow awareness of what is on offer at the library. In particular, the following programs were highlighted as being useful:
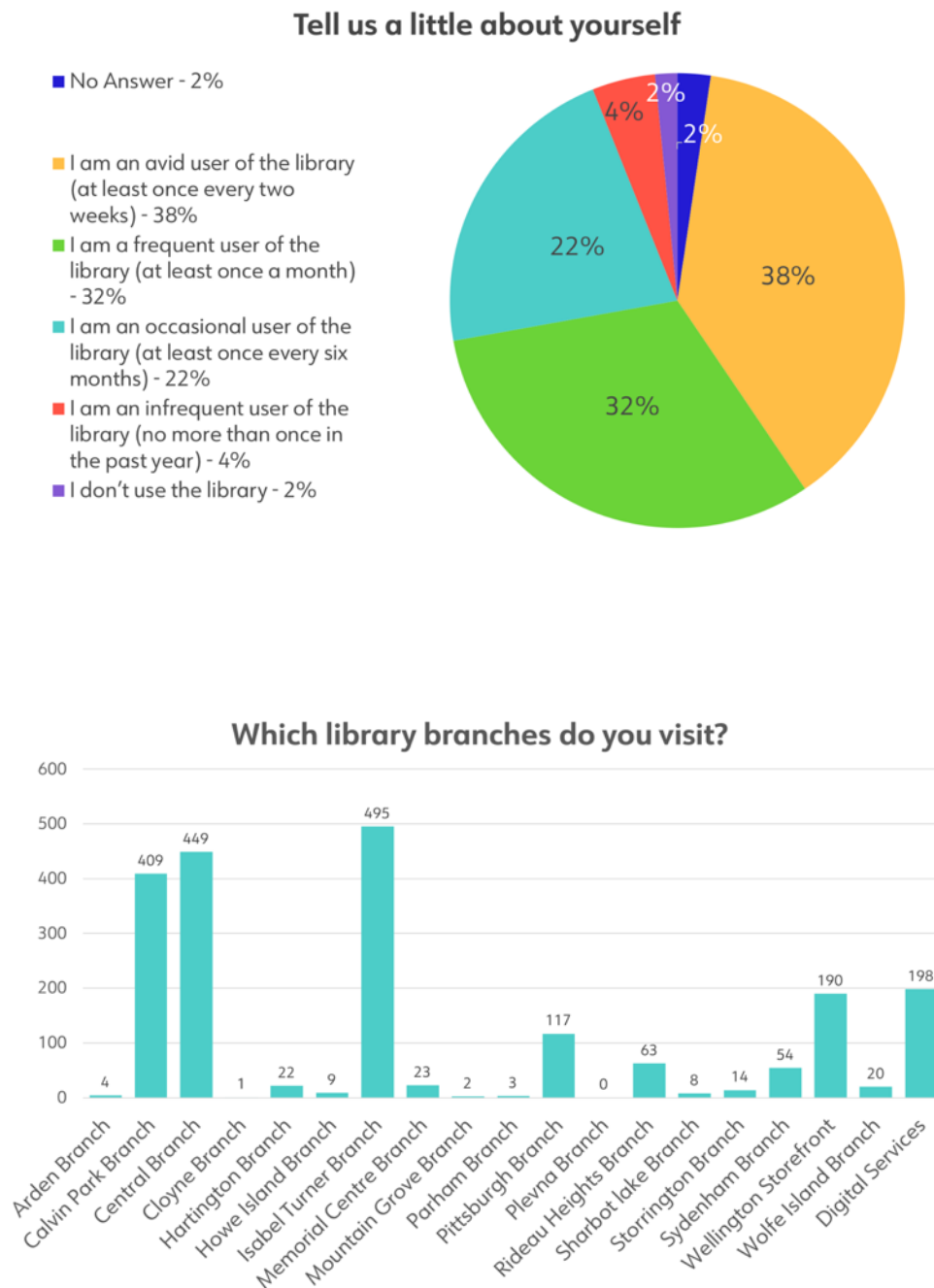
- Lynda.com subscriptions
- Multilingual publications
- Indigenous publications
- Children's programs
- After-school programs
- Computer and internet access

