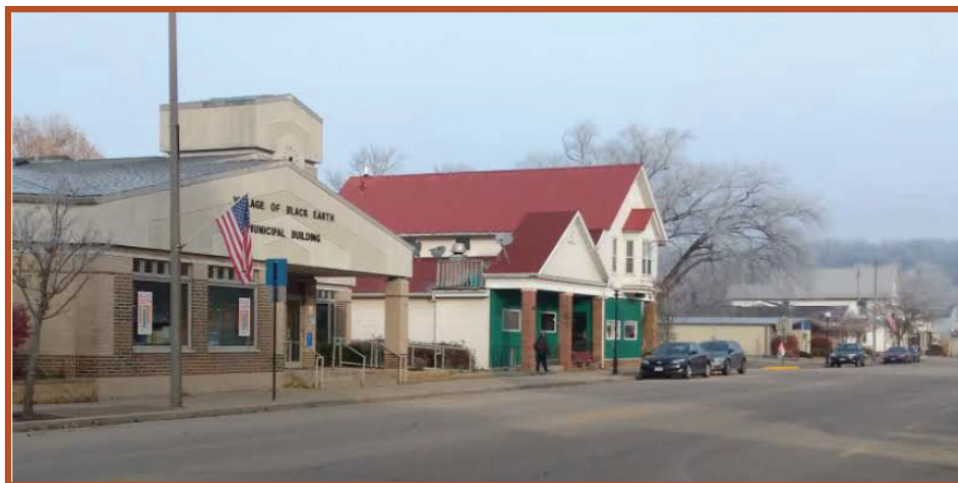


Black Earth Public Library



Strategic Plan Environmental Scan

2025-2030

**BLACK
EARTH**

LIBRARY

BLACK EARTH PUBLIC LIBRARY ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

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Mural artist: Matt Laznicka

Who We Are:

The Black Earth Public Library, founded in 1908 and built in 1990, accounts for approximately 2,600 square feet in the municipal building on Mills Street in Black Earth, WI. The library offers nearly 15,000 physical materials to cardholders, including books, magazines, audiobooks, DVDs, video games, CDs, and more. The library subscribes to several online databases and streaming services, offers free WiFi and computer use, and offers nearly 250,000 items through electronic collections. The Black Earth Public Library hosts hundreds of programs and events every year for all ages and on a variety of topics, from popular culture to science to literature to local history, in collaboration with community partners like Wisconsin Heights School District, Gateway to the Driftless, Mount Horeb Family Pharmacy, Black Earth Historical Society, Black Earth Creek Watershed Association, and more, welcoming thousands of attendees annually. Black Earth Public Library boasts nearly 20,000 yearly visits.



An interlibrary loan system allows Black Earth library users to borrow materials from any library in the South Central Library System as well as from libraries anywhere in the state of Wisconsin. Black Earth Public Library is a member of the South Central Library System, which serves 54 public libraries and seven counties in south-central Wisconsin.

The library is governed by a five-member library board and is a department of the Village of Black Earth.

Previous Strategic Plan

Black Earth Public Library's strategic plan was last updated in 2019, at which time goals for the next five years of service to the Black Earth community were established. These priorities included welcoming and inclusive spaces, cultural and civic connections, and educational and learning opportunities.

Since 2019, that strategic plan has driven library services and programming, and as a result, partnerships with area organizations have increased; number of programs offered and attendees at those programs has increased; the library has reestablished itself as a community hub after the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, as evidenced by survey responses; and has meaningfully increased diverse collections, programming, and staff learning opportunities through county-wide initiatives like Ripple Project and Beyond the Page, as well as through thoughtful collection development.

Despite significant challenges and world events that threatened the future of library service, the Black Earth Public Library has come a long way since the previous strategic plan was approved, and the staff and library board continue to work toward these goals.



■ Sense of Place

People have long inhabited the Black Earth region. Mound builders and the Ho-Chunk Nation lived in the region before European immigrants came to the area to settle the Village of Black Earth and surrounding towns. The natural beauty (often referred to as the Gateway to the Driftless region) and fertile farmland continue to draw people to the region. Agricultural life and connection to nature continue to be priorities in the area.



Connection to nature is a community priority, as is connection to each other. In conversations with library and consultant staff from the South Central Library System, community members noted they want to live in a safe, walkable community with a welcoming and inclusive environment. They want to be connected to each other and know about community events and happenings, and they want to know how they can use their knowledge, talents, and experience to help each other in times of need.

Community members are concerned about their neighbors' well-being, access to community services, and access to help when they need it.

Black Earth's identity is grounded in connection to place and community. The Black Earth Public Library is central to community life and provides opportunities for community members to connect with one another through programs, classes, and events.

Education

The local school district, Wisconsin Heights, moved to a single campus model in 2022, meaning that Black Earth Elementary School closed its doors.

Educators at Wisconsin Heights Community School are active community members who take on leadership roles outside of school district work and are respected by residents, especially students and their families. The high quality of education available to students is a major attraction to Black Earth.

Black Earth values creativity and curiosity and community members crave opportunities to learn. They noted the need for formal opportunities to learn as well as a desire for a community supportive of a culture of education and lifelong learning.

