

“We just built it:” The Room 14 community consultation process

By Shannon Ozirny.

When the West Vancouver Memorial Library (WVML) identified the construction of a new teen space as a major priority during the 2011-2015 strategic planning process, we were essentially embarking on two projects: the first was obviously the building of the new space, but the second was a robust community consultation process that would meaningfully and actively involve as much of our district's grade 6-12 population as possible.

Many people, from our colleagues in the public library sector, to teacher-librarians, to principals to design students have inquired about our consultation process: how did we collect feedback and turn it into living, breathing 838 square foot space? We hope this overview will be useful for those that are embarking on planning a public space for a distinct, pre-identified group of patrons.

Step 1: Being open

Our unofficial tagline for the project was: “West Vancouver teens imagined it. We just built it.” We began this project knowing that we wanted teens to be in the driver's seat of our planning process. This required that we begin with no pre-conceived ideas of what the space would look like or feel like. We were prepared for the teens to tell us anything and everything, and did not know if our finished product would look more like an Apple store or a log cabin.

Step 2: Casting a wide net

Our first step was to develop and distribute an online survey to every Grade 6-12 student in West Vancouver. While students in grade 6 and 7 are just on the cusp of their teen years, we wanted to make sure we included the immediate future users of the space in our process.

There is ample professional literature available on survey design and libraries, but our most useful exercise was consulting our Teen Advisory Group (TAG) who recommended short questions and a draw prize incentive. We also solicited feedback on the survey draft from the school district and district youth services staff (including youth outreach workers).

The survey questions focused on three themes:

1. What did teens like to do at the library?
2. What were their technology and software requirements for both school and personal projects?
3. What would an “ideal” teen space have?

The survey was distributed through a wide variety of channels including the library website and emails to library and community centre teen volunteers. But we believe we got the biggest uptake from partnering with the school district and sending the survey to every single West Vancouver student in grades 6-12.

In addition to soliciting feedback from as many teens as possible, the survey also acted as promotion for future opportunities to get involved in the space plan. Out of the 341 youth who filled out the survey, over 100 indicated that they would be interested in participating in later stages of the consultation process and provided their information.

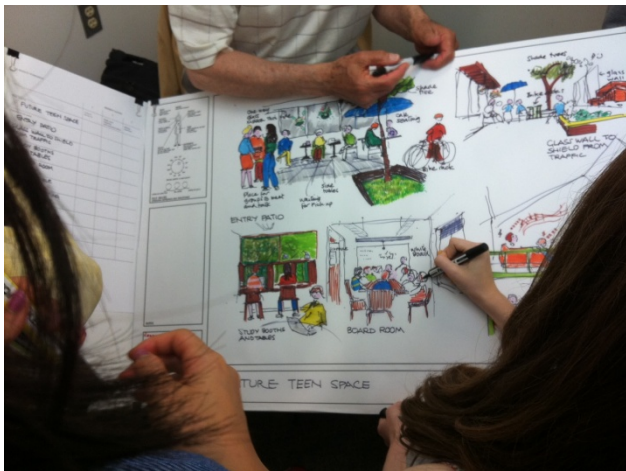
In addition to the survey, youth librarians Shannon Ozirny, Sarah Donald and Roseanne Hinmueller also spoke face-to-face with 60 West Vancouver teens, meeting them in places like drop-in centres, district youth advisory committees and the library's TAG. These conversations took the form of one-on-one and small group interviews in addition to group brainstorming and focus group sessions. In total, we heard from approximately 10% of West Vancouver youth aged 11-18.

Step 3: Visualizing the space

At this point, we had a tremendous amount of data in the form of qualitative and quantitative survey results and interview/focus group notes. We felt that we wanted to gather some more “visual” feedback before beginning the space plan.

We worked with Co-Design, a Vancouver firm specializing in community-led design, to facilitate a workshop for over forty teens. In this workshop, the designers led teens through a variety of exercises that culminated in eight large drawings of ideal library

teen spaces. You can read more about WVML's session with Co-Design on their blog (<http://youthmanual.blogspot.ca/2013/03/west-vancouver-memorial-library-from.html>). Co-Design also offers a fantastic free manual on their blog that outlines their consultation processes for organizations to use.



Teens work with a Co-Design architect to visualize their ideal teen space. Photo by Shannon Ozirny.

After reviewing the Co-Design boards and the survey, interview and focus group data, several key space elements came up again and again:

- natural light/no fluorescent light
- shelving around the perimeter
- enclosed meeting room
- lots of group and individual study space
- study areas by windows
- social space
- lots of electrical outlets

These were the elements that led the creation of the space plan. We worked with Renaissance Interiors to develop a lighting concept and plan for the enclosed meeting room.

Step 4: Colouring in the space

With a space and lighting plan in hand, we brought another group of teens in to pick colours for the soft task chairs, giant bean bag chairs (bean bags were requested time and again) and accent walls. They worked with hundreds of paint chips, fabric samples and space plan templates in small groups before finally voting on a favourite. The workshop took place in Room 14 (in its demolished state) so teens could get a feel for the room they were designing.



Almost two dozen teens came out to make the colour selections. Photo by Shannon Ozirny.

Step 5: Double-checking ourselves

After construction began on the space, the Pew Research Centre released "Younger Americans' Reading and Library Habits" in October 2012.

Recently, on March 13, 2013, Pew also released, "Teens and Technology 2013." We were particularly excited to compare our West Vancouver survey findings to Pew's and the similarities in our data were surprisingly similar.

Pew found that 55% of 16-17 year old Americans have used the library for research in the past year (Zickuhr et al., 2012) while 55.6% of West Vancouver teens surveyed indicated that use the library to get information for homework and assignments.

WVML librarians also observed that teens in our community are often using two devices in our space: a smartphone and a laptop or tablet. And, of course, where there are devices, there is a need for charging. In our survey, teens rated free wi-fi as their most valued thing in a library teen space (followed by books, DVDs and materials for borrowing). Pew's recent report on teens and technology confirms that 78% of teens have a cell phone and 23% of teens have a tablet computer (Madden et al., 2013). This certainly justifies our decision to place 22 outlets in Room 14!

Opening Days

At the time of submitting this article, Room 14 has been open for two weeks. The first thing colleagues ask is "How's it going?" with facial expressions that seem to indicate they are preparing to hear the worst. So far, we have yet to experience some of the

common challenges that the professional literature seems to suggest are inherent in library spaces for teens. Room 14 remains garbage-free despite our liberal food and drink policy, the light-colored task chairs and bean bags have not fallen victim to a sharpie or blade and noise levels have yet to be a problem, even when the space is full.

While we credit this to our District's stellar teen population, we also believe that this amount of respect that teens give the space is directly proportionate to the amount of ownership and pride they feel in Room 14.

Works Cited

Madden, Mary et al. (2013, March 13). *Teens and Technology 2013: Overview*. Pew Research Centre. Retrieved from <http://libraries.pewinternet.org/2012/10/23/younger-americans-reading-and-library-habits/>

Zickuhr, Kathryn et al. (2012, October 21). *Younger Americans' Reading and Library Habits: Summary of findings*. Pew Research Centre. Retrieved from <http://libraries.pewinternet.org/2012/10/23/younger-americans-reading-and-library-habits/>

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