In addition to their current programming, participants suggested that the library should consider programs in the following areas:
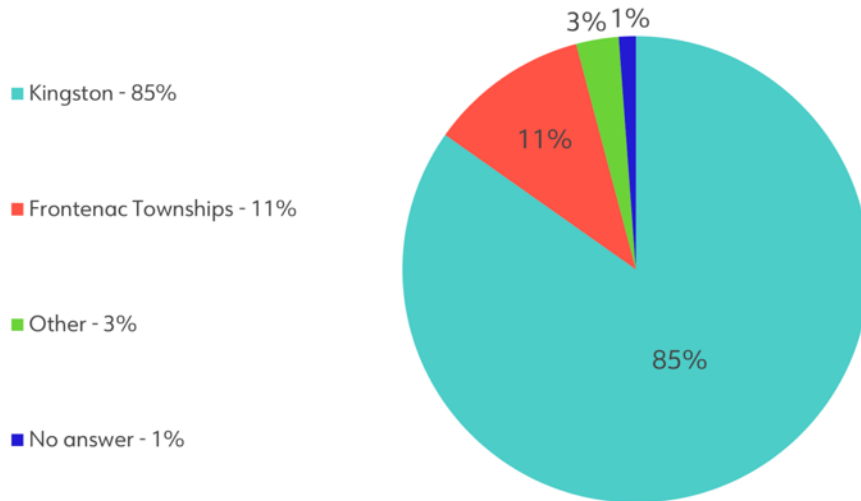
- Peer support programs
- Arts programs
- Newcomer programs
- All-ages reading buddy program
- Seniors and tots reading program
- Public health classes (ie. arthritis and other common ailments)
- Tool lending program
- Seed bank
- Caregiver support programs
- Employment programs
- Aboriginal culture programing
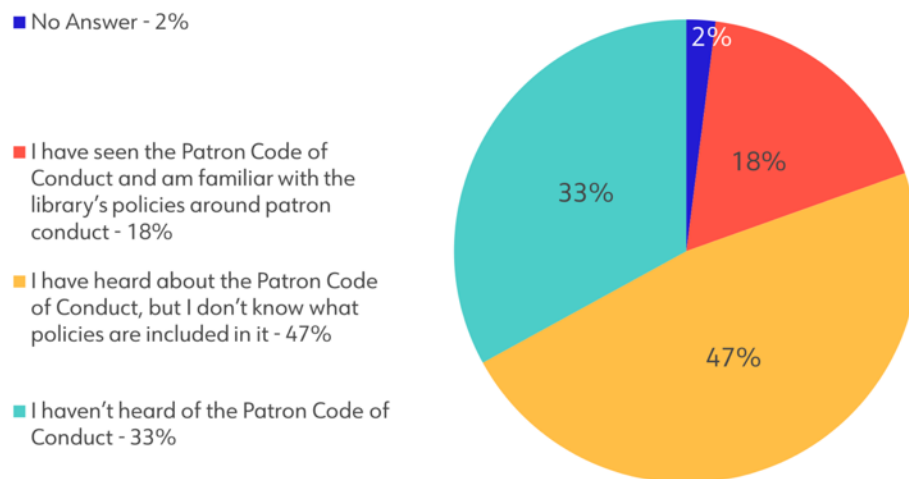- Non-Christian holidays and celebrations

Appendix

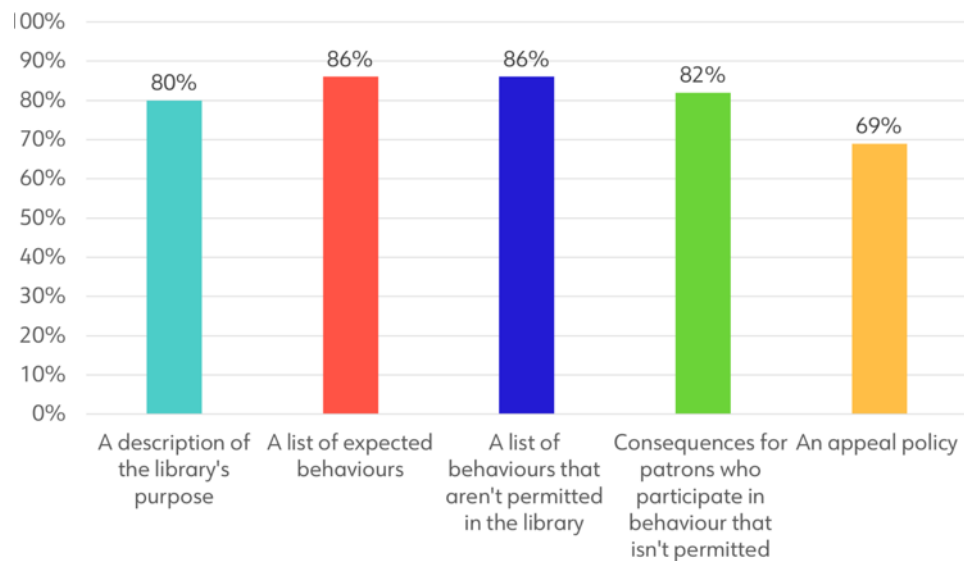In total, 891 individuals responded to the Library's survey. Below is a summary of the results

