

# LIBRARY SERVICE REVIEW

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT

March 2026



# 1. Executive summary

## Report

|                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Project</b>       | Library Service Review                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Date</b>          | 12 February to 15 March 2026                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Method</b>        | Online: survey.<br>Face-to-face: hard copies in library with assistance of librarians.                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Survey design</b> | User / non-user survey.<br><br>Users were asked about satisfaction of library services and ideas for future.<br><br>Non-users were asked about reasons for non-use and what would increase their usage.  |
| <b>Responses</b>     | Clarence Valley Council: 507 responses<br><br><i>*this report only analyses the Clarence Valley Council survey responses.</i>                                                                            |
| <b>Engagement</b>    | Clarence Regional Library channels.<br>Clarence Conversations channels.<br>Clarence Valley Council channels.                                                                                             |
| <b>Next steps</b>    | Analyse the responses – March 26<br>Internal workshops and insights - April 26<br>Prepare library service review recommendations report – July 26<br>Present library services review to ARIC – August 26 |

## Insights

### Overall

- There is a strong correlation between those people that use the library and importance of library services with 95% of respondents believing that the library is either very important (58%) or important (37%).
- The higher the usage, the higher the overall satisfaction overall, with a notable difference with engagement and staff friendliness.
- The large majority of participants use the library for borrowing books, magazines or newspapers (80%). Other popular uses are accessing e-books (29%), reading (28%) and attending activities or events (26%).
- The majority of participants use the library about once a week (27%), 2-3 times per month (22%) or once a month (21%).
- Overall libraries are considered very important services for the community with 95% of people rating the library as important or very importance.
- Across all libraries, community connection has been identified as the biggest opportunity.

### Sub-service

- There is highest satisfaction with engagement, followed by spaces and technology and digital access, and lower satisfaction with local historic resources, mobile services, programs and events and collections.
- There are opportunities for improvements to sub-services, but given the already high level of satisfaction, may have limited impact to overall satisfaction.
  - Collections:
    - reducing wait times on books (physical and eLibrary)
    - increasing the size collections
    - improving display of collection on shelves.
  - Spaces:
    - consistency in opening hours across library including opening in Maclean on Wednesday and removing the lunch time close
    - conflicts between quiet study and active programming areas
    - improvements to seating for those with mobility issues.
  - Engagement:
    - improvements to process for becoming a member
    - targeted social media engagement
    - digital literacy support.
  - Programs and events:
    - increasing programming overall
    - programming after hours
    - exploring themes related to life-long learning, intergenerational connection, multi-cultural engagement and trend-based activities
    - removal of age restrictions that exclude one child or limited spaces.
  - Technology:
    - technical glitches and performance of mobile applications
    - restrictions on data and speed of internets
    - slow repair times
    - complex printing processes.

- Mobile services:
  - barrier to access including scheduling, location and eligibility
  - awareness of services
  - underserved areas
  - complex printing processes.
- Local historic resources:
  - equipment failures and maintenance delays
  - limit restrictions on research access, especially at home.
  - fill collection gaps with missing narratives, incomplete subscriptions and insufficient local digital archives
  - slow internet, and limited data allowances, for research.

## Usage

- For low frequency users, barriers include lack of time, preference for owning their own books or using online eResources.
- It is unlikely that changes to library services, including opening hours, will drive an increase in new members from low frequency category.
- Interestingly, non-users consider opening hours to be adequate (91%).
- The main reason for non-usage is that people prefer to access books online.
- Although low, things that may incentivise them to visit the library more are eBooks (29%) or more information about what's on (8%).

## Opportunities

When asked what are the biggest challenges for libraries, participants largely noted:

- competition with technology and new forms of entertainment (26%)
- funding (22%)
- staying relevant and engaging with a wide range of the community (20%)
- maintaining sufficient spaces, especially with adverse weather (14%)
- maintaining up to date collections (12%)
- engaging with youth (6%)
- maintaining varied opening times (5%).

## Challenges

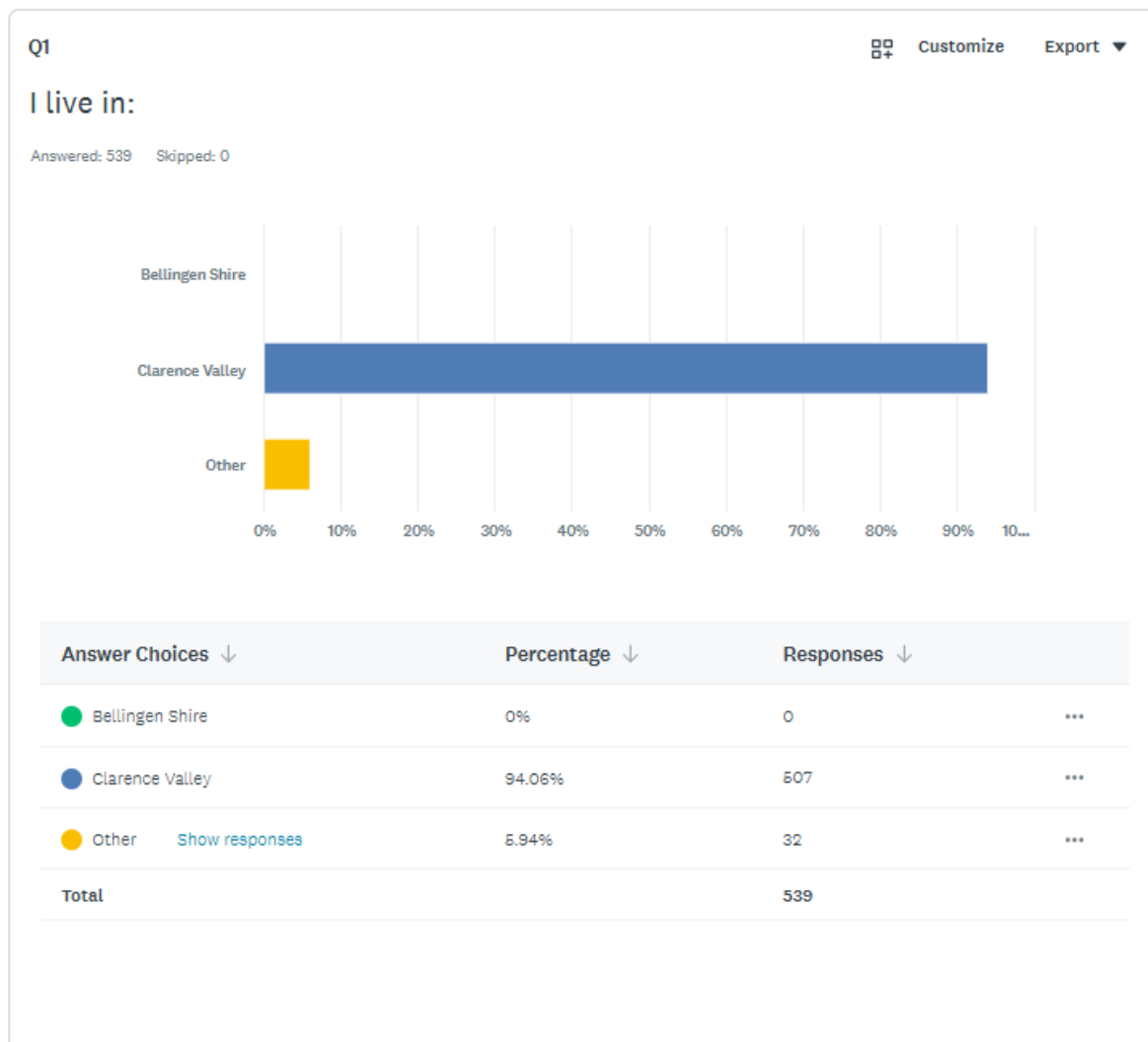
When asked what are the biggest opportunities for libraries, participants largely notes opportunities for:

- space for community connection (30%)
- maintaining current, and sufficient, collections (14%)
- engaging with youth (12%)
- spaces (10%)
- events and programs (9%)
- longer opening hours (8%)
- engagement and awareness (7%)
- tech resources and assistance (5.5%)
- lifelong learning (5%).

## 2. Survey results

### Location

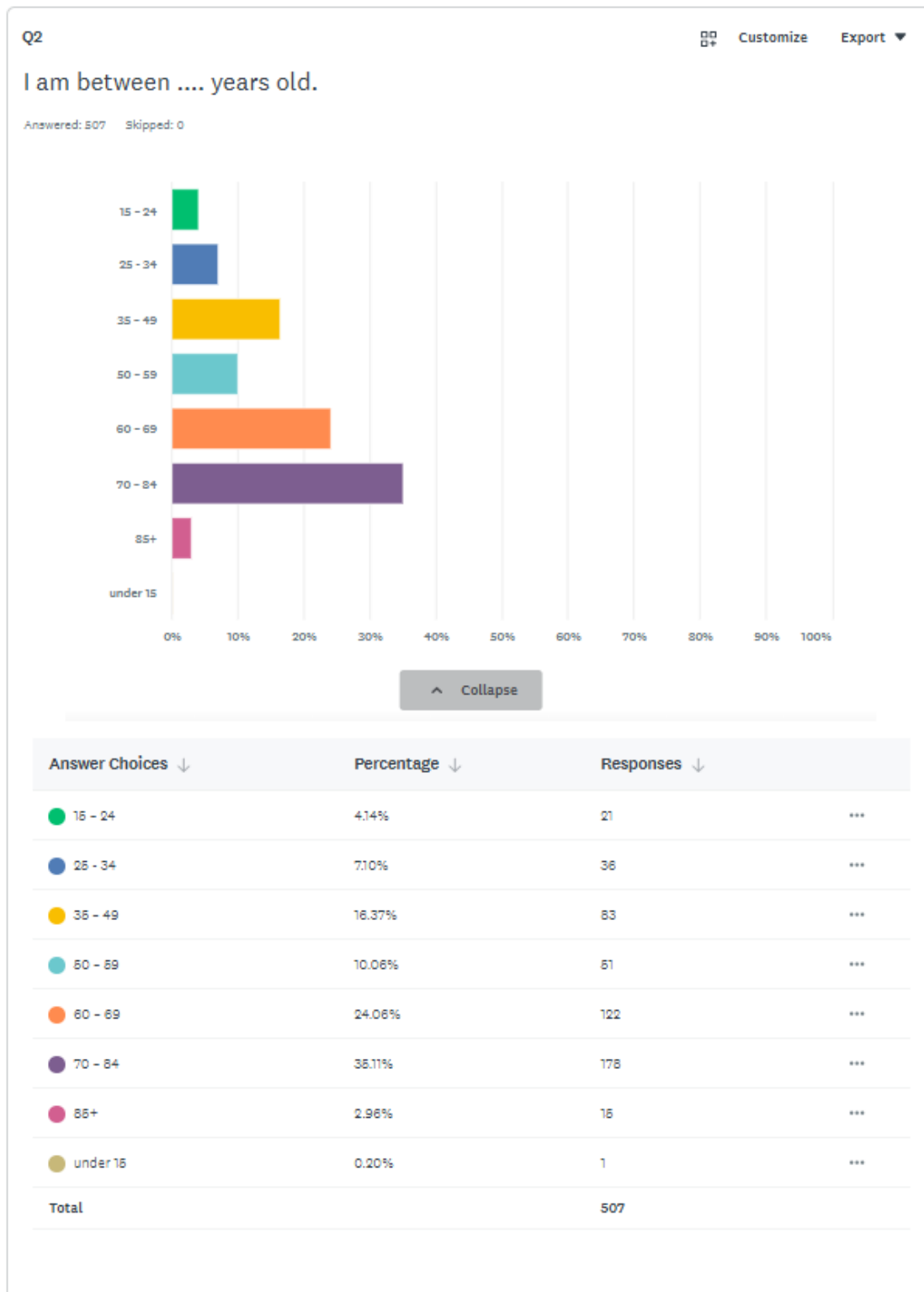
A total of 507 completed the survey from Clarence Valley, as well as 32 'other' people that don't live within the LGA but utilise the library services.



