Campaign Readiness Study Report

Flathead County Library - Kalispell

Prepared by BrandRaise • November 2026

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Executive Summary

In July 2026, the Flathead County Library Board of Trustees engaged BrandRaise to determine whether the Flathead Valley community can and will support a $13M private campaign and a $6M to $8M bond for a new Kalispell library. The study included a Brand and Fundraising Audit, 61 one-on-one interviews, six focus groups with 26 participants, and a public survey with 223 respondents.

Successful capital campaigns share a set of characteristics like: urgency, confidence, and momentum, supported by a clear case and vision, unified leadership, strong donor relationships, community standing and realistic planning. This study tested whether those characteristics are present at the library today.

The library has a strong foundation, and the urgency is measurable. The building's lease expires in 2033, its infrastructure is failing, and the number of registered cardholders has grown 27 percent since 2022. Confidence in the community's fundraising capacity is high. Half of interviewees and 55 percent of survey respondents called the $13M goal reasonable, and 80 percent of survey respondents said a new library is important. The library has already received a $200,000 gift for land and building, and the Whitefish Community Foundation's recent $10M effort gives donors a local precedent. The library's community standing is also an asset, with people describing it as welcoming, helpful, and essential, and many see a well-used library as a sign of a thriving community.

The study found that the barriers to a successful campaign are not capacity or enthusiasm for libraries. They are:

- **Clarity:** The site has not been secured, building plans and renderings do not exist, and the cost estimate carries a $10M range. Donors cannot yet picture the project, and operating costs are undefined.
- **Leadership alignment:** Nearly 90 percent of interview responses about concerns pointed to the library's turbulent recent history and the lack of public support from county leadership. Donors want to see the Board of Trustees, Library Foundation, and all three County Commissioners visibly united behind one vision.
- **Bond readiness:** Bonds and levies have a long history of failing in the valley, and property tax concerns are strong. Commissioners are unlikely to place a bond on the ballot without a firm cost and a clear tax impact.
- **Donor relationships:** Willingness to give is strong but undefined. Of those invited to participate, 69 percent agreed, and 85 percent of those attended. Interviewees and survey respondents identified potential gifts totaling $454,600 to $513,834, far short of what is needed to establish a goal range. Several participants noted that people with capacity have no relationship with the library yet.
- **Perceived value:** Many believe in libraries but doubt the broader community understands why a new building is needed, especially people who do not use the library.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that the library delay launching a capital campaign and reassess readiness in six months. Launching before specific gift amounts are identified and a goal range is established would put the campaign at risk of stalling.

The recommendations fall into two groups:

- Recommendations to be completed before a campaign begins:
    - Unify leadership
    - Clarify the brand strategy
    - Secure public support from all three commissioners
    - Secure the land
    - Confirm the exact cost with an operating plan
    - Form a Building Committee, and seek City and County support
- Recommendations to guide the campaign itself:
    - Develop a case statement
    - Write a communications plan
    - Conduct volunteer recruitment
    - Develop a donor engagement, recognition, and stewardship plan

BrandRaise proposes adding a six-month Campaign Prep Consulting package from January through June 2027. The Pre-campaign Phase would then begin in August 2027, the Silent Phase would shorten to eight months, and the tentative bond vote would remain in November 2028. The Public Phase would run March through September 2029.

The BrandRaise team is grateful to the Flathead County Library team, the Board of Trustees, the Library Foundation, and the Study Committee for their dedication to this process. The openness, honesty, and help connecting with key community members made this study possible. Also, thank you to the more than 300 community members who shared their time and perspectives through interviews, focus groups, and the public survey. The engagement shows how much this community cares about its library, and it gives the library a strong foundation to build on as it prepares for what comes next.

The community has shown it believes in the library. The work ahead is to turn that belief into a clear plan, unified leadership, and committed donors.