Tell us a little about yourself

- No Answer - 2%
- I am an avid user of the library (at least once every two weeks) - 38%
- I am a frequent user of the library (at least once a month) - 32%
- I am an occasional user of the library (at least once every six months) - 22%
- I am an infrequent user of the library (no more than once in the past year) - 4%
- I don't use the library - 2%

Which library branches do you visit?

Branch	Count
Arden Branch	4
Calvin Park Branch	409
Central Branch	449
Cloyne Branch	1
Hartington Branch	22
Howe Island Branch	9
Isabel Turner Branch	495
Memorial Centre Branch	23
Mountain Grove Branch	2
Parham Branch	3
Pittsburgh Branch	117
Plevna Branch	0
Rideau Heights Branch	63
Sharbot lake Branch	8
Storrington Branch	14
Sydenham Branch	54
Wellington Storefront	190
Wolfe Island Branch	20
Digital Services	198

I live in

- Kingston - 85%
- Frontenac Townships - 11%
- Other - 3%
- No answer - 1%

3% 1%
11%
85%

How familiar are you with the Patron Code of Conduct?

- No Answer - 2%
- I have seen the Patron Code of Conduct and am familiar with the library's policies around patron conduct - 18%
- I have heard about the Patron Code of Conduct, but I don't know what policies are included in it - 47%
- I haven't heard of the Patron Code of Conduct - 33%

2%
18%
33%
47%

A Patron Code of Conduct can be structured in many different ways and include different types of information. A Patron Code of Conduct should include:
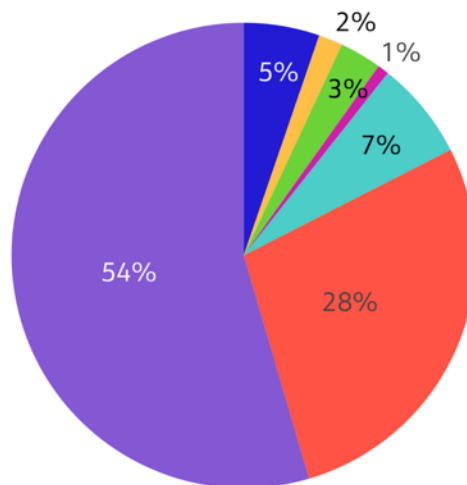
We want to know how you think the library should address rudeness towards patrons and staff using the Patron Code of Conduct?

- No Answer - 6%
- I don't know/I'm not sure - 2%
- This shouldn't be in the Patron Code of Conduct 6%
- There should be no consequences - 6%
- The patron should be given a verbal warning - 37%
- The patron should be asked to temporarily leave - 31%
- The patron should be banned from the library for a period of time - 12%
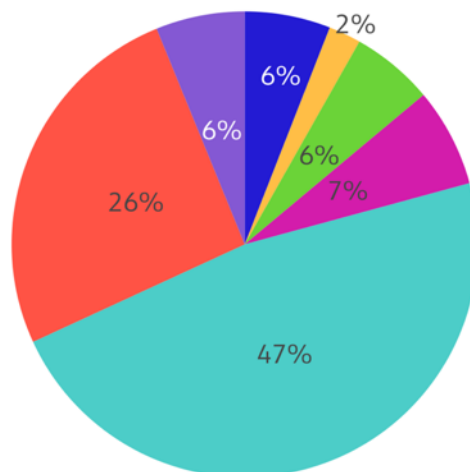
6%
2%
6%
6%
12%
31%
37%

We want to know how you think the library should address aggressiveness towards patrons and staff using the Patron Code of Conduct?

