



Book Bunk Explores Public Libraries



OVERVIEW

Book Bunk imagines that public libraries can be steered to become more than just repositories, acting as sites of knowledge production, shared experiences, cultural leadership and information exchange. We see them as sites of heritage, public art and memory. Our formation as an entity is inspired by this core belief – that our shared public spaces are more essential than ever to our collective Kenyan imagination.

In April 2018, following the signing of a milestone partnership agreement with the Nairobi City County government, Book Bunk began a research season supported by the British Council to explore how Nairobi’s citizens and arts fraternity perceive and engage in activities geared towards Cultural Heritage for Inclusive Growth. These explorations utilised the three library spaces under the remit of our agreement with the county government as

well as Book Bunk’s newly-established digital and other audiences. The events and activities that took place over the course of this partnership enabled Book Bunk to have a series of interactions with various groups of people including current users. Our potential future programming is now informed by this research, with an aim of turning these spaces into inclusive and usable, contemporary public spaces for the social and economic benefit of the general public.

This report provides a summary of our activities, outcomes and lessons. We are especially grateful for the trust, support and guidance offered by British Council as we formulate directions for this exciting venture!

book bunk.



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KOINANGE**
FOUNDING PARTNER



**ANGELA
WACHUKA**
FOUNDING PARTNER



**FREDD
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BOARD MEMBER
(PRIVATE EQUITY)



**WARINGA
NJONJO**
BOARD MEMBER
(CORPORATE LAW)



**BROOKS
WASHINGTON**
BOARD MEMBER
(PRIVATE EQUITY)



OCTOBER 2017

Book bunk founded by Wanjiru Koinange and Angela Wachuka

JANUARY 2018

Architectural surveys and consultations

MARCH 2018

Signed an agreement with the county government to restore three public libraries

APRIL 2018

Research and Programming begins at all three sites

COMPLETED EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES



FILM SCREENINGS

APRIL 2ND 2018

KALOLENI AND MAKADARA BRANCHES

Location: Eastleigh Branch (Makadara), McMillan Memorial Library
Film: Nairobi Half Life, followed by a Q&A with Tosh Gitonga, Director
Audience profile: 96 pax; mostly children/young adults (approximately 65%); mostly male (approximately 70%)
Highlights: The turnout! We anticipated an audience of approximately 60.
The event was advertised locally and promoted in collaboration with local government.
Lessons: Crowd sourced content is ideal to ensure we keep screenings relevant

Location: Kaloleni Branch, McMillan Memorial Library
Film: The Last Fight (Jackie Lebo) followed by a Q&A with Ndirangu 'Coaches' Mahungu
Audience profile: 120 pax; mostly children. Mostly male.
Highlights: The turnout! We anticipated an audience of approximately 100.
The event was advertised locally and promoted in collaboration with local government.
Lessons: This event confirmed our belief that the programming for this space is best focused on young audiences (children). We've also begun to question if we can only focus our renovations on the library and ignore the (bigger, more popular) Kaloleni Social Hall, in itself a historical site that was used as Kenya's first parliament.



STAFF ENGAGEMENT SESSION

**MAY 7TH 2018
CBD BRANCH**

This session served as Book Bunk's formal introduction to the 12 individuals that currently serve in various capacities across the three libraries.

The session included a presentation from the Book Bunk team highlighting the founders' backgrounds, ambitions behind this restoration project and our plans for each of these spaces. We then invited the staff members to provide feedback on programming plans. This session highlighted the need for us to include homework clubs in our programming, helped us zero in on the needs of the users and enabled us to identify areas within the library that need some additional capacity.

At the end of the session, we invited staff members to fill out questionnaires, the data from which is summarised later in this report.

LIBRARY USER ENGAGEMENT SESSION

MAY 12TH 2018

MAKADARA BRANCH

To ensure that our plans are as responsive as possible to the needs of current and potential users, we are committed to regular feedback sessions targeting current users. The first of these sessions took place in May. Our audience were library users who were selected to participate in the sessions based on their responses to our physical surveys which were distributed at all the libraries in March and April. This session reviewed the surveys and invited respondents to provide more context for their responses. From these sessions, we learned that most users would be happy to pay up to Ksh.1,200/- annually to use the library (current subscription is 1,000/-) ; security is a major concern in the libraries; majority of the users want extended hours; and that the community would like a deeper involvement in the plans that Book Bunk has for the libraries.