Situation Analysis

A Library Built on 130 Years of Community Belief

Informed by the 2023-2028 Strategic Plan, published under the library's former name, ImagineIF Libraries of Flathead County

Flathead County Library - Kalispell has served the community since 1892 and today serves as the central library for the Flathead County Library System. Serving a county of more than 115,000 residents, the library provides access to books, digital resources, technology, public computers, Wi-Fi, and spaces for learning and community connection. Approximately 800 people visit the Kalispell library each day.

Since its earliest days, the Kalispell library has been built on community support. In 1901, local citizens came together to secure funding for a Free Library, demonstrating their belief in the power of public libraries. More than 130 years later, that same spirit of community investment and shared purpose can help create a new library that will serve future generations across Flathead County.

Community support remains strong. As library use continues to grow, the library has expanded programs, increased staffing, broadened access to materials, and invested in new service models to better serve residents throughout Flathead County.

Strategic Goals and Progress

The 2023-2028 Strategic Plan focuses on three priorities: welcoming spaces, literacy and lifelong learning, and community connection. Key goals include improving facilities, expanding access, growing collections and programs, and building a team that can meet the needs of a growing population.

Significant progress has already been made. Access has expanded through the Evergreen Smart Locker location, programming has increased across all library sites, and staffing has grown to meet community needs, including additional positions in Bigfork and the creation of a Head Librarian role to strengthen system-wide leadership and coordination.

Flathead County Library - Kalispell Current Challenges

As of October 2026, the library's success has outgrown its home. Nationally, library visits nearly doubled between 2021 and 2023, reaching over 800 million, according to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) Public Libraries Survey. The Flathead Valley is part of that rebound. Growth in programming, access points, and library registrations has highlighted the limitations of the current Kalispell facility and increased demand for space, technology, parking, and accessibility improvements.

Several factors make a long-term facility solution necessary:

- Registered cardholders increased from 34,302 in 2022 to 43,704 in July 2026, a growth of approximately 27 percent.
- The current building is more than 50 years old and its infrastructure is aging.
- The library's lease expires in 2033, creating a firm timeline for future facility planning.
- Accessibility, safety, and parking improvements are needed to better serve patrons.
- After evaluating renovation options and more than 20 alternative locations, the library determined that a new facility offers the most effective long-term solution to meet community needs and support future growth.

With measurable progress already underway and community demand continuing to grow, the library is prepared to take the next step. Investments in services, programming, and staffing have strengthened the organization. The next challenge is ensuring the library has a facility capable of supporting literacy, lifelong learning, and community connection for decades to come.

Programming and Community Partnerships

Flathead County Library - Kalispell hosts dozens of programs and events throughout the year. These include literacy offerings, digital resources, community engagement events, and hands-on enrichment activities for all ages. The reach of the library is not just within its walls.

Through class visits, Storytime at the Pool, guided hikes, the Mobile Memory Café, and partnerships with schools, child care centers, and community organizations across the region, Flathead County Library - Kalispell's impact is wide-reaching throughout Flathead County.

In 2025 and in 2026, FCL has hosted and reached out to the community with the following programs:

Literacy
Summer Reading Program
Author Visits
StoryWalk
Friends of the Library Book club
Storytime at the Pool
Baby and Toddler Storytime
Repurposed Reads
Sensory Play Saturday
Teen Fandom
Symphony Storytime
One Book Montana
Wild Explorers Wednesday Workshop
Guided Poetry Hike
Preschool Storytime
Test Proctoring
Class Visits

Digital Resources
Book a Techie Service
Nintendo Switch Days
Libby App for ebooks, digital audiobooks and magazines.
TumbleBook Library
Novelist
Montana Library 2 Go
Consumer Reports
MT Nonprofit Association Resource Center
Medline Plus
Biography Reference Center
HeritageQuest
Montana Memory Project