- No Answer - 5%
- I don't know/I'm not sure - 2%
- This shouldn't be in the Patron Code of Conduct - 3%
- There should be no consequences - 1%
- The patron should be given a verbal warning - 7%
- The patron should be asked to temporarily leave - 28%
- The patron should be banned from the library for a period of time - 54%
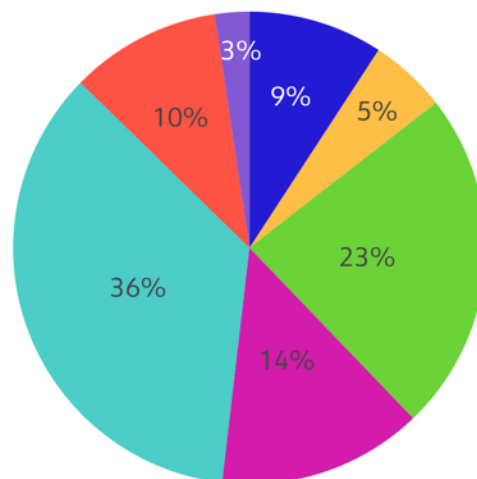
5%
2%
3%
1%
7%
28%
54%

16

We want to know how you think the library should address speaking loudly (yelling or prolonged loud conversations) using the Patron Code of Conduct?

- No Answer - 6%
- I don't know/I'm not sure - 2%
- This shouldn't be in the Patron Code of Conduct - 6%
- There should be no consequences - 7%
- The patron should be given a verbal warning - 47%
- The patron should be asked to temporarily leave - 26%
- The patron should be banned from the library for a period of time - 6%

2%
6%
6%
7%
47%
26%
6%

We want to know how you think the library should address eating hot food in the library using the Patron Code of Conduct?

- No Answer - 9%
- I don't know/I'm not sure - 5%
- This shouldn't be in the Patron Code of Conduct - 23%
- There should be no consequences - 14%
- The patron should be given a verbal warning - 36%
- The patron should be asked to temporarily leave - 10%
- The patron should be banned from the library for a period of time - 3%

3%
9%
5%
23%
14%
36%
10%

We want to know how you think the library should address drinking a non-alcoholic beverage in the library using the Patron code of Conduct?
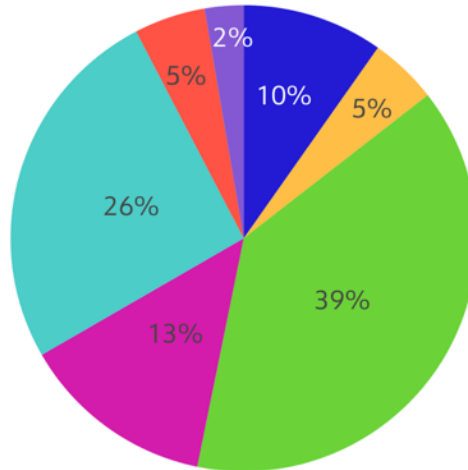
■ No Answer - 10%

■ I don't know/I'm not sure - 5%

■ This shouldn't be in the Patron Code of Conduct - 39%

■ There should be no consequences - 13%

■ The patron should be given a verbal warning - 26%

■ The patron should be asked to temporarily leave - 5%

■ The patron should be banned from the library for a period of time - 2%

2%
10%
5%
5%
26%
39%
13%

We want to know how you think the library should address sleeping in the library using the Patron Code of Conduct?
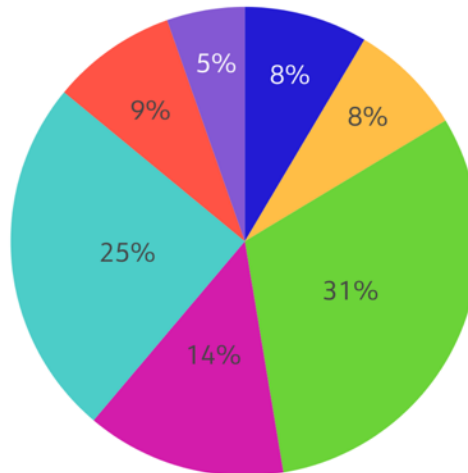
■ No Answer - 8%