We hope to have these sessions on a quarterly basis.



NAIROBI ARTISTS ENGAGEMENT SESSION

MAY 19TH 2018

ALL BRANCHES

A 55-seater bus was filled with Nairobi-based artists ; storytellers, photographers, writers and others, as well as media practitioners, who went on a tour of all three libraries. During the tour, we asked our audience to take in the spaces and begin to explore if and how they might inspire, or provide a home for their artistic process and output.

We also shared the history of each library as we toured then invited reflections on these libraries as pillars of cultural heritage. This session showed us that it is difficult to get artists (and the public also) to reflect on the cultural heritage of these libraries unless they can see themselves and their peers in the content and stories that live in these spaces. We were tasked to remedy this immediately.



RESEARCH PRESENTATION + PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SESSION





Our final event of the series was dubbed *An Evening at the McMillan Memorial Library* #nightatthelibrary and was programmed as a larger community engagement session. Our community in this case was made up of representatives from the Nairobi County Government, existing and future project partners, current and potential library users, artists as well as allies of Book Bunk. This event aimed to:

1. Showcase our ambitions for the library by transforming it into a grand event space for the night and testing the appetite for this direction
2. Bring new audiences into the space; many of our guests were either visiting the space for the first time, or the first time in decades
3. Introduce Book Bunk and its ambitions to a wider audience
4. Present our research findings to the British Council, potential partners and the general public
5. Outline our plans for the first year of academic and creative arts programming
6. Communicate the main tenets of Book Bunk's partnership with the Nairobi County Government

DOCUMENTATION: CREATING A BLUEPRINT





**WE'RE
MAKING
A FILM**

In her book, *Kenya at 50: Trends, Identities and the Politics of Belonging*, Dr. Joyce Nyairo says that “*One of the most glaring fault lines in the construction of the Kenyan nation is not the absence of memory, but rather the deliberate institutionalisation of amnesia*”

We have set out to be very intentional with the way this project interacts with the intersection between public memory, the complexities of history and current contemporary practise. It is important to us that we document our process for many reasons; this project exists in a historical vacuum as far as documentation of previous use goes and our particular placement as partners of the county opens up a wealth of possibilities for others looking to work on public spaces.

We are documenting this process as we go along and will build a map that is relevant to individuals and organisations who are thinking about

the transformation of public spaces in the same way that we are. We are motivated by Book Bunk’s positioning in expanding public discourse related to the city’s public art spaces, and partnerships that may reposition these assets for more mainstream use.

Hence, we are making a film with Chris King and Maia Lekow (Circle and Square Productions) who have already began documenting key moments of our process. Book Bunk and Circle & Square will work collaboratively to garner the resources required for a feature length film.

This blueprint will also feature texts (such as this report and other commissioned pieces); data from our research, a guide to navigating public-private partnerships for public good with government bodies, video, podcasts¹, photographs and a digital product¹ that will be a multimedia marriage of all of these outputs.

¹All of these outputs, save for the podcasts and digital installation are complete. Creation of the audio content (podcasts) is currently underway. The digital installation will then be created once all other elements are complete.