Community Engagement
Community Library Tours
Genealogy Classes
Hawk Watch
Doug Follett- Glacier's Poet Documentary Screening
Wingspan Game Night
Flathead Birds by the Season
Seed Cleaning and Packaging Party
Audubon Christmas Bird Count
AARP Smart Driver Course
Bird Collisions in the Anthropocene
Salish Kootenai Art Reception
Craft for Conservation
Glacier National Park Today- Foraging
Native Plants for Pollinators and Birds
Monarch Butterflies in Montana
Can I Eat This? Guided Hike of Edible Flowers and Shrubs
Mobile Memory Café
Montana Wildflowers
History of Fire in Bigfork MT
America 250 Reading of the Declaration

America 250 American Songs and Solos with Larry Almeida Classic Guitarist
Holistic Habitat Yards and Gardens

Enrichment Activities
Letterpress Workshop
Intuitive Painting Classes
Mini Portable Painting Kits
Quilting Workshop
Quarterly Themed Bingo
Batik Dying
Bento Boxes
Dragon Eye Sculptures
Creative Aging Classes
Baroque Music Concert
Mexican Paper Flowers
Pumpkin Pillow Workshop
Slow Stitching Sampler Class
Decorative Cookie Piping Zone
Cross Stitch Bookmarks
The Art of Giving
Cozy Soup Kit Zone
Decoupage Keychains
Mix Your Own Steak Rub Zone
Foam Sculptures
Tiny Teacup Gardens
Mosaic Magnets
Fidget Spinner Zone
DIY Sketchbook
Flower Bookmarks
Play Expo
Coral Reef Making
Seed Library
Telescopes
Board Games
Blood Pressure Kits
Night Goggles
Metal Detectors

The following groups visit the Flathead County Library - Kalispell main branch:

- Friends of the Flathead County Library
- Flathead County Library Foundation
- Kalispell and Whitefish Parks and Rec
- CASA for Kids
- Outside Kids
- Headstart
- Boy and Girls Club
- Bee Hive Homes of Columbia Falls
- Land To Hand
- The Glacier Institute
- The occasional home-schooling group and also an art group
- Lighthouse Christian Home
- Logan Health
- Bigfork Chess Club
- 4 or 5 book clubs
- A 4H club
- CFBB

Schools
- St. Matthew's Catholic School
- Trinity Lutheran School
- Russell Elementary
- Fair-Mont-Egan School
- Hedges Elementary
- Rankin Elementary
- Elrod Elementary
- Peterson Elementary
- Evergreen Schools
- Bigfork High School
- Kalispell Montessori
- Bigfork High School
- Smith Valley School
- Glacier Gateway Elementary School
- Ruder Elementary School
- Honey Bear Montessori
- Bigfork Elementary School

Daycares and Childcare Centers

- Firefly Children's Center
- Simmons Preschool
- Spread Their Wings Preschool
- Flathead Childcare Columbia Falls
- Yellow Bridge Daycare
- Bigfork After School program (previously ACES)

Campaign Readiness Study Purpose and Methodology

In July 2026, the Flathead County Library Board of Trustees contracted with BrandRaise to conduct a Campaign Readiness Study to assess the readiness of the library and the readiness of a capital campaign within the Flathead Valley.

In collaboration with the Kalispell branch Library team, the Board of Trustees, and the Library Foundation, our main purpose of this study was to determine if private individuals, donors, area foundations, and Flathead Valley business and corporations would support a $13M campaign and $6-$8M bond to build a new Kalispell library.

The project centered around a Study Summit, which is the heart of the Campaign Readiness Study. It is a multi-day period of in-depth, conversational engagement with community stakeholders. The information gathered is designed to provide a clear, honest picture of how the library is perceived and how the community feels about the proposed project.

Additional goals of the study included:

- Identifying an attainable goal range
- Outlining the most effective fundraising strategy for meeting the proposed goal or a successful goal range
- Identifying favorable conditions as well as potential conflicts for the fundraising campaign
- Outlining any challenges that could inhibit or slow the fundraising process
- Assessing the level of financial support available within the Flathead Valley
- Cultivating prospective contributors
- Identifying and cultivating potential campaign leaders and volunteers
- Providing an opportunity for stakeholders to voice their opinions about the proposed project
- Educating philanthropic and community leaders about the status of the proposed project

Conducting the Brand and Fundraising Audit

In August 2026, a Brand and Fundraising Audit was conducted with the goal of understanding both the library and the foundation's brand and major gifts fundraising efforts, and what needed to be in place to pursue a capital campaign forward with confidence.