■ I don't know/I'm not sure - 8%

■ This shouldn't be in the Patron Code of Conduct - 31%

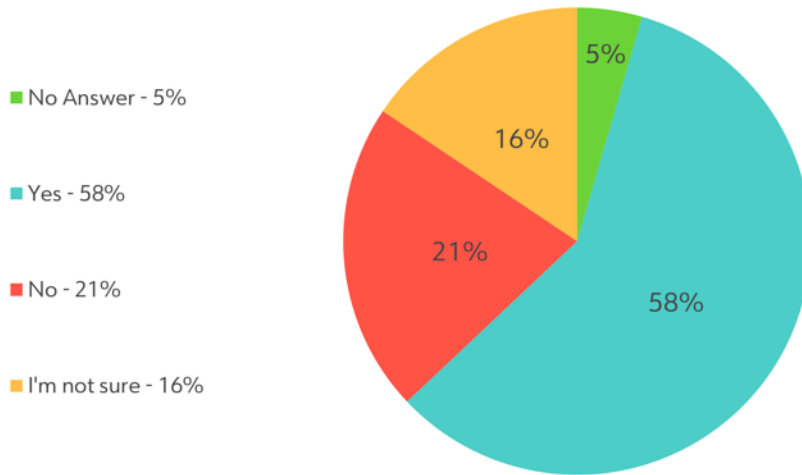■ There should be no consequences - 14%

■ The patron should be given a verbal warning - 25%

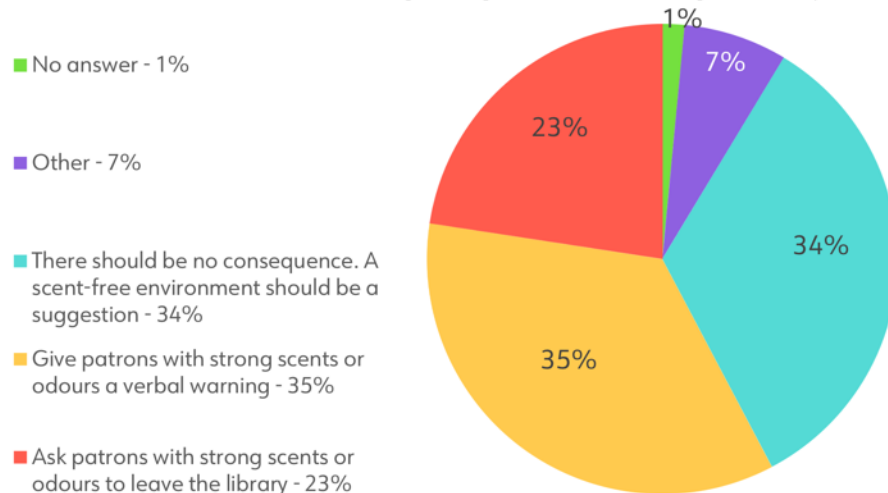■ The patron should be asked to temporarily leave - 9%

■ The patron should be banned from the library for a period of time - 5%

5%
8%
9%
8%
25%
31%
14%

18

Should the library implement a policy for strong scents and odours?

- No Answer - 5%
- Yes - 58%
- No - 21%
- I'm not sure - 16%

How should the library address strong scents and odours? (only participants who responded with a yes or an unsure were prompted with this question):

- No answer - 1%
- Other - 7%
- There should be no consequence. A scent-free environment should be a suggestion - 34%
- Give patrons with strong scents or odours a verbal warning - 35%
- Ask patrons with strong scents or odours to leave the library - 23%

Should the library limit the number of bags a patron can bring into the library?

■ No Answer - 4%

■ Yes - 23%

■ No - 46%

■ I'm not sure - 27%

4%

23%

27%

46%

How should the library address the number of bags a patron can bring to the library? (only participants who responded with a yes or an unsure were prompted with this question):

■ No Answer - 5%

■ Other - 18%

■ There should be no consequence. Limiting the number of bags should be a suggestion - 25%

■ Give patrons who bring in more bags than is permitted a verbal warning - 31%

■ Ask patrons who bring in more bags than is permitted to leave the library - 21%

5%

18%

21%

25%

31%

20