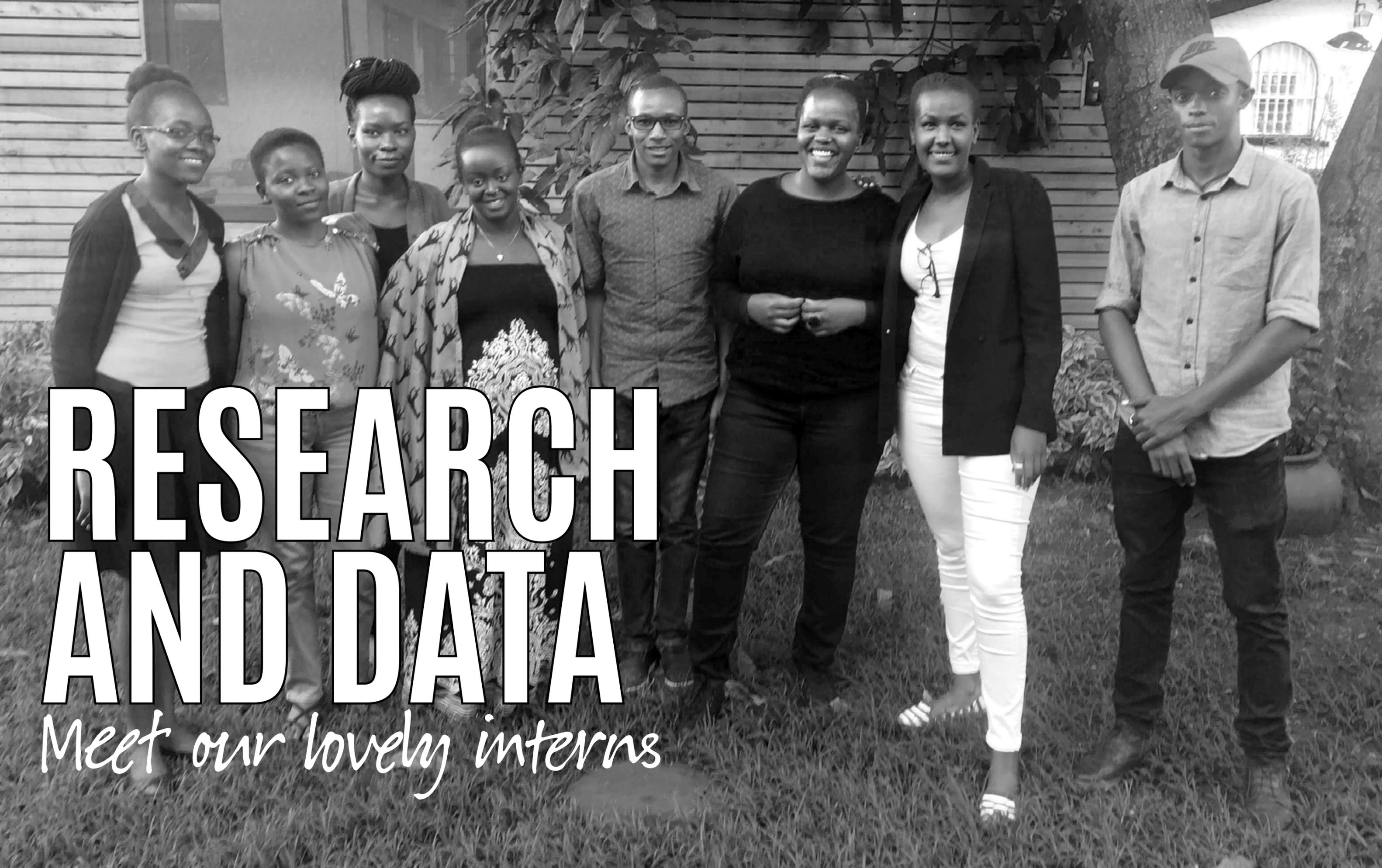
Book Bunk Film Trailer



Showcase Reel: Kaloleni Branch



Showcase Reel: Makadara Branch



RESEARCH AND DATA

Meet our lovely interns

RESEARCH AND DATA

In March and April 2018, we stationed a team of interns at the three libraries for three weeks, during which they handed out surveys and tallied the number of walk-ins that each branch got.

The Kaloleni Library receives an average of **39 users** a day. The main branch (CBD), serves an average of **62 users a day** and the Eastlands branch (Makadara) has an average of 182 users a day. That is a total of **283 daily users** across the three spaces. While we were encouraged with these numbers, we would also like to continue to monitor this process and plan to send our team back to the library for another 3 week period in July, and again in October so that we can track usage at different times of the school year. Our initial survey got over **540** responses.

We also ran an online survey which was targeted at Book Bunk's small but growing online community. This questionnaire examined Nairobi residents' relationship to these particular libraries, and to libraries in general. While useful, the insight we gathered was insufficient so we would like to carry out a second round of surveys targeted at individuals outside our immediate network of digital communities.

There's little to no data available locally about library use in Kenya so we are quite proud of the data we have gathered so far about this! We realise that we have only scratched the surface and are excited about the lessons ahead of us.





**LIBRARY
USER DATA**
highlights

WHY DO YOU COME TO THIS LIBRARY?

55%

TO STUDY FOR EXAMS

41%

TO READ MY OWN BOOKS

3.5%

TO BORROW BOOKS

18%

TO RESEARCH

2.1%

TO READ NEWSPAPERS

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE ABOUT YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR LOCAL LIBRARY THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH US?