The audit report was organized around the three phases of a capital campaign: Pre-Campaign, Silent, and Public. Each phase included what was working well, and where there was room to grow.

The results of that report showed that across all three phases, the library has a clear strategic direction and strong momentum for the proposed project, but that clarity hasn't yet been converted into the documentation and systems that a large-scale campaign would require. The need for documentation and systems was most concentrated to the Pre-Campaign phase, where brand strategy, committee structure, case statement development, and operational infrastructure all require formal understanding and documentation to be campaign-ready. Silent and Public phase readiness both depend on that foundational work being completed first.

Preparing for the Study Summit

To help prepare for a successful Study Summit, a Campaign Readiness Study committee was formed. The purpose of the committee was to provide input and support for the Campaign Readiness Study. This included providing feedback on the project summary (see appendix), identifying and recruiting area residents to participate in the Study Summit, supporting BrandRaise with input and ideas to facilitate a thorough investigation of a potential capital campaign, and ultimately providing a recommendation to the Board of Trustees regarding the proposed campaign.

The committee had 14 members, including:

- Laurie Barron
- Lorraine Clarno
- Carmen Cuthbertson
- Margaret Davis
- Kisa Davison
- Teri Dugan
- Ryan Eney
- Sharon Furlong
- Josh Kroll
- Jinnifer Mariman
- Valeri McGarvey
- Mike Smith
- Jane Wheeler
- Erica Wirtala

Conducting the Study Summit

The Flathead Library - Kalispell Study Summit was held from Monday, October 5, 2026 through Friday, October 16, 2026. In total, the BrandRaise team conducted 61 virtual one-on-one interviews, and six focus groups with a total of 26 participants.

In addition to the interviews and focus groups, there was a public survey shared with the broader community, resulting in a total of 223 respondents.

Where the survey was shared digitally:

- Friends of the Library email newsletter,
- Flathead County Library email newsletter
- Flathead County Library Facebook and Instagram
- Chamber email
- Foundation email newsletter,
- Foundation Facebook and Instagram

Where the survey was shared in-person:

- Flathead County Library library door poster
- Library computer kiosk
- Northwest Montana Fair booth
- Charro's Coffee House
- Bias Brewing
- Black Rifle Coffee
- VFW
- Wheat Montana
- Sweet Peaks
- Ceres
- Insty Prints
- Rocky Mountain Outfitters
- Norm's News
- Bonelli's Bistro
- Shopping areas north of Kalispell
- City Brew
- Mountain Valley Food Store
- Flathead Valley Community College, Sportsman & Ski Haus
- Natural Grocers
- REI

Campaign Readiness Study Reporting

The Campaign Readiness Study concludes with an in-depth report that answers the basic question of whether or not the community can and will support the proposed project.

The following methodologies were used to obtain the conclusions and subsequent recommendations:

- Reviewed the history of the organization and its fundraising/development efforts
- Conducted a brand and fundraising audit of the organization

- Conducted organization fact-finding with staff, Board of Directors, and key stakeholders
- Conducted 1:1 interviews and facilitated focus groups
- Reviewed results of an online public survey from 223 community members. *(Note: Not all respondents answered every question.)*
- Held many general discussions with staff and volunteers

Input from the interview and survey responses is detailed in the findings section of this report. Questions can be found in the report's appendix.

Findings, Analysis, and Recommendations

Favorable Factors

01. Confidence in the Flathead Valley community being able to financially support a $13M private fundraising goal amount.