*Note: the survey was jointly delivered with Bellingen Shire Council with data separated for each council.*

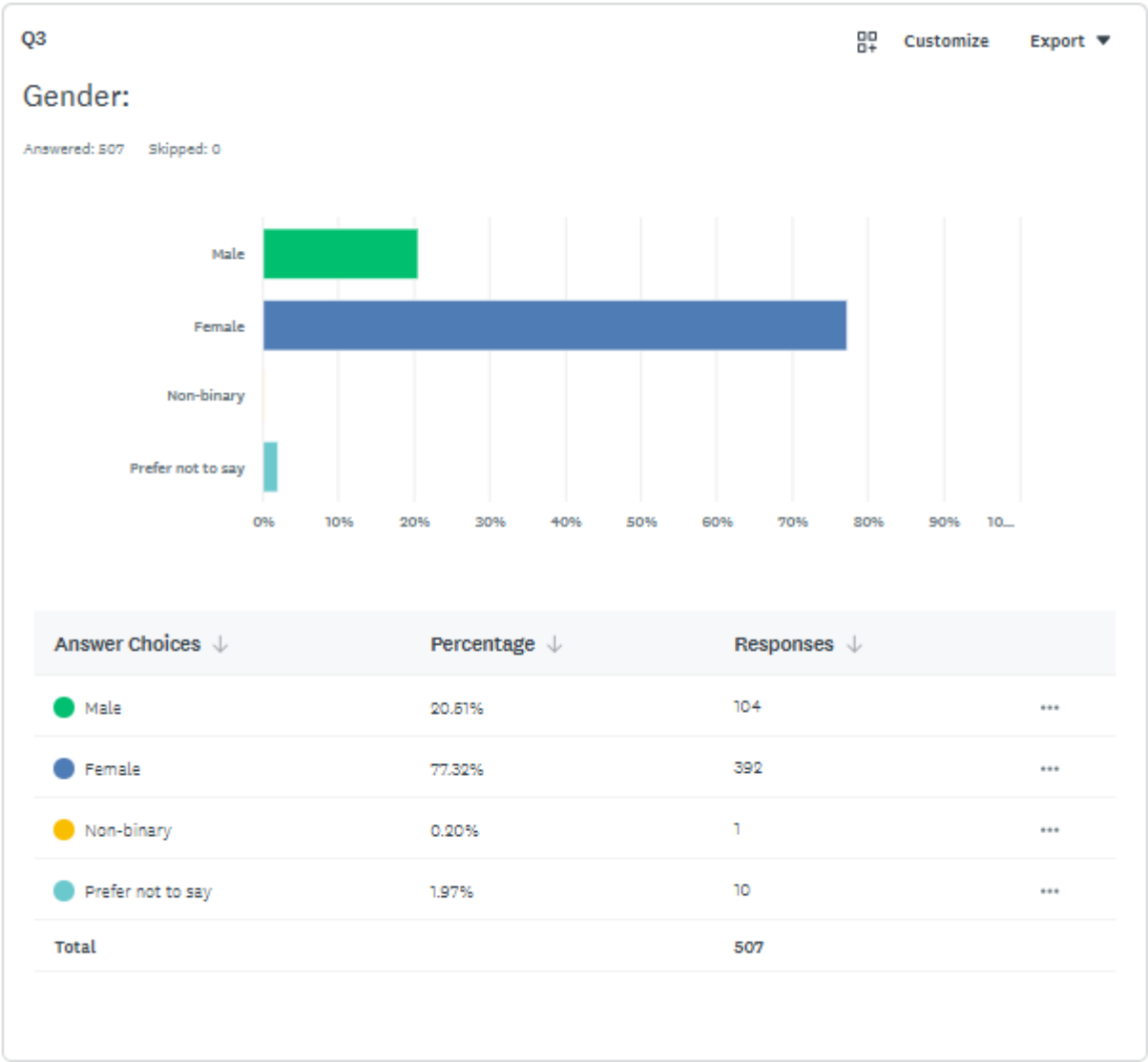
## Age

A broad range of age groups participated. It is reasonably representative based on population, however skews slightly towards the 60-69 and 70-84 age groups.



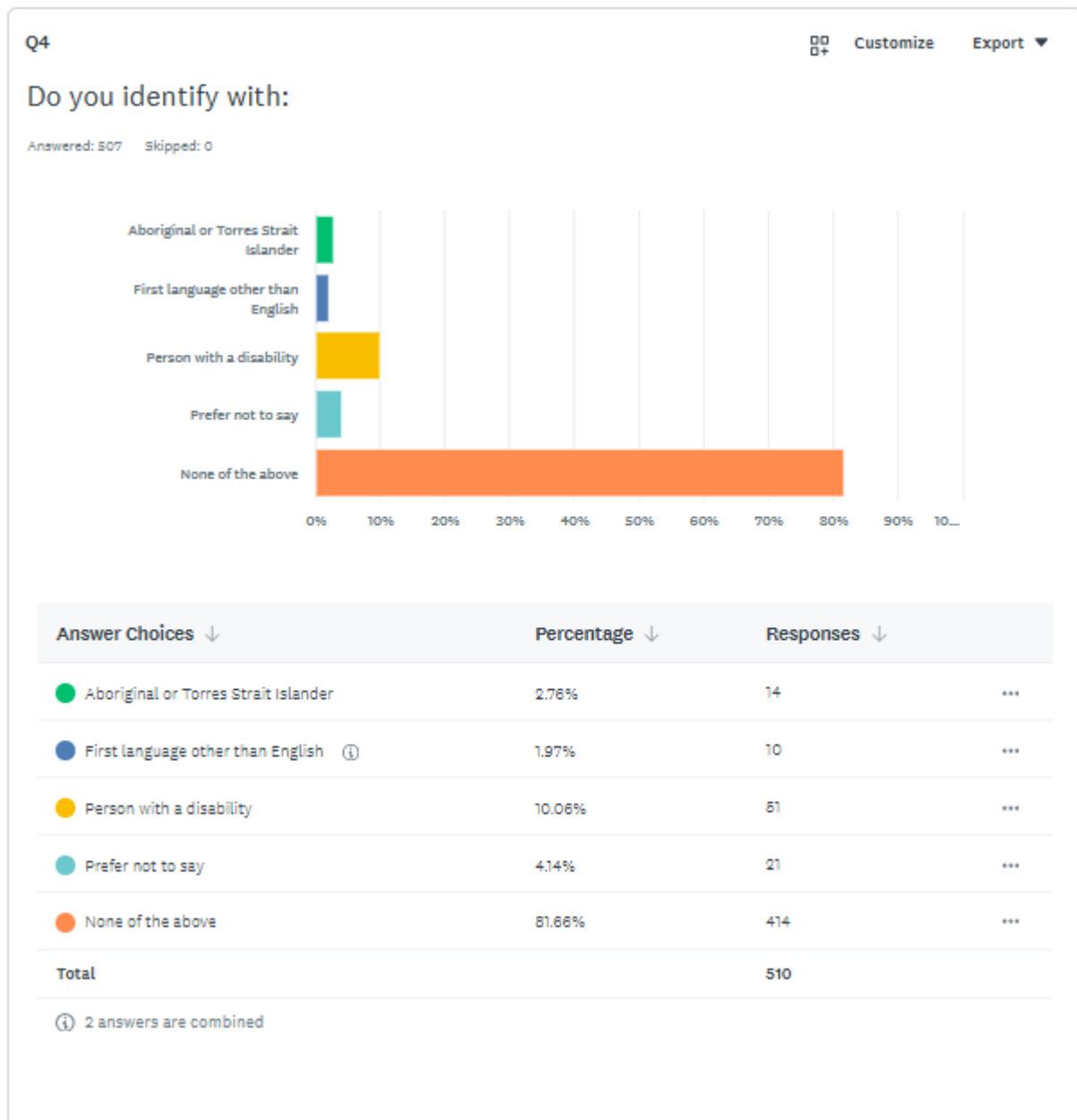
# Gender

A large majority of respondents (77%) identify as female, with only 20% identifying as male.