Seats are too few

I recommend for modern tables to reduce distractions. Partitioning of the library.

Make allowances for children

The environment is awesome for learning.

I would prefer if it opened till late on weekdays.

The library is filled with old non school books.

It provides a conducive environment for personal studies.

Please digitise the library

update the bookstore

We should not be paying to use toilets

... payment procedure should be made abit easier...

...thank the librarians for the good job they are doing.



DESIRED IMPROVEMENTS



57%

WiFi



45%

TEXTBOOKS



36%

LONGER HOURS



44%

DIGITAL COLLECTION



39%

COMPUTERS



21%

COFFEE AND BOOKSHOP



30%

TOILETS



13%

CHILDREN'S PROGRAMMING



9%

EVENT SPACES



20%

MORE WORKING SPACE



15%

QUIET SPACES

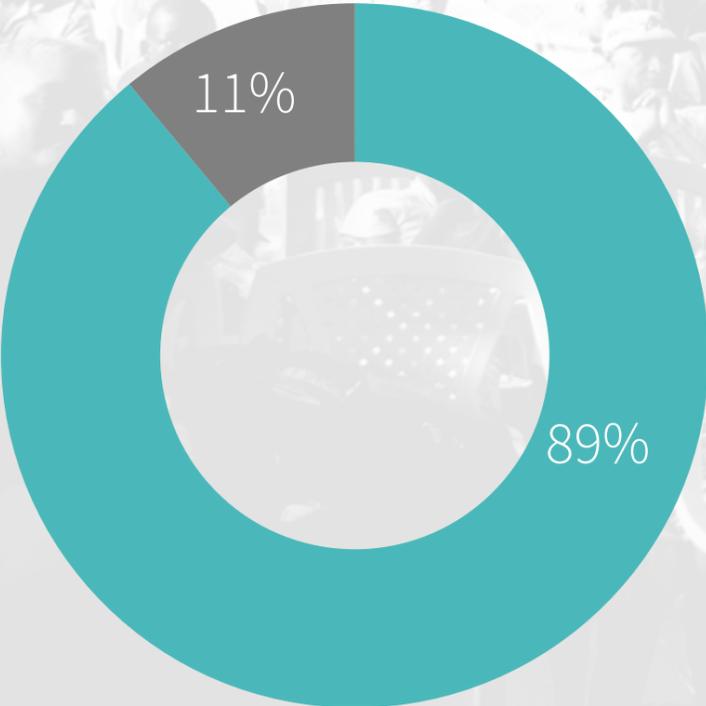


10%

MEETING ROOMS

DO YOU THINK THAT THE McMILLAN LIBRARIES CAN SERVE AS CENTRES FOR PUBLIC ART?

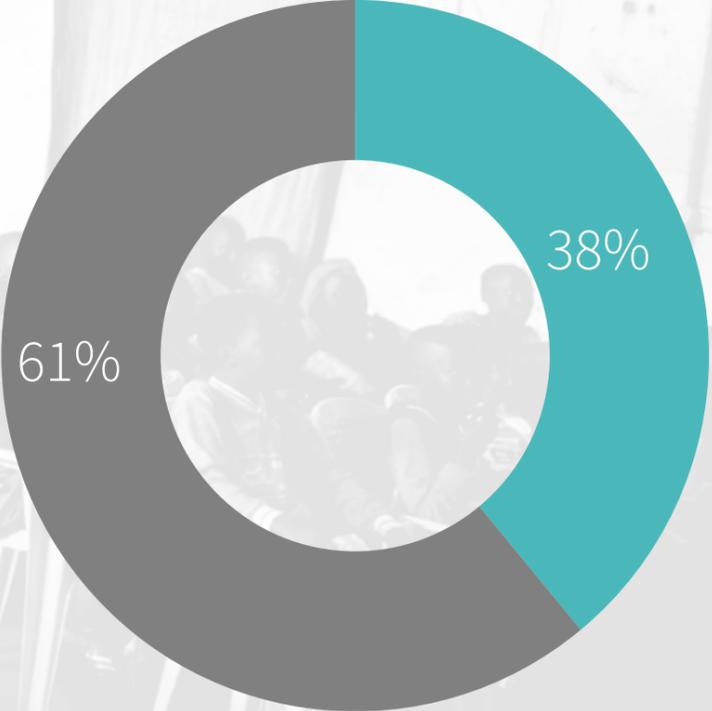
505 responses



Yes No

DO YOU ATTEND CONCERTS, THEATRE PERFORMANCES, FILM SCREENINGS OR OTHER PUBLIC ARTS AND CULTURE EVENTS?