Between the personal interviews and focus groups, the overwhelming sentiment was that the Flathead Valley community has the capacity to reach the goal. Several individuals pointed to the recent Whitefish Community Foundation fundraiser raising $10M as an example of the philanthropic nature of community members. Adding to this momentum, the Library has already received a $200,000 gift designated for the new land and building. This is a significant positive: it is a strong early signal of donor confidence in the project.

Of the 51 personal interviewees who were asked whether they would personally contribute to the project, 47% (24) said they would, 45% (23) said they might but didn't know of a range, and one individual said they would not.

In terms of whether or not the goal was reasonable, 50% (31) of interviewees said it was, stating things like, "In building any large facility, it's better to be realistic and not under-estimate. If you have an opportunity to build it, build what you need." 30% of interviewees didn't know if the private goal amount was reasonable because of the effort required to reach that amount and whether or not the philanthropic community would support this specific project. And two individuals said the goal was unreasonable.

Focus group participants echoed similar patterns in that they believed the money was here in the valley, but the lack of connection to the library and details about the proposed project make it challenging for individuals to get excited. One participant stated, "If a solid plan is put into place, there are definitely people who would want to contribute."

Public Survey Data

- Of 210 respondents, 55% (117) said the $13M goal was reasonable, 41% (88) said possibly, and just 2% (5) said no
- Of 150 respondents, 42% (78) said they would consider giving to the project, 41% (22) said they would not consider giving, and 35% (66) said they would possibly consider giving

From the Interviews

> *"I think there's a lot of people out there, similar to Bozeman, who truly believe in libraries, and getting those connections to those here in our valley, who might want to write a big check."*
>
> *"I look at the fact that the college did it. Other places have done it. It may take a year or three but there are very philanthropic people in this area."*

Why Confidence Matters in a Capital Campaign

Capital campaigns run on urgency and momentum, and momentum is built on confidence. When donors, volunteers, and community leaders believe a project can succeed, they are far more willing to commit early, and early commitments are what make later gifts possible.

The sentiment gathered here is a meaningful asset. Half of interviewees called the $13M goal reasonable, 55% of survey respondents agreed, and nearly everyone who has doubts framed them as questions about the plan, not about the community's capacity. That distinction is very important. Doubts about readiness can be addressed with strategy, however doubts about capacity are much harder to overcome.

Why confidence is a favorable factor:

1. **Leadership gifts set the pace.** Campaigns are typically won or lost in the silent phase. The first 60 to 70 percent of a goal usually comes from a small number of leadership gifts, and those donors give when they believe the goal is achievable and others will follow. Community confidence makes those early asks easier to make and easier to say yes to.

2. **Confidence attracts confidence.** Donors look to one another. A lead donor who sees peers taking the project seriously is more likely to stretch, and a campaign cabinet that believes in the goal recruits stronger volunteers. The Whitefish Community Foundation example shows that local donors have already seen what is possible here, which gives this campaign a credible local precedent.

3. **It protects against stalled campaigns.** Campaigns lose momentum when early progress is slow. A community that starts with belief in the goal tolerates the natural slow stretches of a multi-year effort. As one interviewee noted, it may take a year or three, and that patience is only available when confidence is high.

4. **It supports public and matching strategies.** Visible gifts create the proof that fuels challenge grants, matching gifts, and public phase appeals. Those tools work best when the community already believes the total is within reach.

5. **It shapes how the goal is perceived.** A goal that feels reasonable invites participation. A goal that feels out of reach invites hesitation, even from people who could give. Starting from a position of confidence means the campaign spends its energy on making the case and not on defending the number.

What this means for next steps.
The data shows capacity is not the barrier. The barrier is connection and clarity. Focus group participants said the lack of connection to the library and limited project details make it hard to get excited. That is a solvable problem, as outlined in challenging factor 01 and 04, and solving it is how confidence converts into commitments: a clear case for support, visible leadership, and early, personal engagement with the donors most likely to lead.

02. Large community support of the Flathead County Library - Kalispell, and libraries in general as a community gathering place.