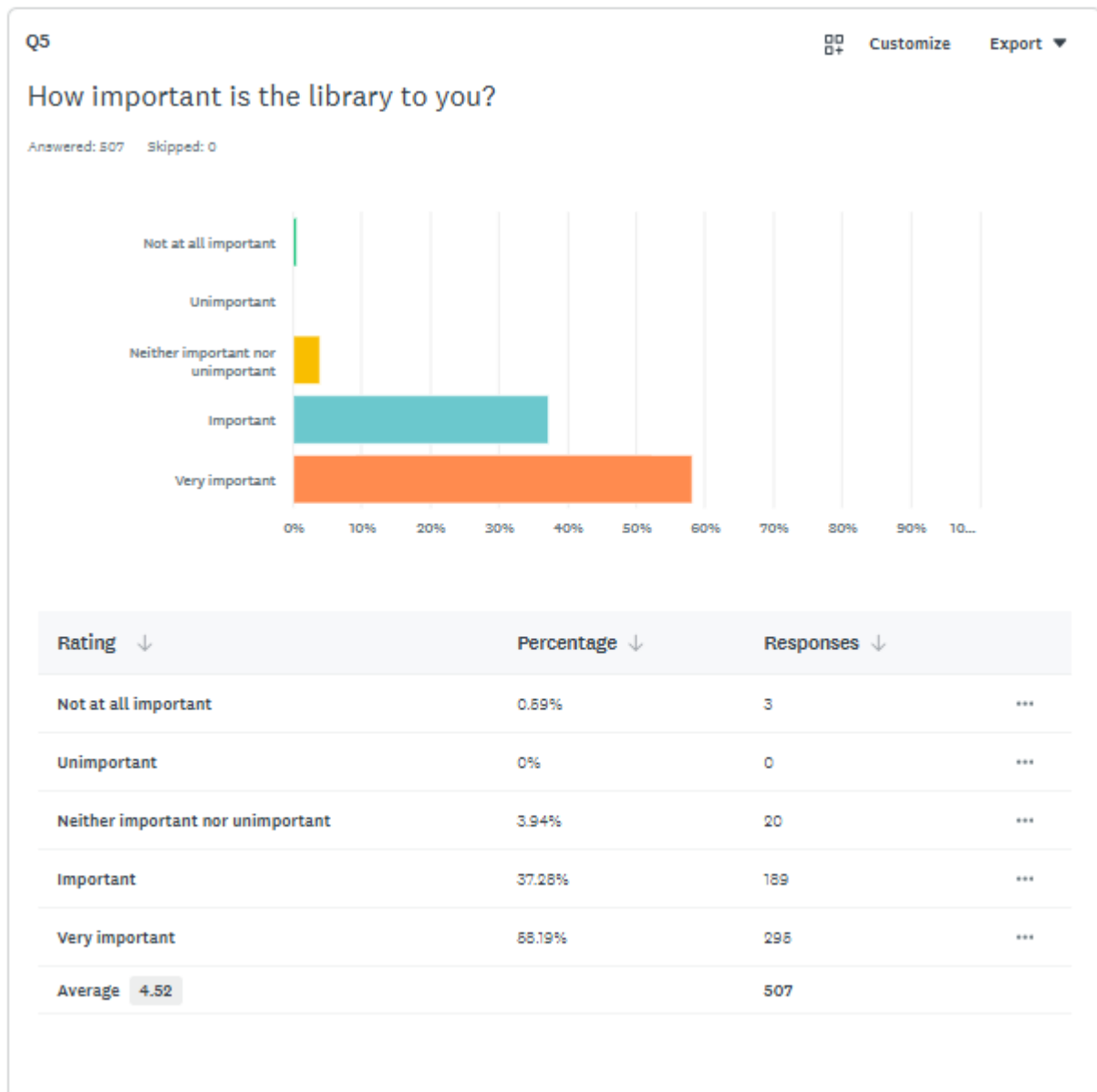
## Groups

Eighty-two percent of survey respondents do not identify with a particularly group. Importantly 10% of people identify as a person with disability and 3% identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.



## Importance

A total of 95% of respondents believe that the library is either very important (58%) or important (37%). There is a strong correlation between importance and use of libraries.

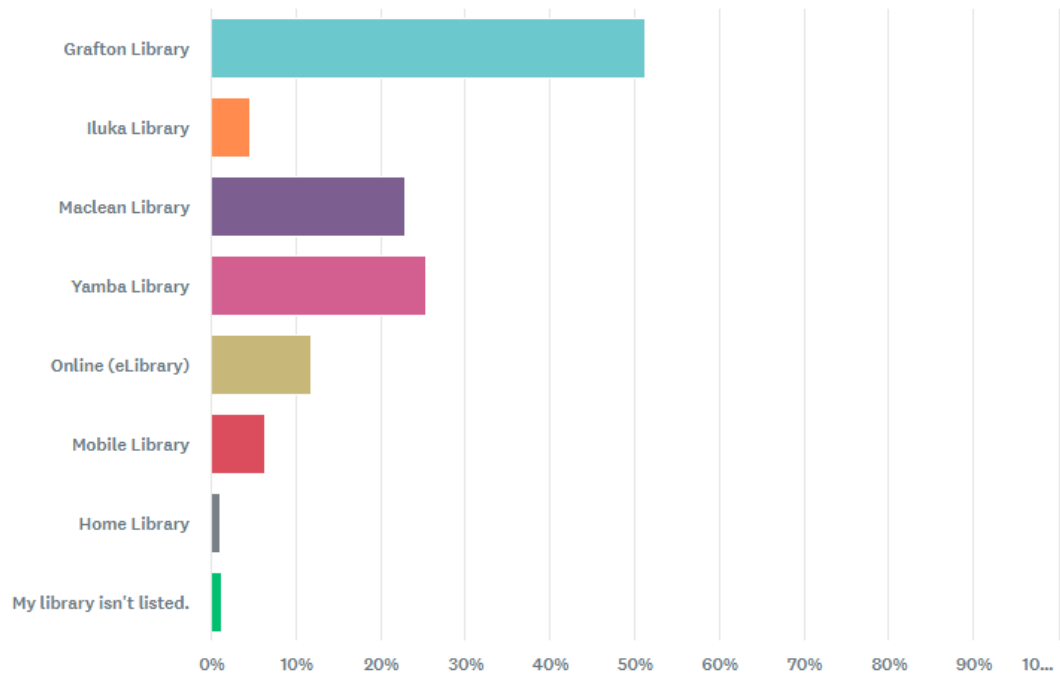


## Library location

The majority of respondents use the Grafton Library (51%) followed by Yamba (25%) and Maclean (22%).

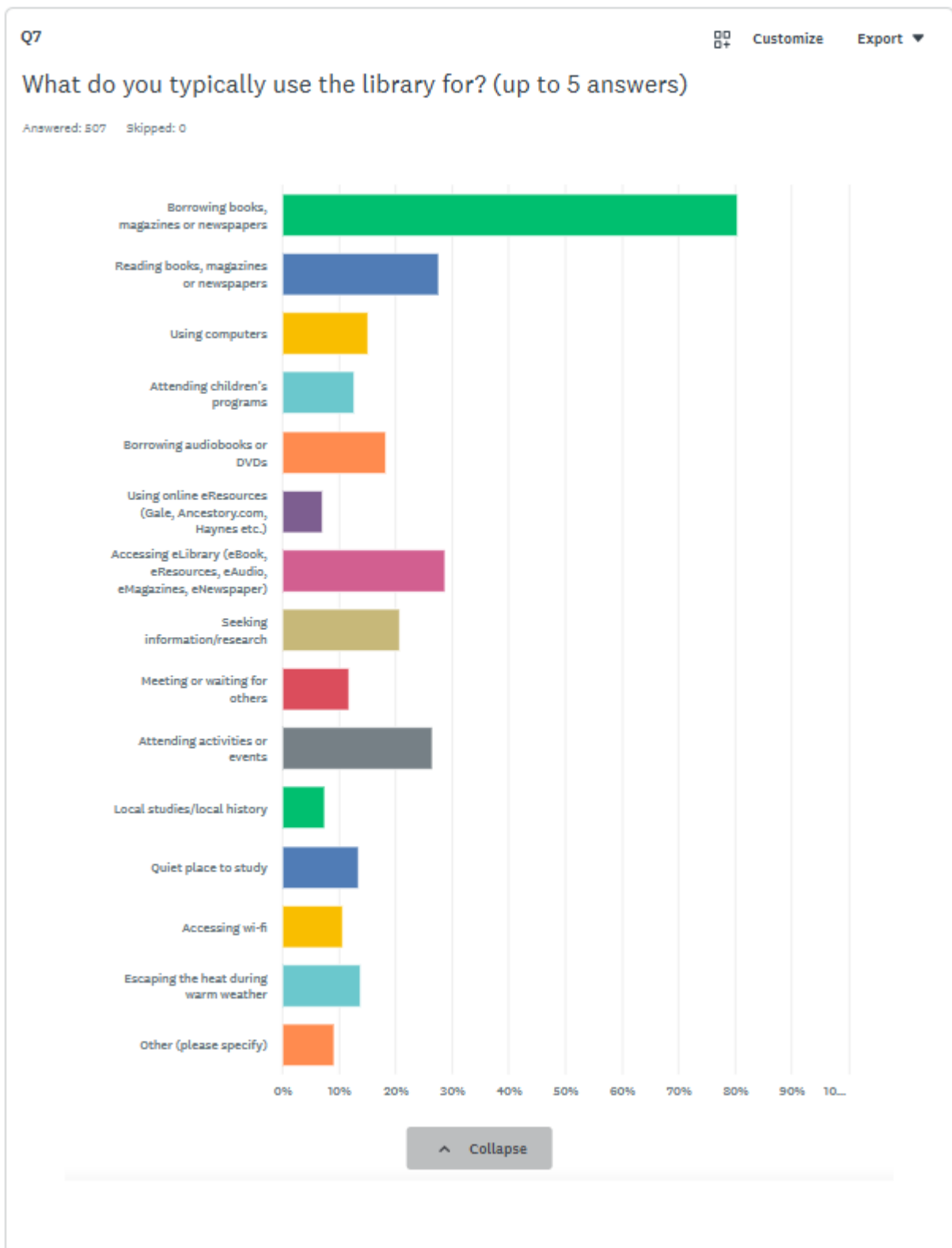
### Which library do you use most?

Answered: 507 Skipped: 0



## Use

The majority of people (80%) use the library for borrowing books, magazines or newspapers. Other popular uses are accessing e-books (29%), reading (28%) and attending activities or events (26%).