511 responses



Yes No

WHAT IS YOUR MOST FAVORITE THING ABOUT YOUR JOB AT THE LIBRARY?

LIBRARY STAFF SURVEYS



Meeting the user's information needs. When they are satisfied i feel proud

SUPPORTING READERS IN PERIOD SECTION

Serving and interacting with library users

When I see students reading the books and pass the exams

Being a team leader

Meeting different people and culture

Serving library users

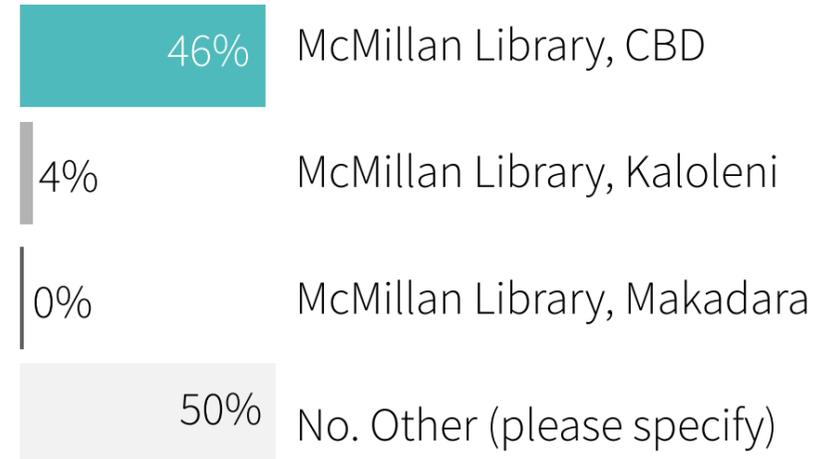
Supporting pupils

Understanding fellow staff and bosses.

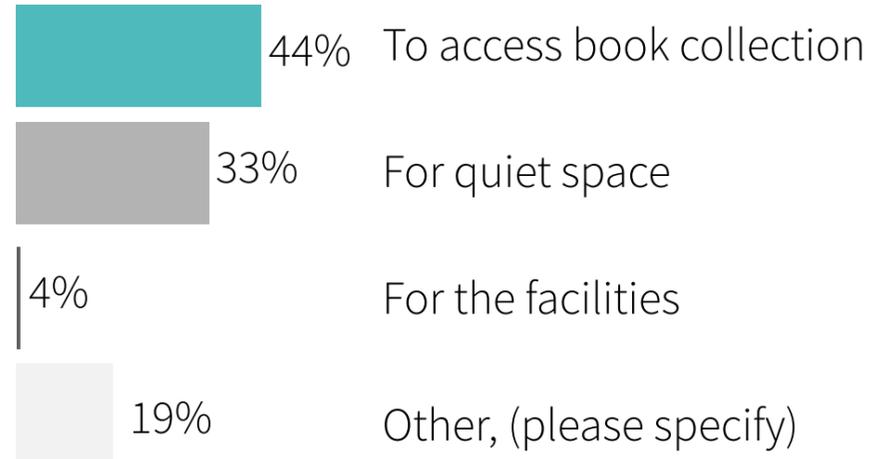
Books



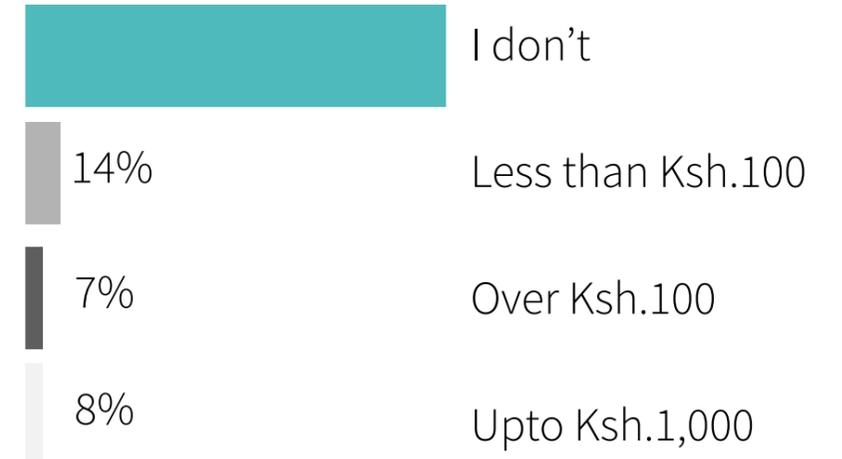
ARE ANY OF THESE BRANCHES OF THE MCMILLAN MEMORIAL LIBRARY YOUR LOCAL LIBRARY?