The Black Earth Public Library offers many programs for children and families and has a strong collection of books and materials for youth. The Black Earth Public Library has fostered a strong partnership between Wisconsin Heights School District in order to support education and early literacy in the Black Earth community at large.

■ How We Serve:

Our Mission:

The Black Earth Public Library and its staff provides inspiring programs, services, and materials for the community's educational, informational, cultural, and recreational needs in a welcoming and respectful atmosphere.

Our Vision: The Black Earth Public Library provides opportunities for free and equitable access to learn, discover, create and connect.
(adopted 10-16-2018)

Who We Serve:

The Black Earth Public Library serves residents of the Village of Black Earth, the Town of Black Earth, and surrounding region. Library funding comes from an annual appropriation from the Village of Black Earth and Dane County. The library's Eligibility for Services policy states:

The Black Earth Public Library shall serve all residents of the community. Services shall not be denied or abridged because of age, religious, racial, social, economic, or political status. Persons residing outside of the geographical area shall be issued an appropriate county library card according to their place of residence which shall be accepted for usage in the Black Earth Public Library. Any person with reciprocal borrowing privileges with the South Central Library System shall also be served.



The Black Earth Public Library card may be used at any public library in Columbia, Dane, Green, Sauk, Wood, Adams, and Portage counties belonging to the South Central Library System. It may also be used at public libraries in other library systems with South Central reciprocal borrowing agreements.

Service Snapshots: What Data Tells Us

Population, Demographics, and Future Estimates:

The Wisconsin Department of Administration estimates the region's population will slightly rise by 2040, with higher population growth in the Towns of Black Earth and Berry. Additionally, the village and town have higher property value than the rest of Wisconsin

Population Estimates WI Dept. of Administration (DOA)				
Year	Village of Black Earth	Town of Black Earth	Town of Berry	Town of Vermont
2024	1,556	522	1,181	907
2040	1,395	570	1,205	830

2022 American Community Survey						
Metric	ACS Table ID	Village of Black Earth	Town of Black Earth	Town of Berry	Town of Vermont	Wisconsin
Median age (years)	DP05	44.7	50.1	57.6	50.2	39.9
Population under 18	DP05	22.1%	15.5%	15.1%	17.8%	21.6%
Population 65+	DP05	31.4%	19.5%	37.5%	25.0%	17.7%
Non Hispanic – White Alone	DP05	91.4%	95.0%	98.1%	88.4%	79.9%
Hispanic or Latino	DP05	3.5%	2.4%	1.2%	0.5%	7.3%
Veterans	S2101	8.3%	6.7%	4.1%	4.5%	6.7%
Median property value	DP04	\$237,800	\$394,600	\$452,400	\$525,800	\$231,400
Median household income	DP03	\$65,714	\$125,000	\$78,036	\$90,313	\$72,458
Poverty rate – children (under 18)	DP03	5.8%	11.3%	8.7%	0.0%	13.3%
Poverty rate	DP03	6.9%	5.0%	4.6%	1.1%	10.7%
Households without an internet connection	S2801	16.6%	9.3%	8.2%	22.3%	11.9%
Renters pay >30% income	B25074	41.1%	63.6%	52.5%	26.9%	40.6%
Children living in household with Supplemental Security Income (SSI), cash public assistance income, or food stamps/SNAP	B09010	36	0	11	20	274,668