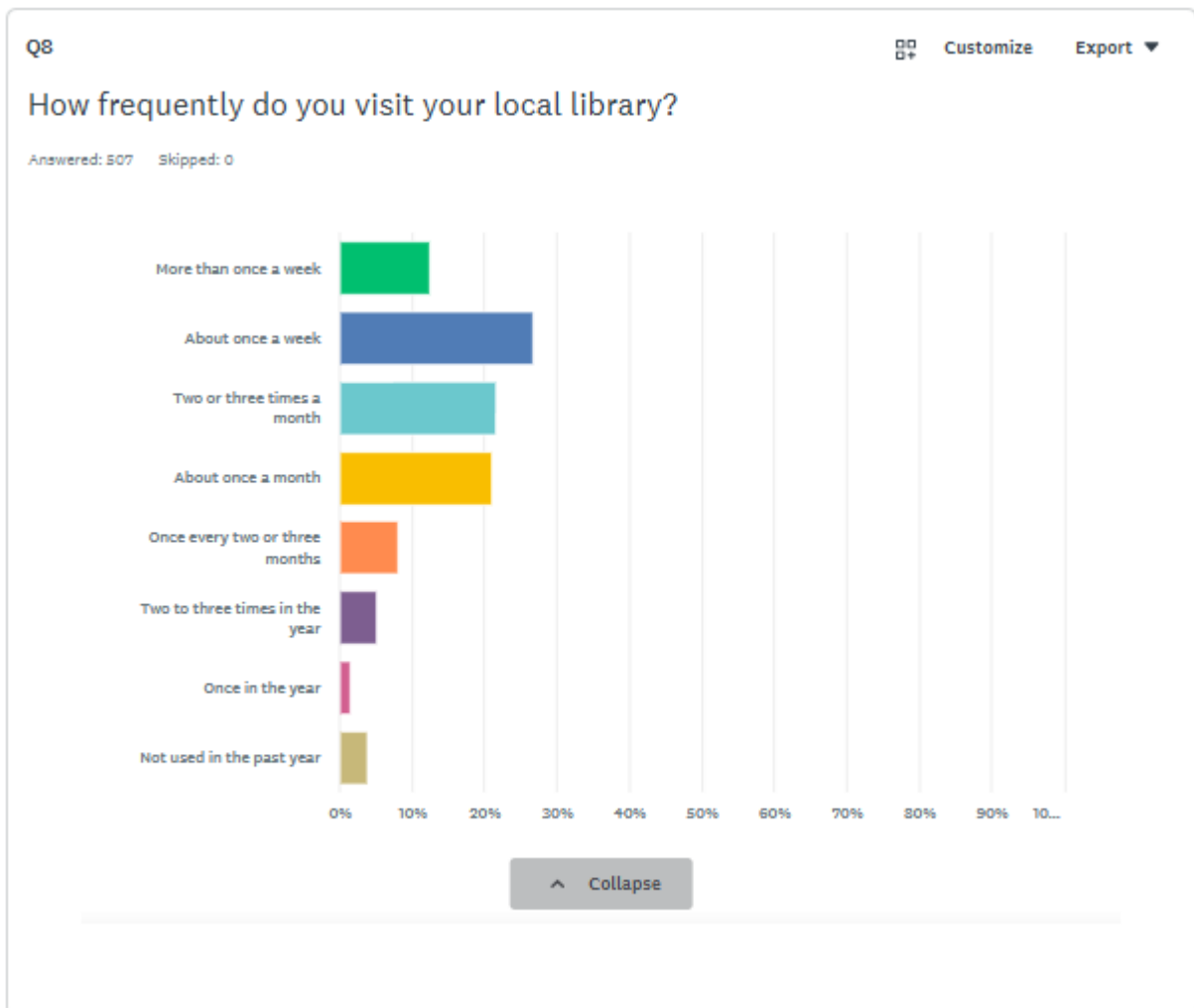
## Frequency of use

The majority of survey participants use the library about once a week (27%), 2-3 times per month (22%) or once a month (21%).

Five percent of responses are considered non-users as they have not used the library in the past year (4%) or used it once in the year (1%).

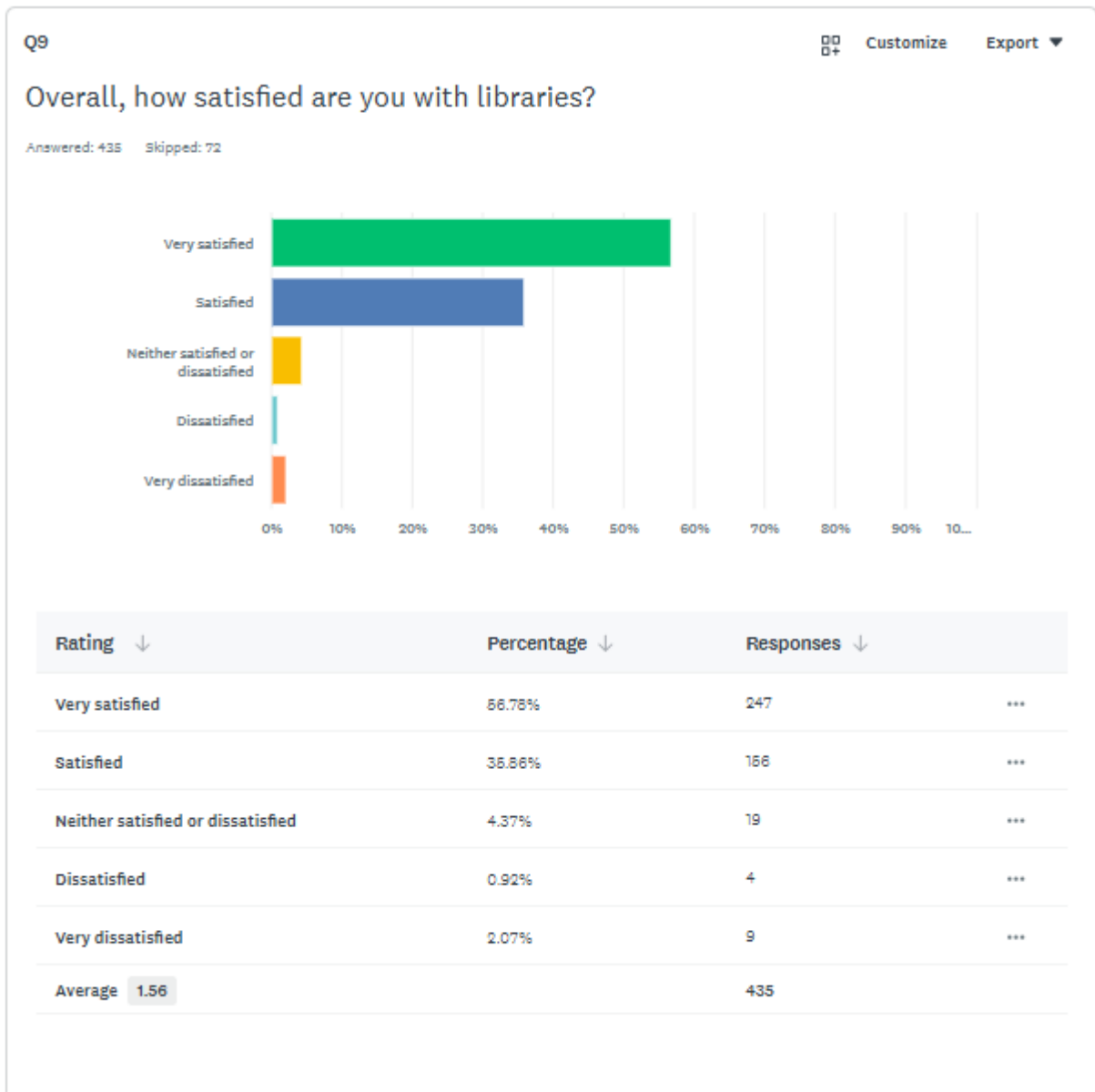
There is a correlation between frequency of use and overall satisfaction, especially with staff friendliness.

Of those who are low frequency users, they tend to be more reliant on eLibrary resources than physical books.



## Satisfaction

A total of 93% of participants were either very satisfied (57%) or satisfied (36%).



## Satisfaction – collection

Overall, there is satisfaction with library collections.

Satisfaction was highest with books, magazines and newspapers, eLibrary. Satisfaction was lowest with audio books and physical items.

The reasons for higher satisfaction scores included:

- Friendly and helpful staff (recommendations).
- Collection of books.
- Being able to reserve books or source from other libraries.

The reasons for lower satisfactions scores included:

- Wait times on books (physical and eLibrary).
- Wanting larger collections (physical and eLibrary).
- Display on books on shelves.



## Satisfaction – spaces

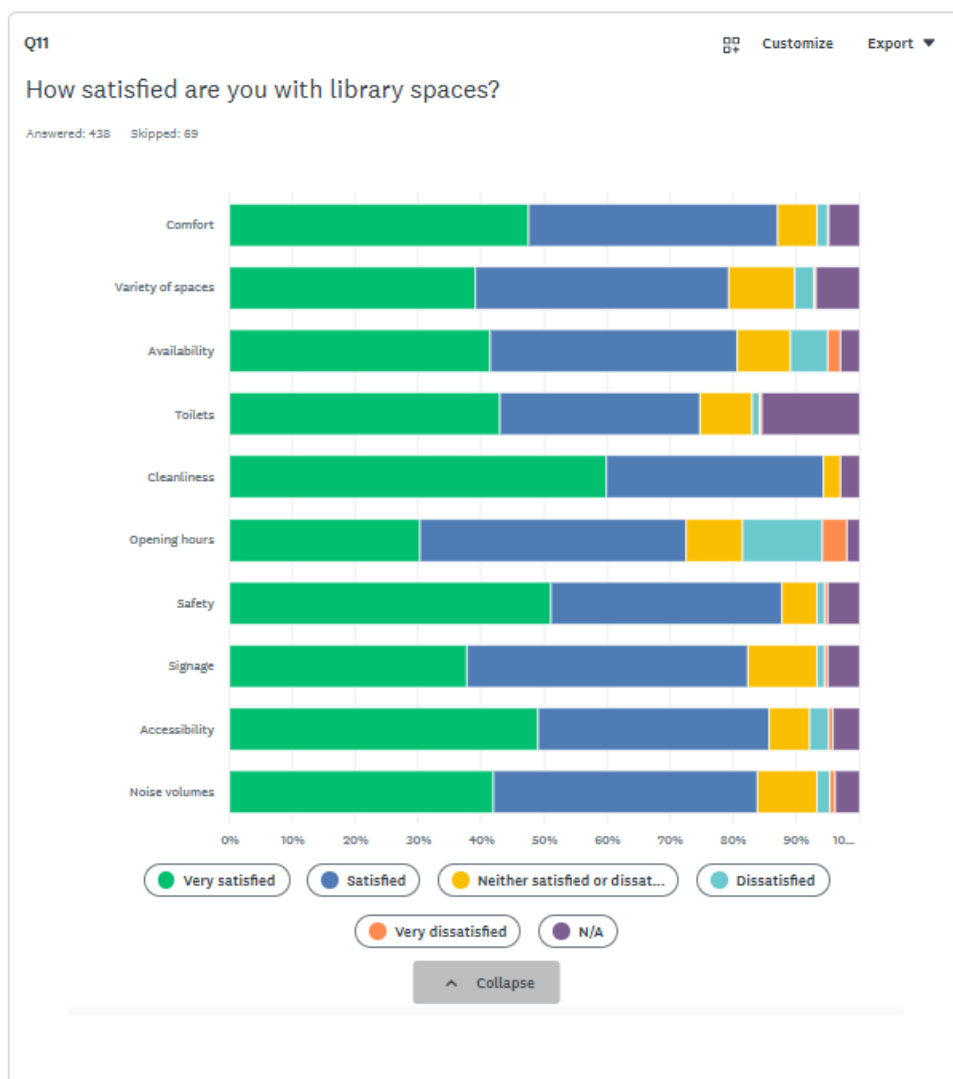
Overall, there is high satisfaction with spaces. Satisfaction was highest with cleanliness, safety, comfort, and accessibility. Satisfaction was lowest with opening hours, availability, variety of spaces and signage.