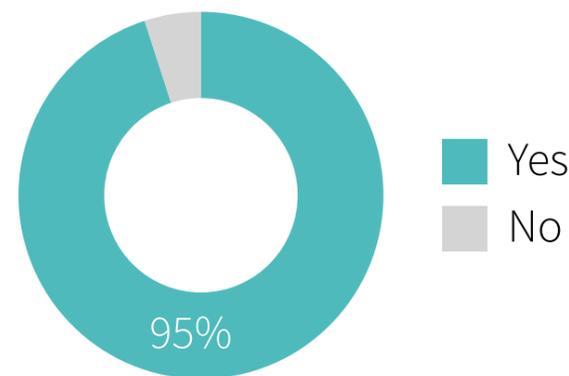
WHY DO YOU VISIT YOUR LOCAL LIBRARY?



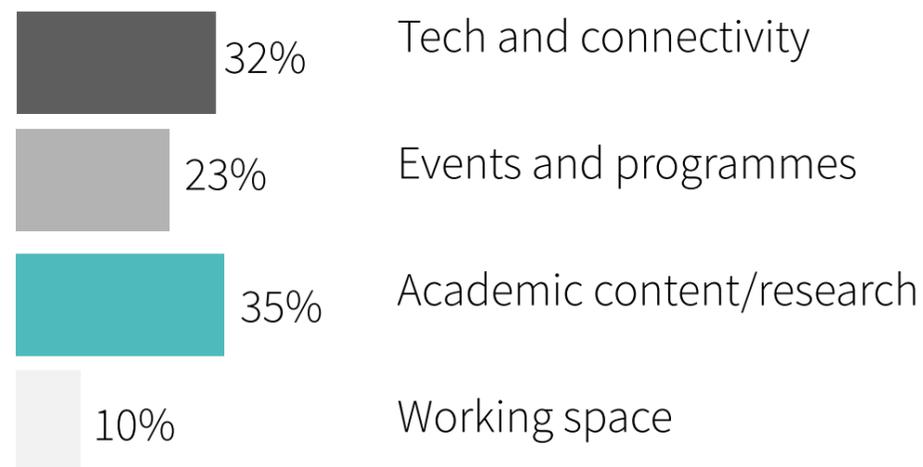
HOW MUCH DO YOU PAY TO USE YOUR LOCAL LIBRARY?



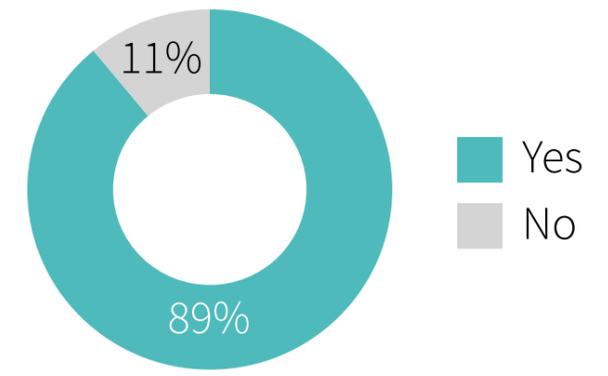
DO YOU THINK THAT PHYSICAL LIBRARIES (I.E BUILDINGS) ARE STILL RELEVANT TODAY?