Black Earth Public Library: Registered Borrowers and Library Use

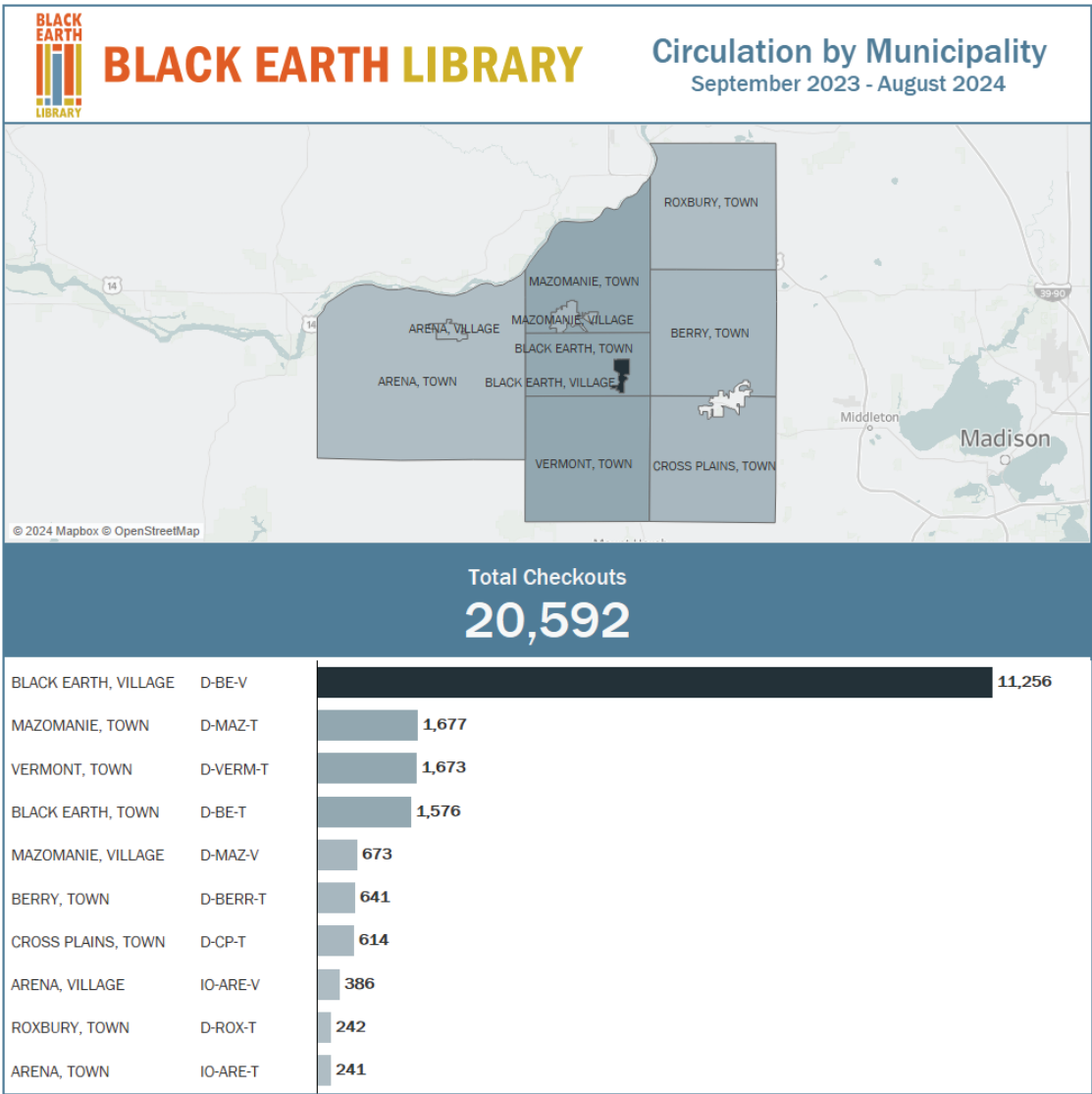
Wisconsin public libraries submit an annual report to the Department of Public Instruction. The most recent data from 2023 indicates there are 1,019 registered borrowers with library cards at the Black Earth Public Library. As a point of comparison, there are 1,493 village residents as of the most recent census. Annual report data provides information about the number of materials borrowed, the number of library visits, information about computer usage, and program attendance.

Residents with a library card September 2024				
LINKcat-patrons-registered WI Dept. of Administration (DOA)				
	Village of Black Earth	Town of Black Earth	Town of Berry	Town of Vermont
Count	660	189	402	319
Percentage	42%	36%	34%	35%

Residents who used their library card Jan-Sep 2024				
Bibliovation WI Dept. of Administration (DOA)				
	Village of Black Earth	Town of Black Earth	Town of Berry	Town of Vermont
Count	278	96	188	154
Percentage	18%	18%	16%	17%

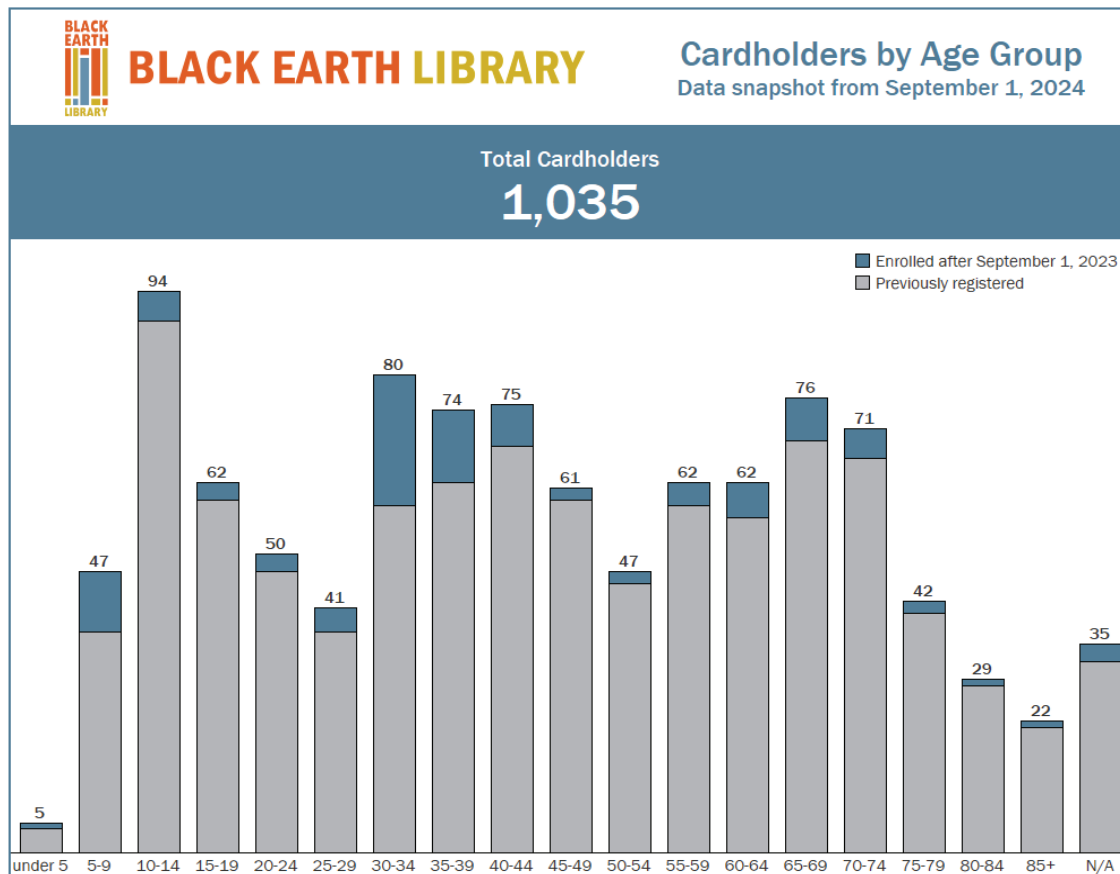
Snapshot of Library Card Registration and Use by Municipality:

2023 Annual Report data indicates the residents of the Village of Black Earth borrowed 11,256 materials from the Black Earth Public Library. Residents in the Town of Vermont borrowed 1675 items and residents of the Town of Black Earth borrowed 1576 items.

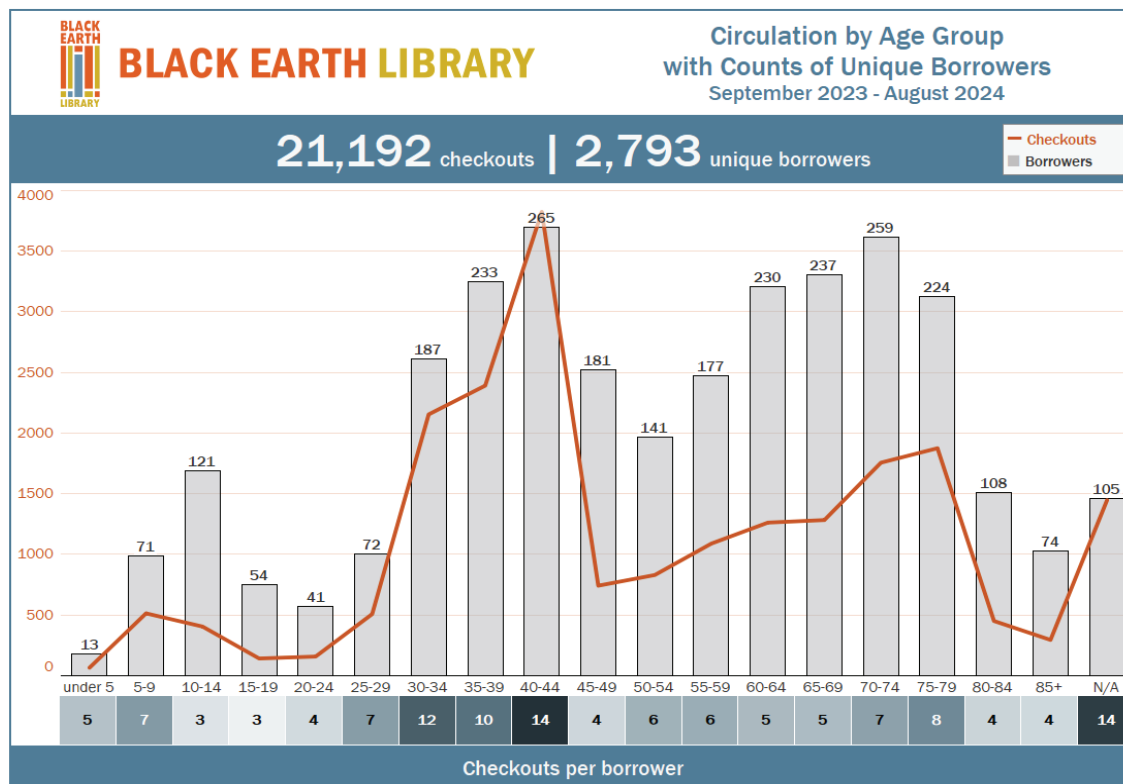


Age and Usage Snapshots:

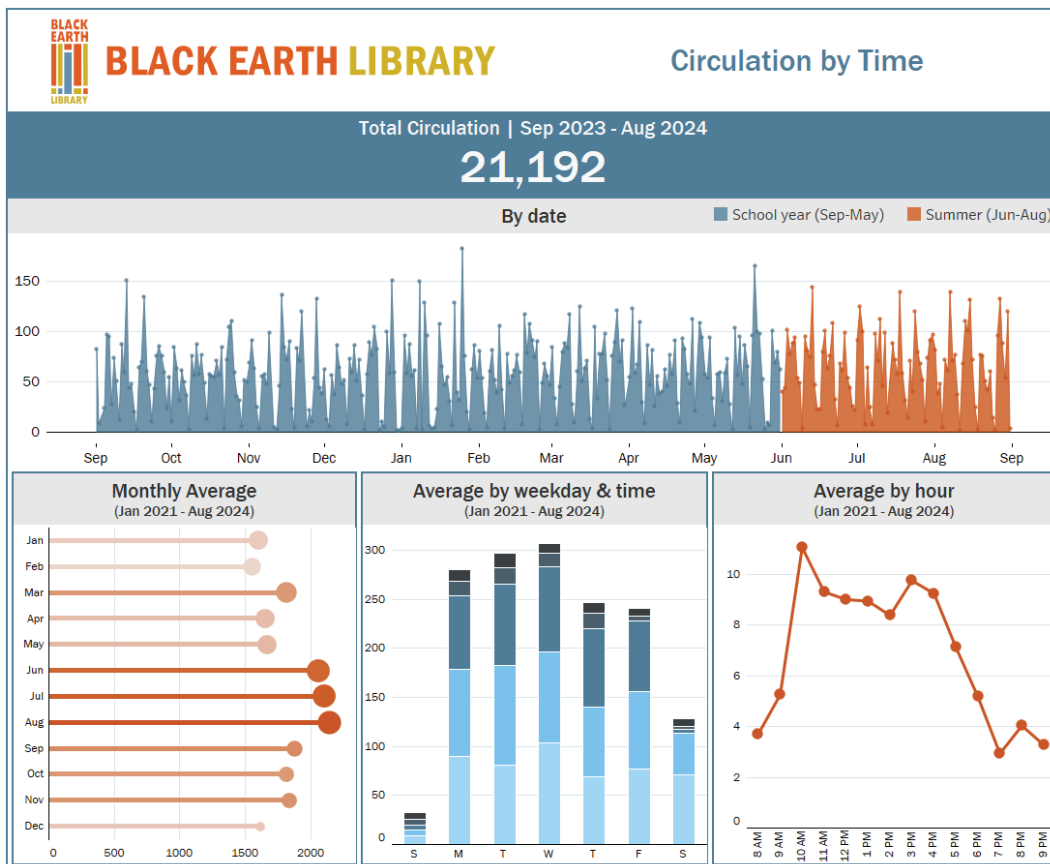
Patrons who chose Black Earth Public Library as their home library in 2024 by age:



Number of items borrowed in 2024 by age group.



Library materials checkout by date and time



School District Data

Wisconsin Heights

2022-23 school enrollment: 749

2017-18 school enrollment: 781

<https://apps2.dpi.wi.gov/reportcards/>

88.9% White | 2.3% Hispanic or Latino | 5.3%

Two or More Races (2022-23)

<https://apps2.dpi.wi.gov/reportcards/>

86 homeschooled students (2023-24)

<https://dpi.wi.gov/parental-education-options/home-based/statistics>

25.29% of students approved for free and reduced price meals (October 2023)

<https://dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/program-statistics>

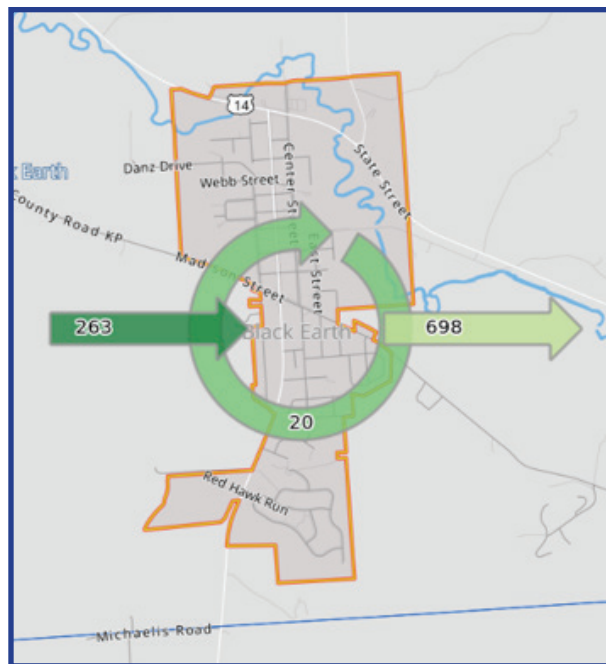


Employment Snapshot

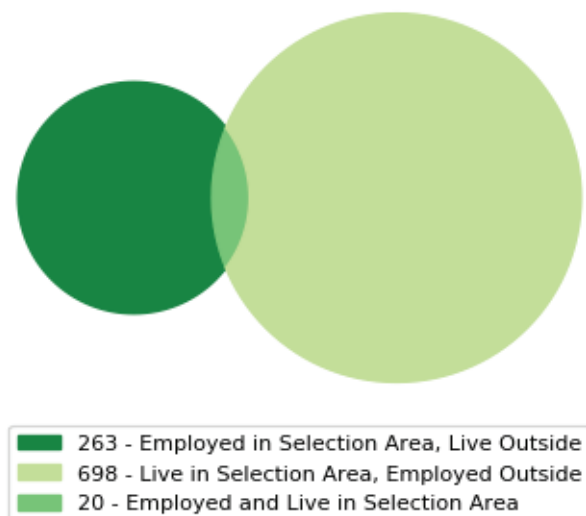
Village of Black Earth

- 265 employed in Village of Black Earth, live outside
- 20 employed and live in Village of Black Earth
- 698 live in Village of Black Earth, employed outside