The reasons for higher satisfaction score included:

- Modern and welcoming facilities.
- Providing a safe and comfortable refuge.

The reasons for lower satisfaction scores included:

- Opening hours and accessibility (incl. lunchtime closures, inconvenient schedules and inconsistency).
- Maclean facility constraints.
- Conflicts between quiet study and active programming areas.
- Comfort with inappropriate seating.



## Satisfaction – engagement

Overall, there is high satisfaction with engagement. Of the sub-services engagement has the highest satisfaction.

Satisfaction was highest with friendliness, help with general information and help with library resources.

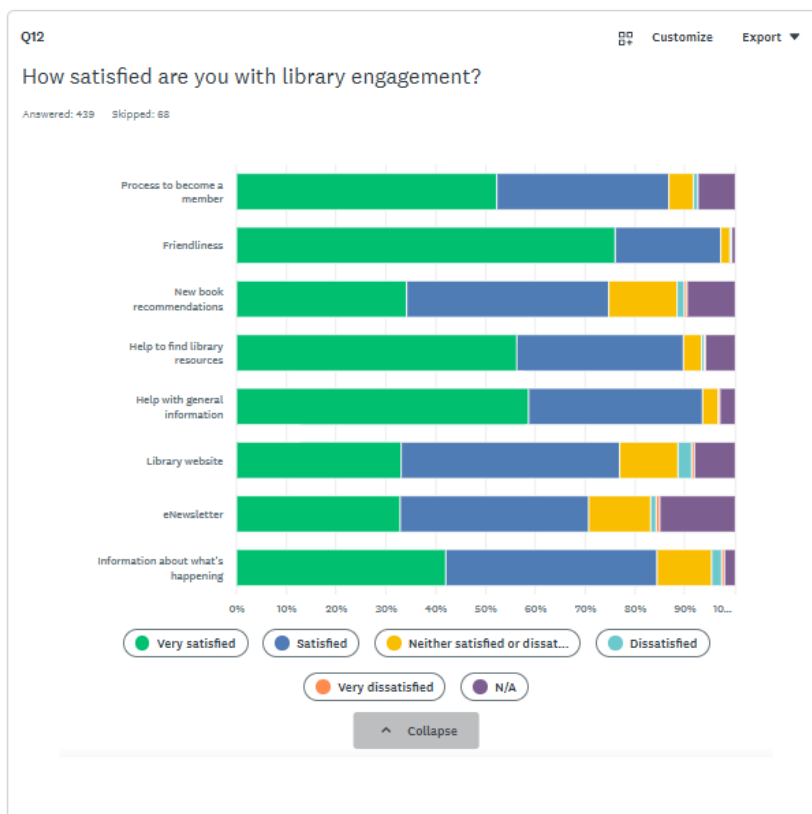
Satisfaction was lowest with library website, new book recommendation and eNewsletter.

The reasons for higher satisfaction score included:

- Exceptional staff friendliness.
- Quality of assistance.
- Information sharing.

The reasons for lower satisfaction scores included:

- Website issues (note the website has since been updated).
- Frustration when staff aren't available, rushed or busy.
- Awareness of what is available, particularly for non-members.



## Satisfaction – programs and events

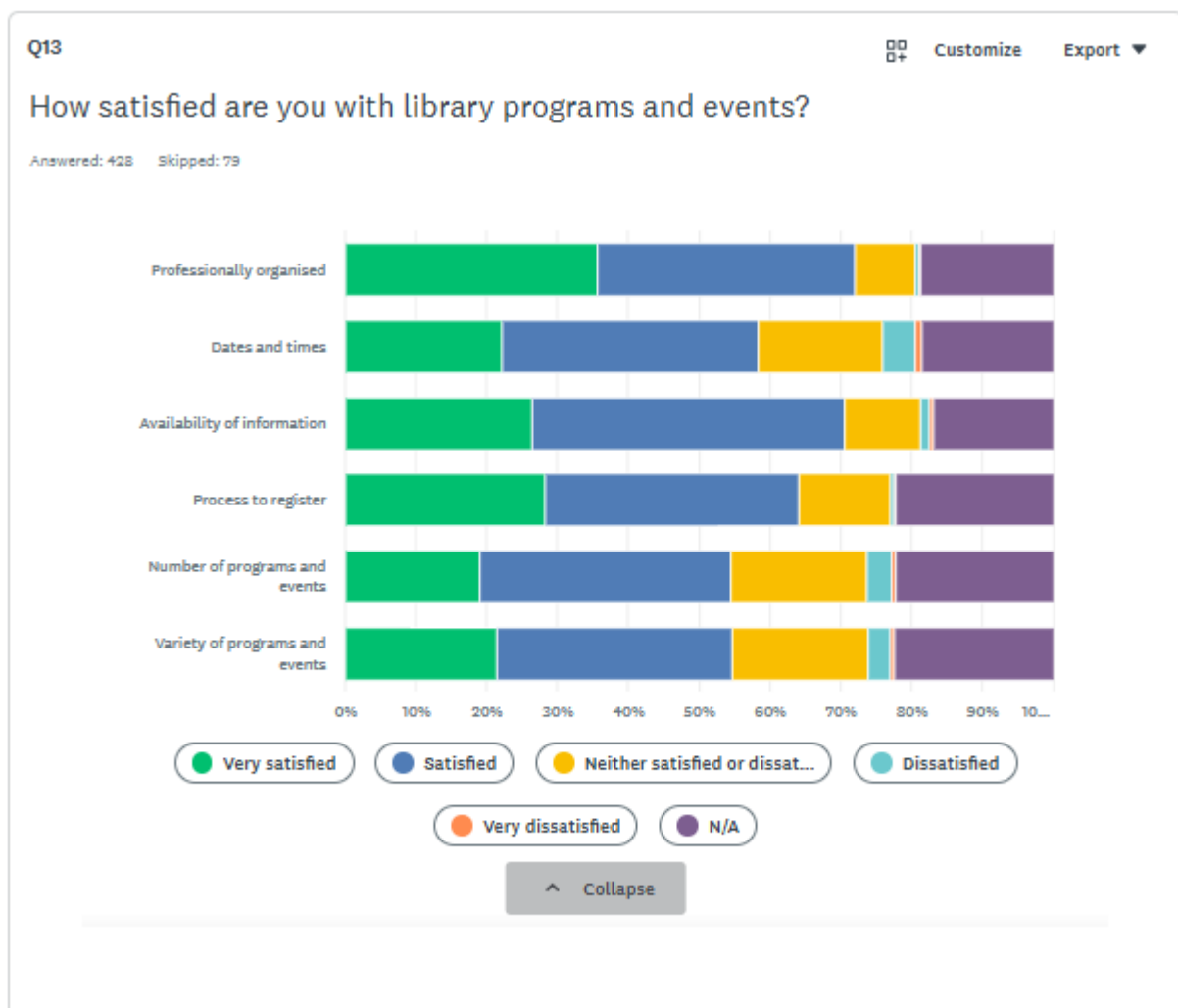
Overall, there is satisfaction with programs and events. Satisfaction was highest with professionally organised, process to register and availability of information. Satisfaction was lowest with number of programs and events dates and times and variety.

The reasons for higher satisfaction score included:

- Professionally organised and variety.
- Success of high-profile events and school-holiday programs.
- Connection with staff members and enthusiasm.

The reasons for lower satisfaction scores included:

- More events including children's activities, author talks, craft workshops, and lifelong learning opportunities.
- Removal of age restrictions that exclude one child and limited spaces.
- Information, advanced notice and booking process; and some events are difficult to hear.
- Scheduling conflicts, particularly for workers and students.



## Satisfaction – technology and digital access

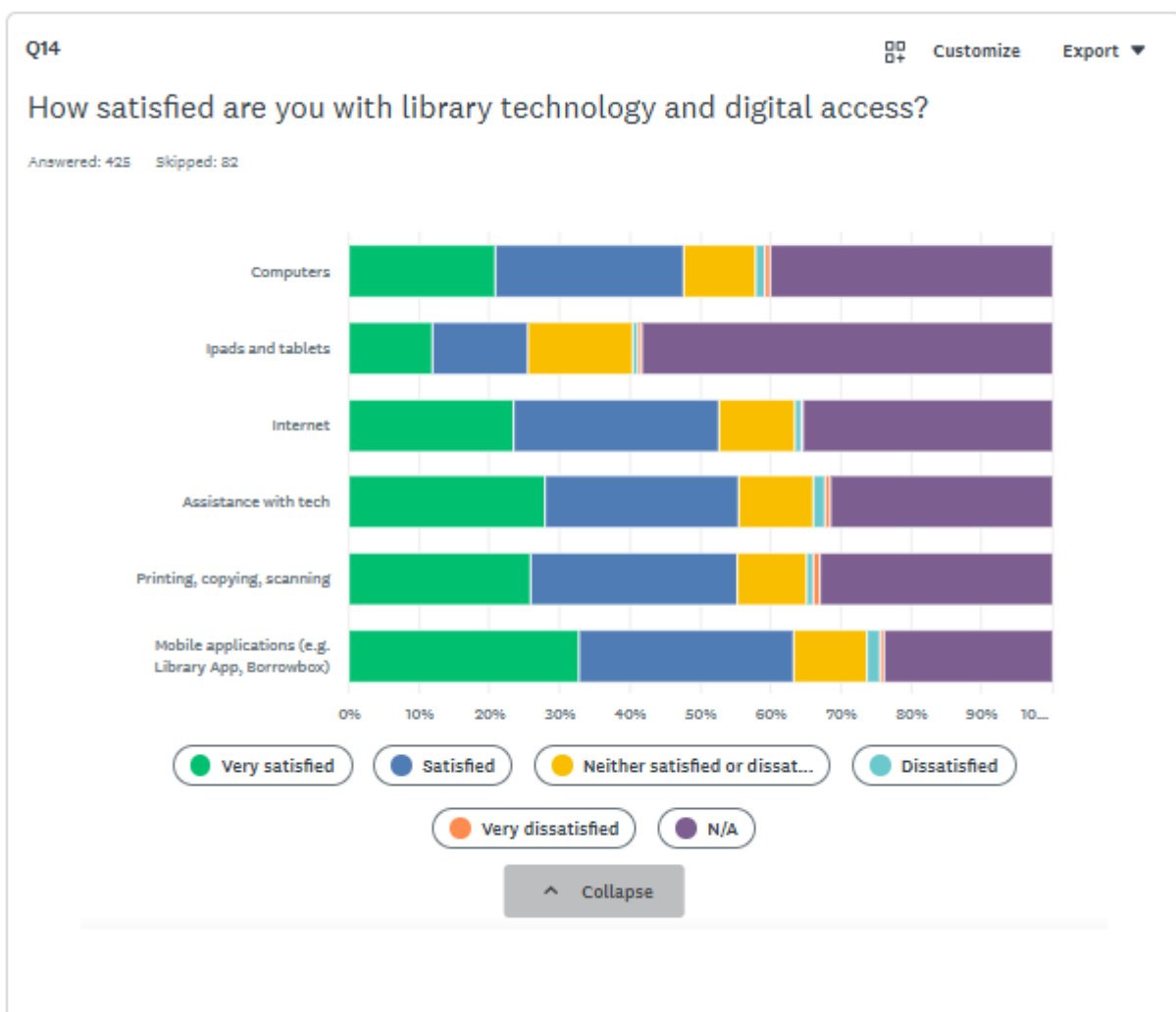
Overall, there is satisfaction with technology and digital access. Satisfaction was highest with mobile applications, assistance and printing. Satisfaction was lowest with ipads and tablets and computers.