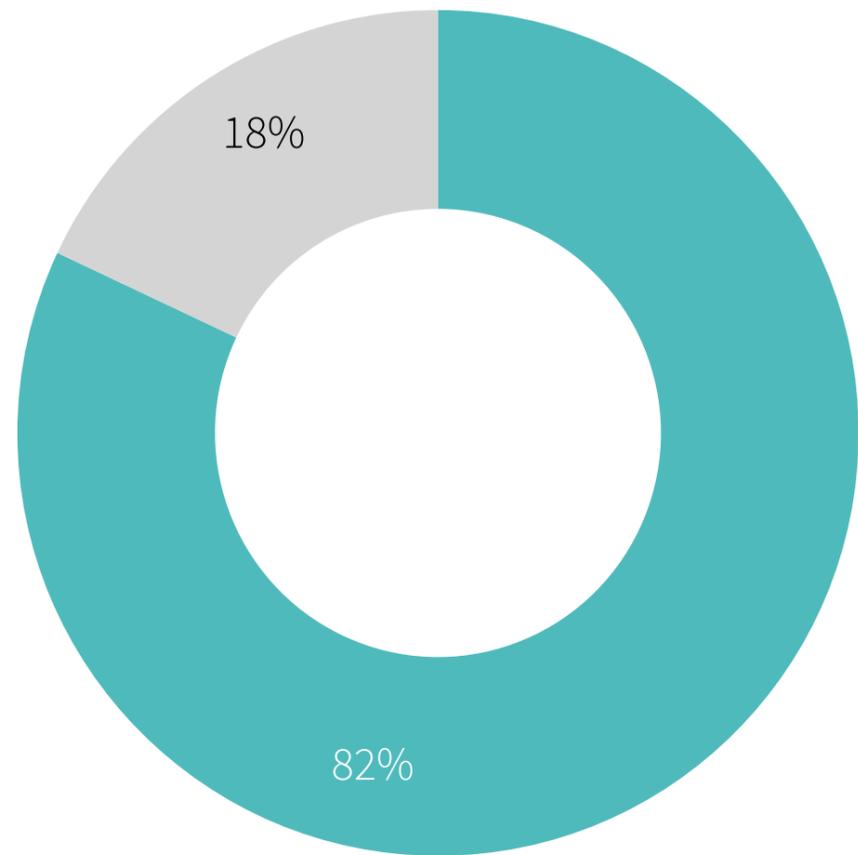
WHICH OF THESE DO YOU THINK SHOULD BE A TOP PRIORITY FOR LIBRARIES TODAY?



SHOULD NAIROBI'S PUBLIC LIBRARIES SERVE AS CENTRES OF PUBLIC ART?



🐦 WOULD YOU STILL VISIT PHYSICAL LIBRARIES IF YOU HAD THE OPTION TO ACCESS THEIR COLLECTIONS ONLINE?



Yes No



Do you belong to any local libraries in Kenya?

Yes



No



Have you ever been to the McMillan Memorial Library - CBD?

Yes



No



Why do you visit your local library?

To study



For fun



What about the Kaloleni Branch? Have you been to that one?

Yes



No





NEXT STEPS

NEXT STEPS

Our core focus for our first year of this project is to get to know the three libraries as intimately as possible from an architectural, programming/utility and content/inventory standpoint.

We will employ a three-pronged research approach to this exploration:

1

ARCHITECTURE

- Engage in a research process into the architectural history of all three buildings. This process requires a minimum of 5 months and the deliverable from this will be a fully phased out and costed architectural renovation plan.
- Form an architectural committee to guide this research process
- Solicit financial support, in cash or kind, for the architectural research

2

PROGRAMMING/UTILITY

- Launch regular events and activities at the library in order to attract new audiences (see a breakdown on the next page)
- Purchase textbooks for all libraries for Homework Clubs and implement extended hours.
- Install wi-fi at all three locations.
- Purchase portable toilets for all three libraries. These will be used until new toilets can be installed.

3

RESEARCH/INVENTORY

- Identify a digital library cataloguing system for the libraries.
- Solicit partnerships with archival and inventory specialists.
- Enlist and train a team of interns who will carry out inventory of the over 400,000 (books, art pieces and other artefacts) contained in the library.
- Continue to collect data about libraries in Kenya through online and offline engagement.

OUR PROGRAMMING PLANS

LIT BUNK

Literary
Programming



THEATRE BUNK

Performance
Programming



POETRY BUNK

Poetry specific
programming

FILM BUNK

Local film
screenings

STAFF TRAINING SESSIONS

MUSIC BUNK

A quarterly concert
series

HOMEWORK CLUBS

Targeted at school going
children looking to use
the libraries after hours
(5pm to 8pm)

ARTISTS BUNK

Visual arts
programming



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