Within the personal interviews and the focus groups, there was positive feedback around libraries in general, stating that a well-used library says the community is thriving, connected, entrusting, engaged, strong, healthy, dynamic, educated, and willing to invest in itself. The other common thread shared between the interviews and focus groups was that a well-used library meant the community valued investing in education, providing access to information, and sharing resources with everyone.

When it comes to the engagement with the library from interviewees (59 responses), 52% (31) are current library card holders, and 40% (24) receive the library's email newsletter. Of the 57 that were asked about social media engagement, 35% (20) follow at least one channel, with the predominant one being Facebook. In the focus groups, about half of the participants were receiving the email newsletter, and Facebook was the most popular social media channel to engage with the library.

In terms of the perception of the Kalispell branch and whether or not it's innovative, almost half of the personal interviews responded that they believed it was. About 30% (15) of those asked echoed a sentiment around the library doing the best they can, with what they have available to them, making statements like, *"It's as innovative as it can be within its constraints."* Focus group participants had similar feedback in that some thought it was, while others were more uncertain because of the library's current circumstances.

When asked to describe the library, personal interviewee participants consistently stated words like *welcoming, inviting, friendly, helpful, community-oriented, historic, useful, and resourceful.*

Public Survey Data

- Of 132 respondents, 55% (73) stated being very familiar with the Flathead Library - Kalispell, 32% (43) said somewhat familiar, and 13% (16) said not familiar.
- Of 205 respondents, 80% (165) said building a new and expanded Flathead County Library in Kalispell was important, 5% (11) were mixed or unsure, and 14% (29) said a new building was not important
- Of 216 respondents, 42% (92) receive the Flathead Library - Kalispell email newsletter, 30% (66) didn't realize there was a newsletter, and 26% (58) are not on the newsletter list
- Of 154 respondents, 64% (100) follow the Flathead Library - Kalispell on Facebook, 33% (51) follow via Instagram, and 2% (3) follow via YouTube

From the Interviews

"When I see a town that has an excellent library it tells me a lot about the economic health of the community. It also indicates that it's a good place to raise a family. "

"That community matters and that information and education are important and accessible to all."

Why Community Support Matters, and Why It Is Bigger Than a Building

Capital campaigns run on engagement, and engagement is built on community support. When a community values its library and uses it regularly, the campaign starts with awareness, goodwill, and people who are already connected to the cause. That is a meaningful asset before a single ask is made.

The sentiment gathered here is strong. Just over half of interviewees (52%) currently hold a library card, and 64% of survey respondents who follow the library on social media do so on Facebook, which shows an audience that is already connected and paying attention. Many also said a well-used library signals a community that is thriving, connected, and willing to invest in itself. That identity is something the campaign can be built on.

Why support is a favorable factor:

1. **Support translates to engagement.** People who hold library cards, read the newsletter, and follow the library on social media are already paying attention. They are the people most likely to open an invitation, attend an event, and listen to the case for support. A community that is merely sympathetic is hard to mobilize, while a community that is already engaged can be asked to act.

2. **Volunteers are needed to get the job done.** A campaign of this size cannot be carried by the staff, Foundation or Board of Trustees alone. It takes volunteers to make introductions, serve on committees, and speak up for the project. Broad community support widens the pool of people willing to do that work and makes it easier to recruit strong campaign leadership.

3. **Support becomes relationships, and relationships are what the campaign needs.** Major gifts come from relationships built over time, not from announcements. Every card holder, newsletter subscriber, and follower is a potential relationship. The more people who feel connected to the library, the more opportunities the campaign has to turn goodwill into conversations, and conversations into commitments.

4. **The library's identity strengthens the case.** As one interviewee put it, an excellent library says a lot about the economic health of a community and signals a good place to raise a family. That allows the project to be framed as an investment in the whole community's future, not only a request on behalf of the library, which resonates with donors who care about the place they live.