The reasons for higher satisfaction score included:

- High performance of mobile applications.
- Support for digital literacy.
- Access to vital hardware.

The reasons for lower satisfaction scores included:

- Technical glitches and performance of mobile applications.
- Restrictions of data, especially for students and researchers; and speed of internet.
- Slow repair times.
- Complex printing processes.



## Satisfaction – mobile services

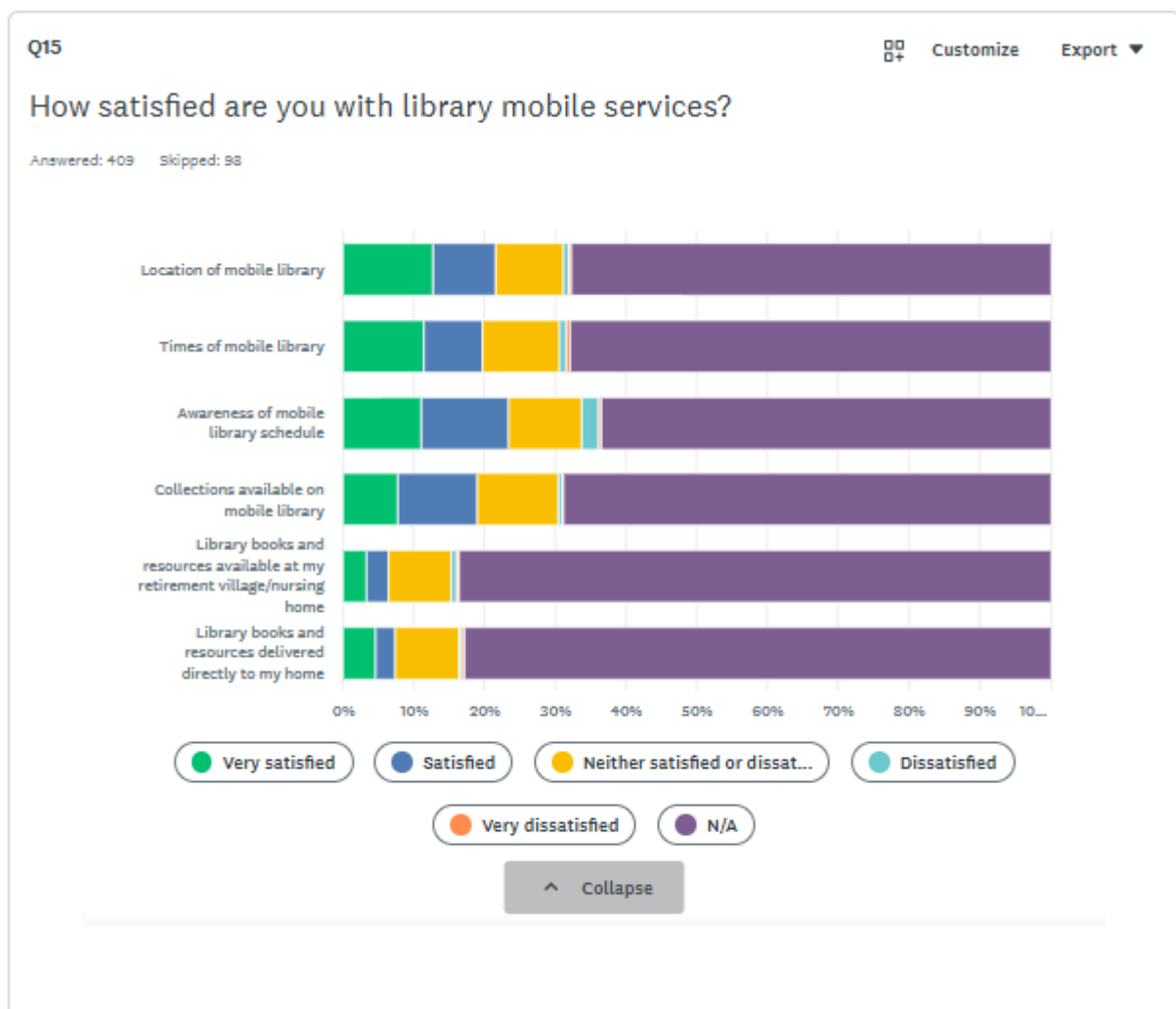
Overall, there is satisfaction with mobile services. Satisfaction was highest with location of mobile library, and times of mobile library. Satisfaction was lowest with collections availability at retirement villages/nursing homes and collections delivered directly to home.

The reasons for higher satisfaction score included:

- Vital access for remote and isolated communities, especially those with transport limitations.
- Exceptional and personalised staff interaction.
- Asset for local remote preschools and homeschooling.

The reasons for lower satisfaction scores included:

- Barriers to access including scheduling, location or eligibility.
- Awareness, especially for home library services.
- Underserved areas, including Ashby, Tyringham, Dundurrabin and Pillar Valley.



## Satisfaction – local historic resources

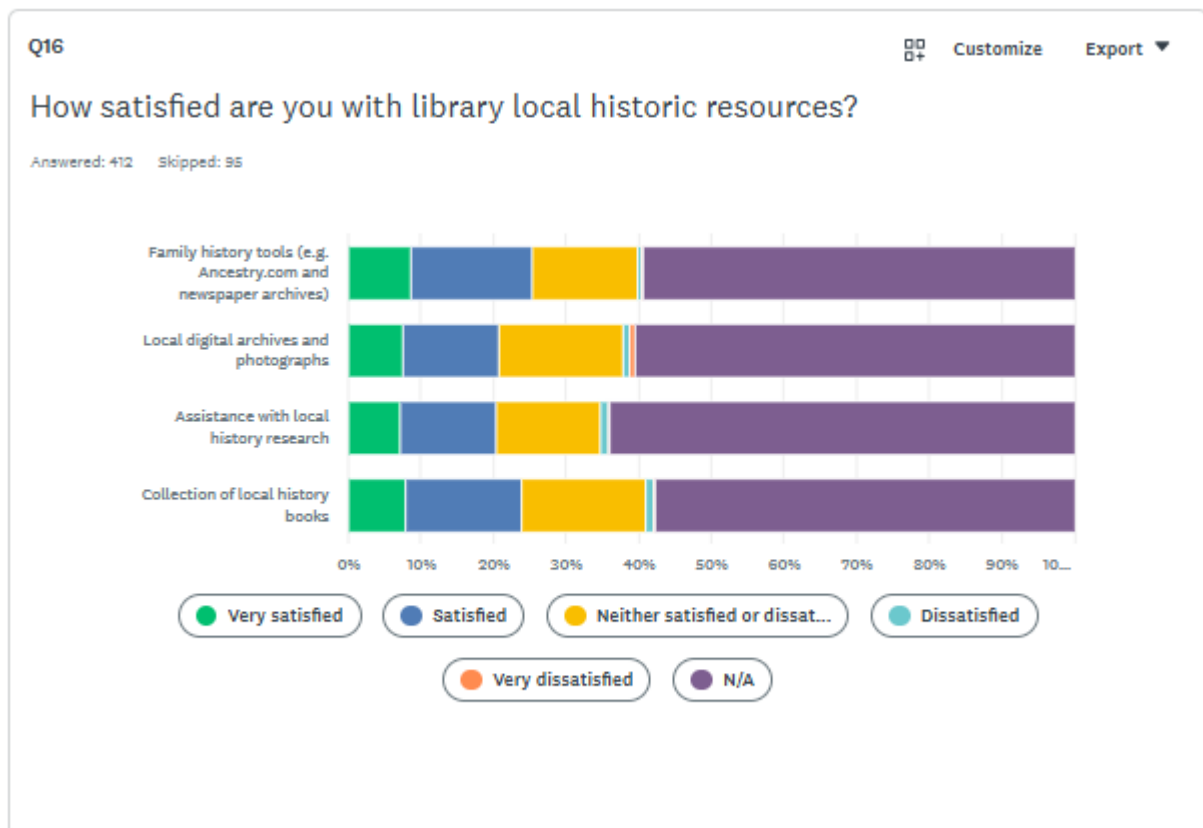
Overall, there is satisfaction with local history resources. Of the sub-services local history resources has the lowest satisfaction. Satisfaction was highest with family history tools. Satisfaction was lowest with local digital archives and photographs.

The reasons for higher satisfaction score included:

- Quality of tools.
- Informational breath.
- Available of assistance.

The reasons for lower satisfaction scores included:

- Equipment failures and maintenance delays.
- Restrictions on research access, especially at home.
- Collection gaps with missing narratives, incomplete subscriptions and insufficient local digital archives.
- Slow internet, and limited data allowances, for research.