Workers Living in Village of Black Earth: Primary employment location		
2021		
	Count	Share
Total Primary Jobs	718	100.00%
2021		
	Count	Share
Madison city (Dane, WI)	231	32.17%
Middleton city (Dane, WI)	52	7.24%
Mazomanie village (Dane, WI)	44	6.13%
Cross Plains village (Dane, WI)	24	3.34%
Sauk City village (Sauk, WI)	24	3.34%
Black Earth village (Dane, WI)	20	2.79%
Prairie du Sac village (Sauk, WI)	18	2.51%
Fitchburg city (Dane, WI)	16	2.23%
Verona city (Dane, WI)	16	2.23%
Black Earth town (Dane, WI)	14	1.95%
Waunakee village (Dane, WI)	14	1.95%
Madison town (Dane, WI)	13	1.81%
Mount Horeb village (Dane, WI)	11	1.53%
Mazomanie town (Dane, WI)	10	1.39%
Shorewood Hills village (Dane, WI)	9	1.25%
Sun Prairie city (Dane, WI)	9	1.25%
Monona city (Dane, WI)	8	1.11%
Spring Green village (Sauk, WI)	8	1.11%
Milwaukee city (Milwaukee, WI)	7	0.97%
DeForest village (Dane, WI)	6	0.84%
Janesville city (Rock, WI)	5	0.70%
Oshkosh city (Winnebago, WI)	5	0.70%
Middleton town (Dane, WI)	4	0.56%
Roxbury town (Dane, WI)	4	0.56%
Verona town (Dane, WI)	4	0.56%
All Other Locations	142	19.78%



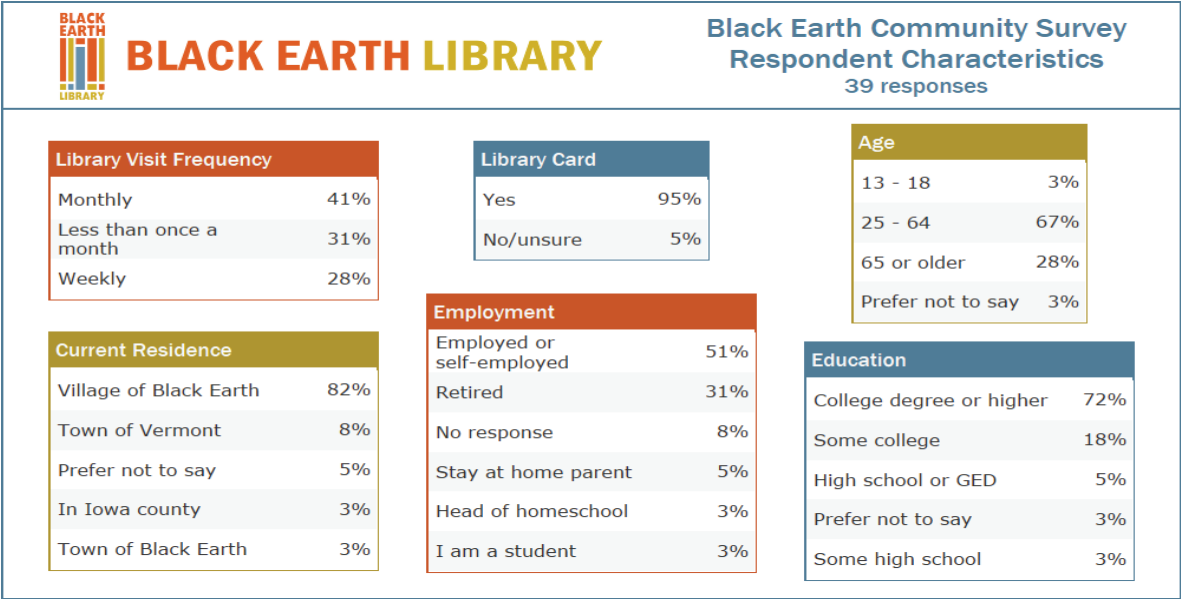
Inflow/Outflow Job Counts in 2021
All Workers