5. **It gives the campaign a place to start.** Existing channels are already in use. Roughly 40% of interviewees and 42% of survey respondents receive the newsletter, and Facebook is the most popular social channel across the interviews, focus groups, and survey. A campaign that begins with an engaged audience can move faster and spend less energy building awareness from scratch.

What this means for next steps.
The data shows support is not the barrier, but reach is. About 30% of survey respondents did not know the newsletter existed, which means there is a sizable audience that could be engaged with very little effort. Growing newsletter sign-ups, using Facebook as the primary channel for campaign updates, and inviting people who already love the library into specific volunteer roles is how support converts into participation, and participation into the relationships the campaign depends on.

Challenging Factors

01. Lack of clarity and confidence in the project because the land has not been secured, and the building details have not been confirmed.

When asked about potential concerns surrounding the proposed project, personal interview and focus group participants expressed uncertainty about the project's current status and whether the necessary details had been established to move forward. In particular, the lack of a secured

site, confirmed building plans, and a clearly defined funding structure contributed to concerns about the project's feasibility. And, a lack of visible project details like architectural renderings or detailed building plans raised concerns about the project being too conceptual, rather than fully defined.

Further questions about the proposed location and the associated developers also contributed to uncertainty. Interviewees and participants referenced the lack of confirmed land, the potential impact of TIF funding, and whether the project was directly tied to the rest of the construction of the proposed location property.

In terms of funding, interviewees, focus group participants, and public survey respondents expressed concern about the broad cost estimates, noting that the wide range made it difficult to fully assess the project's financial feasibility or understand what the final building would include. Another part of funding that came up frequently was the lack of clarity around whether there would be sufficient funding to support staffing, operations, maintenance, technology, and other ongoing expenses.

> **From the Interviews**
> *"It feels like we're raising money without a plan. We don't have space, we don't have land. If that's the status quo, that concerns me."*
>
> *"The funding structure. It's so vague. What I think when I see that is people don't know what they're doing. It's too broad."*

Why Clarity Matters, and Why Donors Give to What They Can See

Capital campaigns run on confidence, and confidence is built on clarity. When donors understand what is being built, where it will stand, what it will cost, and how it will be sustained, they can make a decision. When those answers are missing, they hesitate, even when they believe in the library.

The sentiment gathered here is consistent. Interviewees, focus group participants, and survey respondents all said they support the idea of a new library. Their hesitation was about the project's current status: no secured site, no confirmed building plans, no visible renderings, a broad cost range, and a funding structure they described as vague. Those gaps keep a project feeling conceptual instead of real.

Why lack of clarity in the project is a challenging factor:

1. **People do not give when they still have questions.** A donor who is unsure about the location, the cost, or the plan is unlikely to commit, and is even less likely to stretch to a leadership or lead gift. Unanswered questions get a "maybe later," and a campaign

cannot build momentum on “maybe later.” This is closely tied to Challenging Factor 04, where willingness to give was strong but often undefined.

2. **People want to see themselves in the project.** Donors give to what they can picture: their family visiting, their children studying, their neighbors gathering. Without a secured site, they cannot place the library on a map, walk the route there, or imagine using it. Renderings and building plans help for the same reason. Until they exist, the project stays an idea and not a place people can see themselves in.

3. **A broad cost range signals that the details have not been fully worked through.** A spread as wide as a $10M difference leaves donors asking whether the numbers have been examined line by line. Major donors in particular want to see that the project has been scrutinized before they invest in it. A range that wide makes it hard to judge what the final building will include or whether the $13M goal is the correct one.
4. **Undetermined operating costs raise questions about sustainability.** Donors and taxpayers want to know that a new building can be staffed, maintained, and kept current with technology after the building is completed. The study heard repeatedly that it is unclear whether funding will cover staffing, operations, maintenance, and other ongoing expenses. A beautiful new building that the community cannot sustain is a risk donors will not take. This concern is reinforced in Challenging Factor 03, where property tax worries show how closely the community watches the long-term cost of the library.