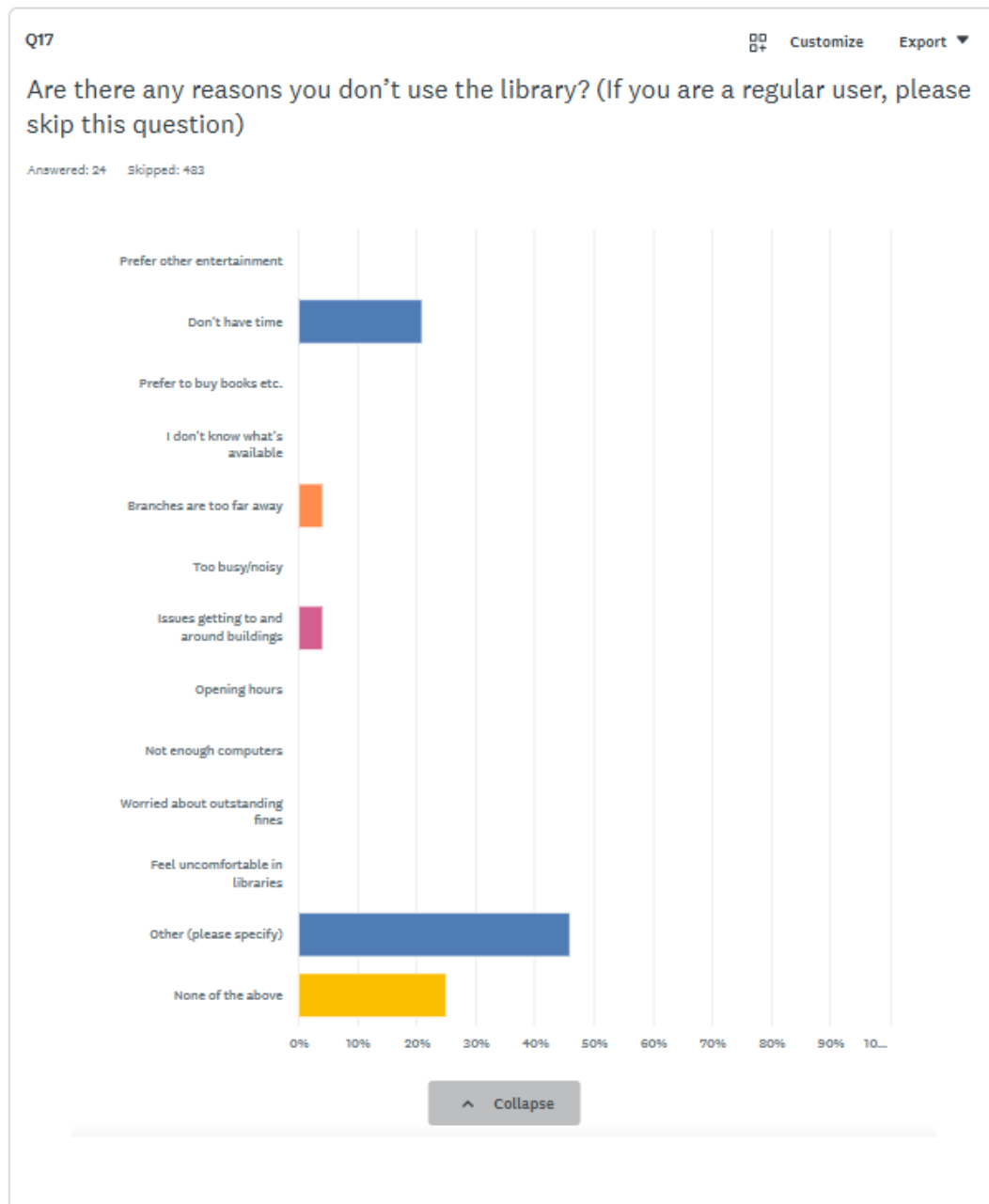


## Reasons for non-use

From those participants that are infrequent or non-users of the library, their non-use includes don't have time, branches are too far away or issues getting to or around buildings.

Interestingly opening hours isn't a reason for non-use for library users for increased opening hours may not increase new members but may increase frequency of usage from existing members.

The main reason for 'other' is people preferring to access books online. These non-users could be converted to users with an increase in awareness of eLibrary.

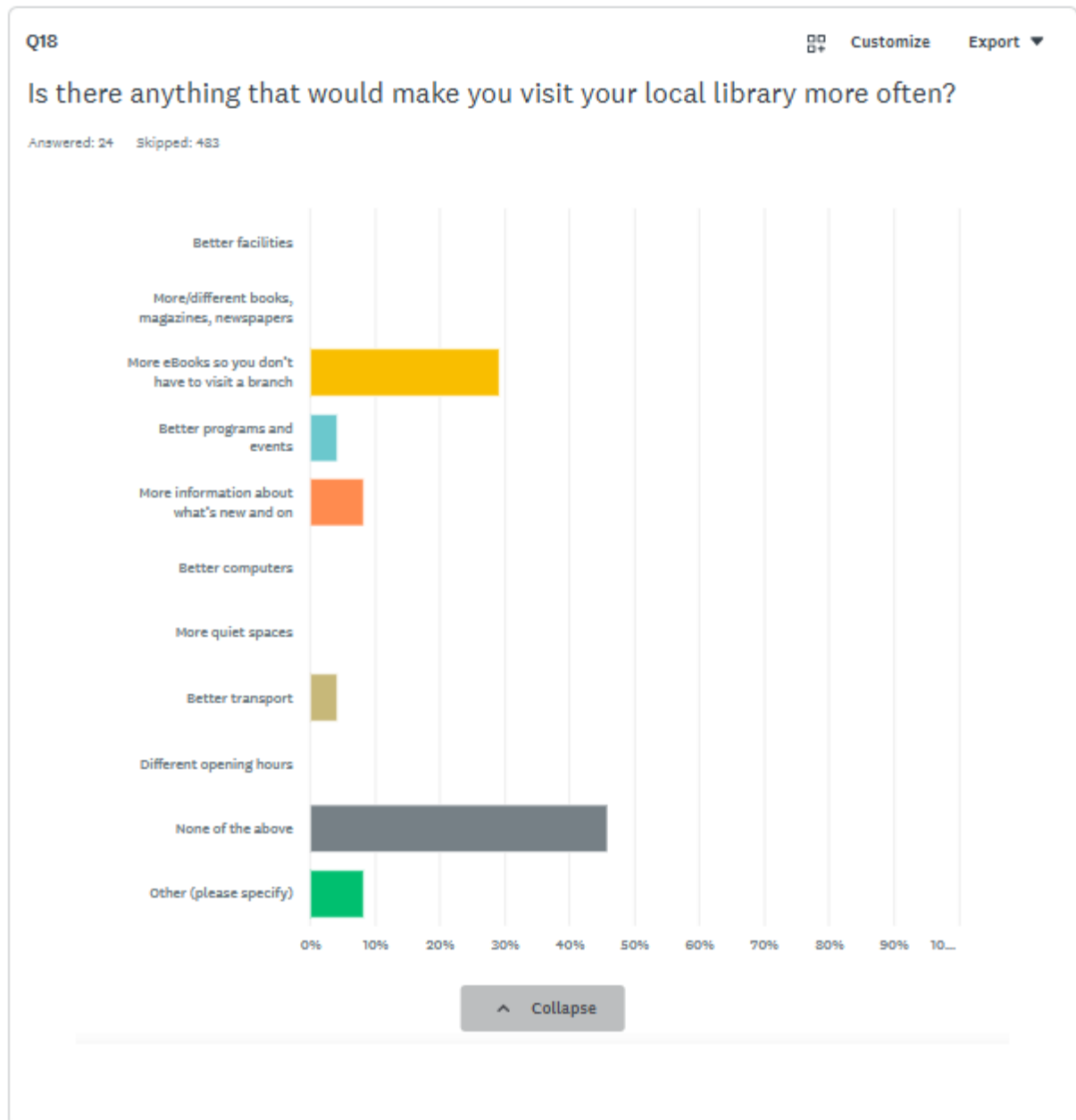


## Opportunities to increase visitation

From those participants that are infrequent or non-users of the library, things that would make them visit the library more often include more eBooks and more information about what's on.

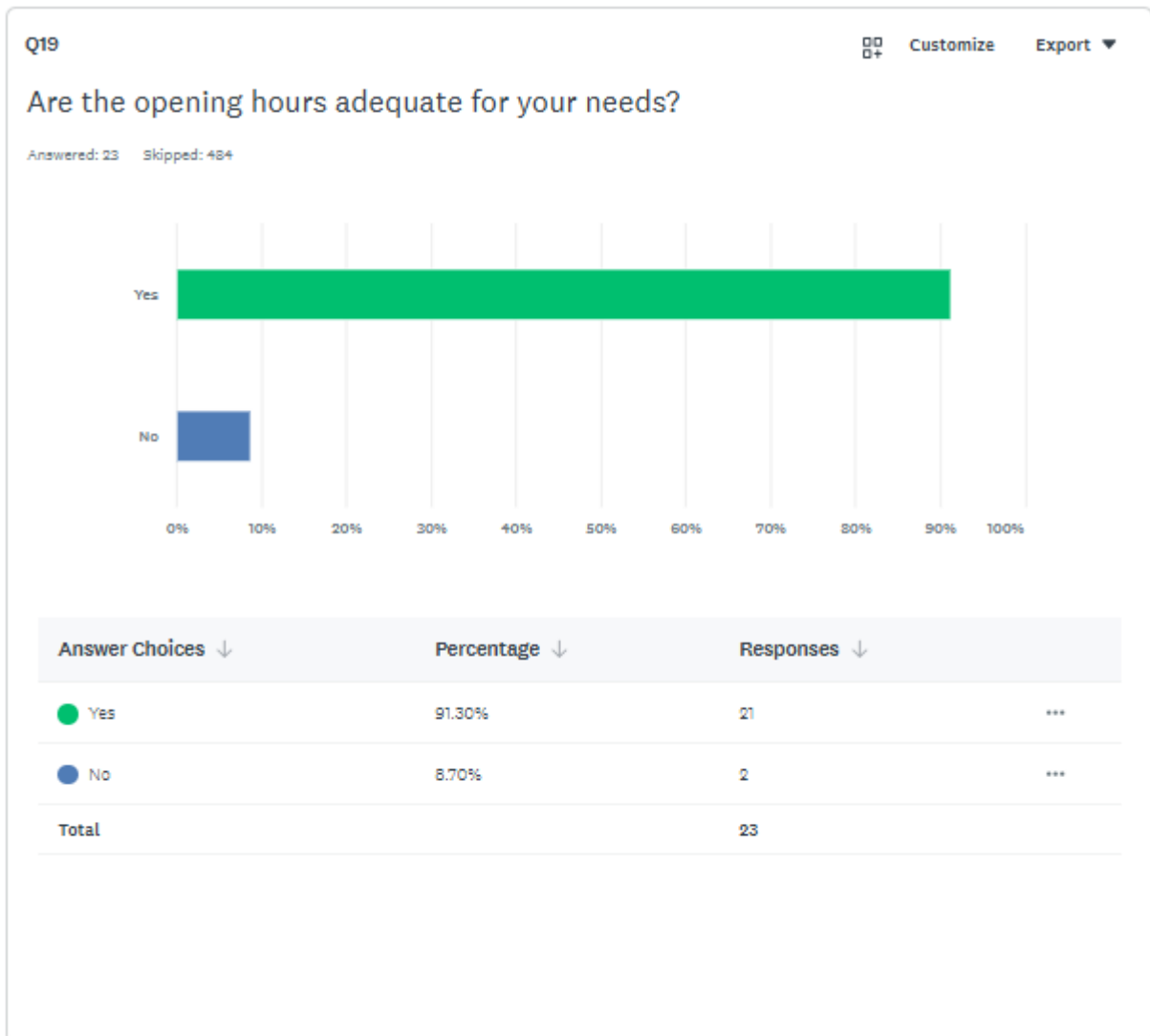
Interestingly those non-users aren't interested in more/different books or better facilities.