Library Services Survey

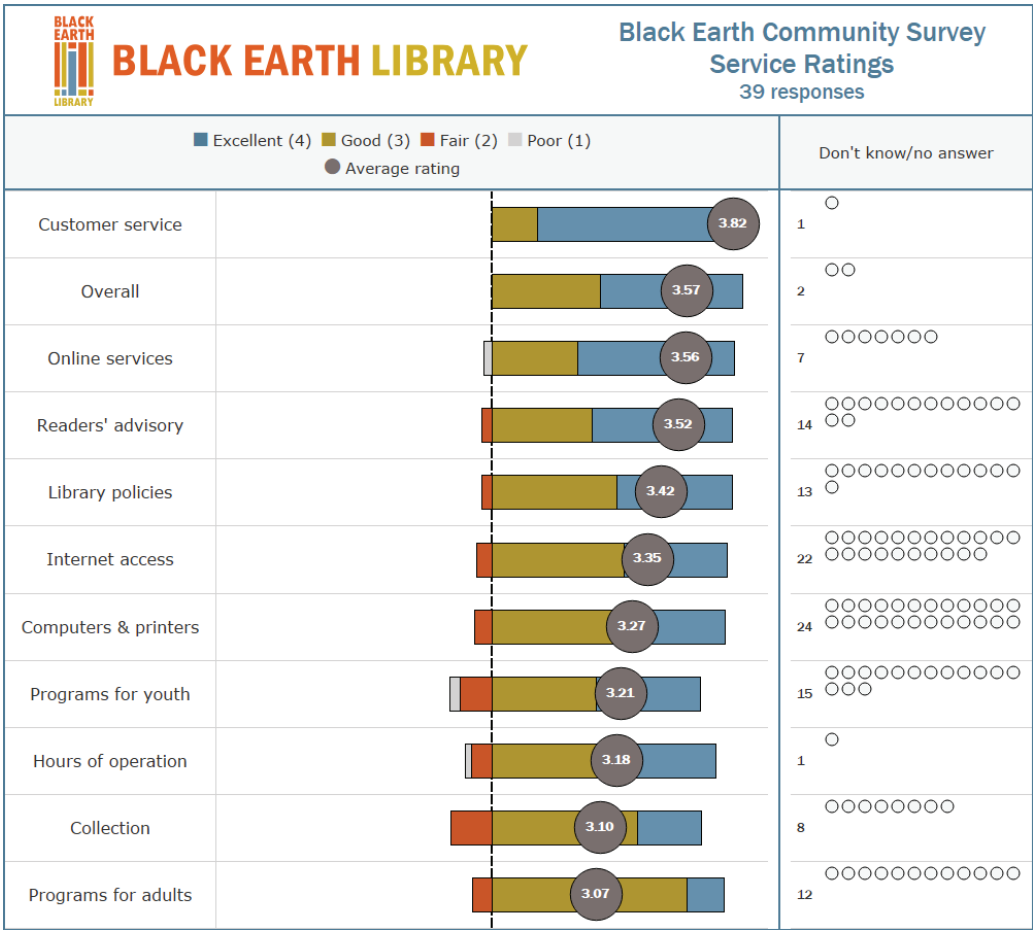
During the summer of 2024, the Black Earth Public Library conducted a library services survey; 39 people responded to the survey, providing feedback on current library services and spaces and input about future library use:

Survey respondent characteristics:



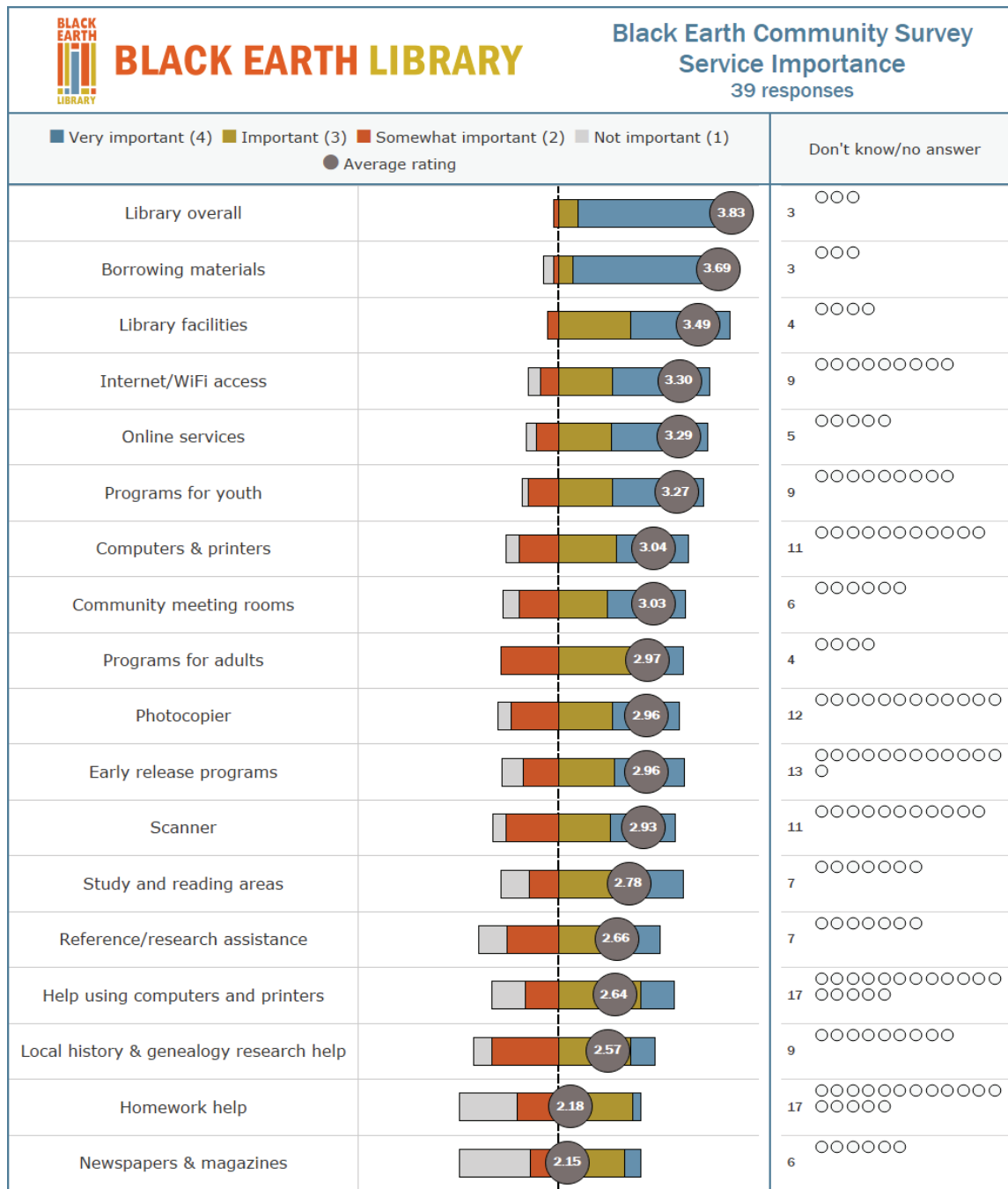
Survey service ratings snapshot:

Customer service, overall library service, and online services rank highest in the survey's service ratings report:



Survey service importance snapshot:

Overall library service, borrowing materials, and library facilities rank highest in the survey's service importance report:



Local Author
Fair 2024

Black Earth Public Library Strategic Plan Outline, 2025 - 2030

Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal
<p>Theme: Library space</p> <p>We will develop the library's physical space: The Black Earth Public Library will develop the library's physical spaces to be a community hub where all library patrons feel welcome and able to meet their variety of needs in a modern, attractive, and functional environment.</p>	<p>Theme: Welcoming & accessible</p> <p>We will provide welcoming, accessible, and inclusive spaces: The Black Earth Public Library will be a safe, inclusive, accessible, and welcoming space where all residents feel empowered to interact with ideas, library services, and each other.</p>	<p>Theme: Education center for all ages</p> <p>We will support educational and learning opportunities: The Black Earth Public Library will connect community members of all ages with information to help fulfill their educational needs, feed their curiosity, and connect them to the world of knowledge.</p>	<p>Theme: Fiscal responsibility</p> <p>We will responsibly use municipal funds in order to best serve the communities of Black Earth and the surrounding areas. The Black Earth Public Library, as a department of the Village of Black Earth, will maintain responsible use of public dollars.</p>
Objectives/ Strategies:	Objectives/ Strategies:	Objectives/ Strategies:	Objectives/ Strategies:
<p>The library will have identified a location for their expansion project by 12/31/2025.</p> <p>The library will have begun a capital campaign by 12/31/2025.</p> <p>The library will host at least three community listening sessions, as well as engaging digitally with community members via Zoom, online forms, and other methods, in order to gain continuous feedback on a potential building project.</p>	<p>The library will provide more passive opportunities for patrons to engage in ideas and collections on their schedule by 6/30/2026.</p> <p>The library will update the space to increase accessibility and sense of welcome in the space by 06/30/2027.</p>	<p>Programs encouraging hands-on interaction with new skills (crafts, repair, woodworking, building) will increase by 6/30/2026.</p> <p>The library will increase investment in learning tools like STEAM kits, busy bags, games, and tools by 12/31/2025.</p>	<p>The library will have adopted a fiscal policy by 1/1/2026.</p> <p>The library will demonstrate value to the community through annual statistics reporting, including cost/benefit analysis, to the Village Board of Black Earth.</p> <p>The library will have applied for at least three major grants in order to develop a dequate library spaces for the community of Black Earth while reducing the impact on taxpayers, hiring grant writers as necessary.</p>

Activities	Activities	Activities	Activities
<p>Work closely with the Village Board in order to establish funding sources</p> <p>Capital Campaign to raise funds for a building project or space updates</p> <p>Engage with community members to establish a community identity that can be reflected in a building project and ensure that a building project reflects community</p>	<p>Subscribe to alternative book recommendation channels in order to diversify collections, including TikTok/ BookTok accounts, Instagram accounts, and other non-traditional book review venues</p> <p>Establish guidelines for purchasing books from smaller, independent publishers, which may feature more diverse voices.</p> <p>Research and invest in high-quality library furniture that will lend flexibility and accessibility to the library space without compromising services</p> <p>Perform a “space audit” specifically to address how to make the library space more welcoming to patrons without necessitating staff interaction.</p>	<p>Encourage community members to design their own programs and let the library help make it happen</p> <p>Create a program series that embraces trying new skills.</p>	<p>Adopt a fiscal policy.</p> <p>Perform a cost/ benefit analysis of the library and present it to the Village Board with annual report data.</p> <p>Search and apply for grant funding from public and private sources to support projects and capital improvements.</p>

■ Sharing Results:

The library director of the Black Earth Public Library will share progress reports with the library and village boards of trustees at board meetings. Staff members will receive updates about the actions of the plan, with special attention paid to identifying ways their work supports the strategic plan. Community members will learn about new collections, materials, services, and programs resulting from the new strategic plan via local media outlets, newspaper articles, social media updates, in-library publicity and community forums and discussions. The library director will refer to goals of the strategic plan when hiring new staff; newly-elected board members will be introduced to the strategic plan and goals as a component of trustee training.