The main reason for 'other' is people preferring to access books online. These non-users could be converted to users with reopening of Grafton library and tech classes for seniors.



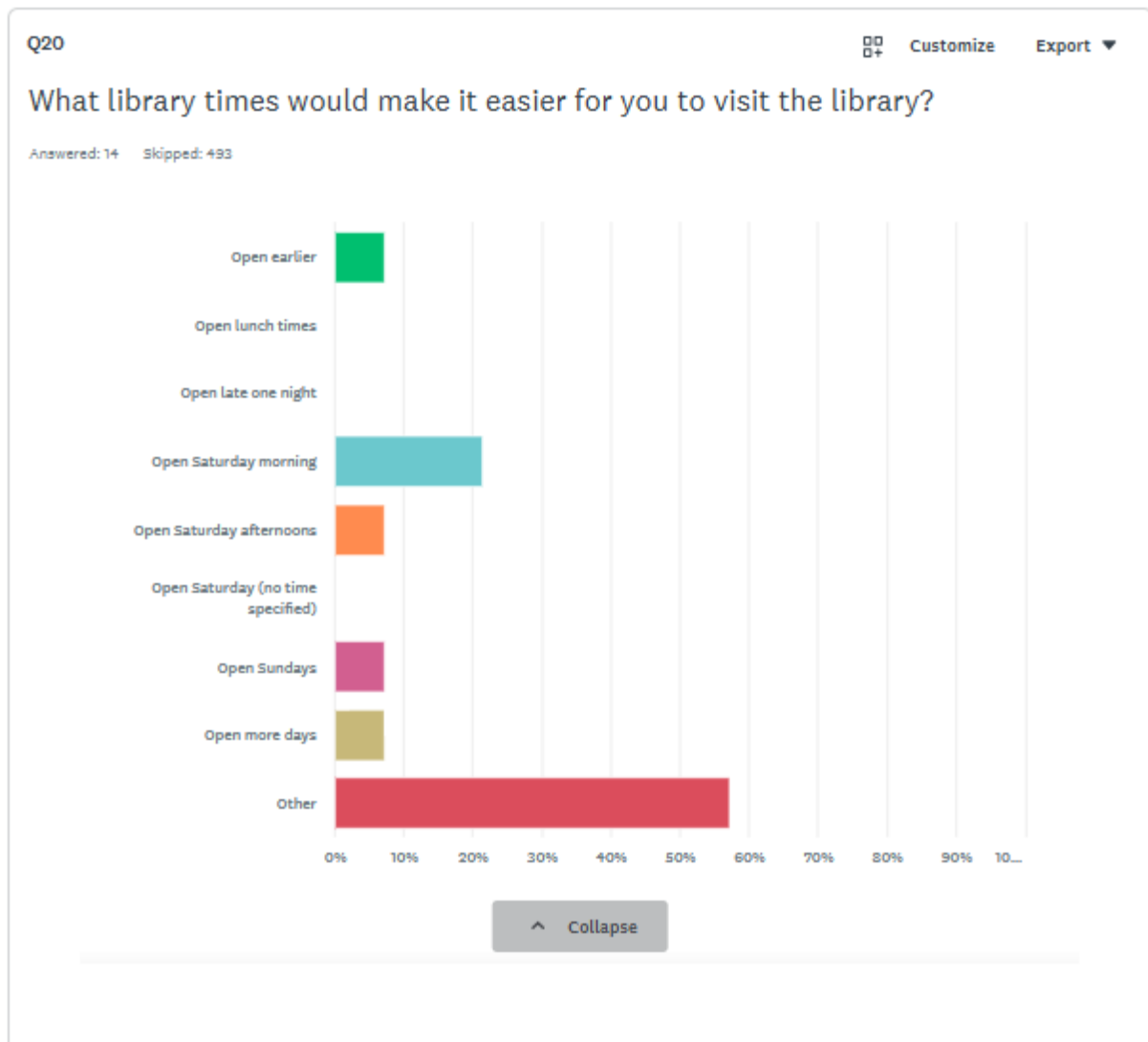
## Adequate hours

From those participants that are infrequent or non-users, they stated that library hours are adequate (91%).



## Preferred times

From those participants that are infrequent or non-users, they noted that opening on Saturday morning and earlier would make it easier to visit. Interestingly open late one night wasn't indicated as being a way to increase library users.



## Challenges

When asked what are the biggest challenges for libraries, participants largely noted:

- competition with technology and new forms of entertainment (26%)
- funding (22%)
- staying relevant and engaging with a wide range of the community (20%)
- maintaining sufficient spaces, especially with adverse weather (14%)
- maintaining up to date collections (12%)
- engaging with youth (6%)
- maintaining varied opening times (5%).

### Comments include:

*Digital Equity & AI Literacy: Managing the gap for residents without tech access and helping the community*  
*Funding vs. Rising Costs: Balancing a tight regional budget against the high cost of digital book licenses.*  
*Frontline Service Pressure: Managing the increased workload. Aging Infrastructure & Accessibility: Ensuring that physical buildings and digital platforms remain fully accessible for Maclean's older demographic. Space Conflict: The difficulty of maintaining traditional "quiet zones" while trying to accommodate louder, modern community activities like LEGO clubs and workshops.*

*Cost. I think the Clarence Regional Library is a wonderful asset. However, the Clarence Valley has a relatively low socioeconomic demographic and a small population of around 55,000 people. Ever increasing Council rates are not affordable for many people. In August 2025 the overall rates increased by around 10%. Many people do not even use the library - many people I know don't use it. There is a cost of living crisis which is going to worsen with the current situation in the Middle East. I would prefer to see some cost cutting in library services instead of a Special Rate Variation (SRV).*

*Given the always increasing demand on CVC resources, I would suggest that a small fee is charged for the use of the library. Small enough so that no one is unable to borrow books because of financial reasons but enough so that everyone makes a small contribution as they do in the use of the council swimming pools. An extra small charge for the reservation of books could assist with library finances as well. I borrow many books each year and reserve most of those. I would be happy to make a small financial contribution to use these services. I also understand this would not be a popular move but I believe it has merit.*

*Creating a generation of younger Australians who appreciate traditional literary resources and a love of literature in a digital age. Create an awareness of the potential pitfalls and dangers of digital resources, particularly AI, in politics, influencing citizens, fact checking etc. Sessions by suitably qualified personnel would be useful, not just children and teenagers, but their parents. Plenty more, but much of the above is covered by educational institutions. However you would have a captive audience as they could be attending voluntarily, unlike school, where teachers spend much of their time with crowd control. (I taught in Primary, Secondary and some Tertiary for 40 yrs)*

*Extreme weather damage, keeping up with popular trends Eg, self help, consciousness, metaphysics, has quietly boomed as people seek beyond religion for life's answers with meditation, reincarnation, researching family trees has boomed from people's own home, conservation, natural health, all more relevant than ever as people seek to live harmoniously with nature.*

## Opportunities

When asked what are the biggest opportunities for libraries, participants largely noted opportunities for:

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- engagement and awareness (7%)
- tech resources and assistance (5.5%)
- lifelong learning (5%).

### Comments include:

*Getting kids talking about books, becoming readers, having kids book clubs or writing workshops or holiday activities, am sure parents would be willing to pay - to try encourage kids away from screens.*

*More room to have a reading corner with comfy chars and opening all day from 9am. Community engagement with special interest groups.*

*Libraries play an important role in bringing communities together and helping people to connect and stay informed and involved. AI will probably impact libraries. Perhaps libraries could play a role in helping people to understand AI and how it can be used.*

*A space to meet and discuss books and ideas, social cohesion through events, a community meeting space, a place for computer literacy learning after hours, a place to encourage more children to engage with text, enhancing pre-reading/writing skills in pre-schoolers, offering a safe place for teenagers to gather.*

*Digital Innovation Hubs Formalized Resilience Centres: Strengthening the library's role as a safe refuge during floods or heatwaves, providing power, Wi-Fi, and cool drinking water Diverse Collection Advocacy: Utilizing new NSW "Freedom to Collect" laws to expand local history archives Health & Wellbeing Partnerships: Partnering with local health providers to host wellness workshops and social groups that combat isolation.*

*Becoming a community cultural hub of learning. Using spaces and resources to teach skills that AI cannot do - handicrafts, art, improvisation story telling, music. Extend beyond books - set up reuse centres that cater for mending clothes, fixing small toys and games or being able to produce entertainers of the future. Our imagination is our only limitation for the future of libraries - which traditionally have been a 'depot of knowledge'.*

*I would love home schooling programs (7-year-old)*

*The library could do way more to get the message out on how up to date they are with trends and new books etc I was very surprised and impressed with the range of new books that were already available on the app eg lots of trendy book tok books. I don't think they advertise enough on social media how good the library service is if you are a reader, and how you can save so much money. I have told so many of my friends and family to join the library and they were all shocked and all said they wish they knew how many books they actually wanted to read were available for them and free.*