What this means for next steps.
The data shows the barrier is clarity, not capacity. Securing the land is the step that unlocks the other steps, because it makes the project concrete with renderings and building plans, and lets people see where the library will be. From there, narrowing the cost estimate and developing a clear operating and sustainability plan will show donors that the project has been fully examined. These steps match the recommendations to secure the land and to establish an exact cost before the campaign moves forward.

02. Community uncertainty in how supportive the Library Foundation Board, Board of Trustees, and county leadership is in the proposed project.

When asked what issues or concerns could impact the project, nearly 90% of personal interview responses focused on the library’s recent turbulent history and the lack of public support from county leadership. Interviewees expressed uncertainty about whether the Library Board of Trustees, County Commissioners, and Library Foundation were fully aligned in their support of the proposed project, and whether the existing support would be enough to carry the project forward.

Several interviewees emphasized the importance of visible and unified leadership, particularly from those in positions of political influence. One individual noted, “There’s got to be a champion that’s identified and preferably someone in political power.” Others shared feedback questioning whether county leadership would provide the necessary commitments to support the project, including funding and grant applications as examples. One participant shared, “We need the commissioners to come out with strong support for it.”

Another common theme around proposed project concerns was the past turbulent history and uncertainty in the current relationship between the Library Foundation and the Library Board of Trustees. Additional uncertainty also arose around whether the Board of Trustees vision for the library aligned with the broader community’s expectations, particularly around the library’s role within the community and whether the new building would prioritize all community members’ needs. Similar sentiments were echoed in the public survey. When asked about their current impression of the library, nearly 20% made some mention of the past board controversy creating a negative perception of the library, as well as questioning whether the board supports the library serving all community members.

> **From the Interviews**
> *“My concern is that we have a huge opportunity to build and raise money for a state-of-the-art building that is forward-thinking and forward-focused, but I do fear that without the right leadership and vision, that it will be a building and a shell.”*
>
> *“The current board seems split on the needs of all community members, but the library staff continue to do good work.”*

Why Leadership Alignment Matters, and Why Donors Invest in What Will Get Done

Capital campaigns run on trust, and trust starts at the top with those in leadership roles within the community. When the people with authority over a project are visibly aligned, donors can believe it will move forward. When that alignment is missing or uncertain, donors hold back, even when they love the library and believe in the need.

The sentiment gathered here was consistent. Nearly 90% of personal interview responses about potential concerns focused on the library’s recent turbulent history and the lack of public support from county leadership. Nearly 20% of public survey respondents who described their impression of the library mentioned the past board controversy. Interviewees were not questioning the value of a new library. They were questioning whether the Library Board of Trustees, the County Commissioners, and the Library Foundation are fully aligned behind it.

Why community uncertainty in leadership is a challenging factor:

1. **Leadership sets the tone for the whole community.** The County Commissioners and the Board of Trustees are the most visible voices on this project. When they are enthusiastic

and united, the community follows. When they are silent, divided, or lukewarm, the community notices and reads it as a signal about the project's priority.

2. **Alignment and buy-in from every group has to be present.** Support from some leaders is not enough. All three commissioners and every Board of Trustee need to publicly back the project and share one vision for it. The current picture is unanimous support for a new library, but not unanimous engagement, and donors can see the difference.

3. **People will not invest in a project that could stall because of relationships.** Donors want confidence that their gift will become a building. If a project could be delayed or derailed by strained relationships between the Library Board, the commissioners, and the Library Foundation Board, a gift looks like a risk and not an investment. Interviewees raised this directly, questioning whether county leadership would provide the funding, statements of support, and grant application commitments the project needs.

4. **Leadership behavior signals how much leaders want the project.** When leaders cannot set aside personal motives or past conflicts, donors conclude the project is not a high enough priority to them. Donors want to see leaders who care about this project enough to put differences aside.

This factor is reinforced by others in this report. Uncertain leadership support deepens the lack of clarity in Challenging Factor 01, since the funding structure and grant applications depend on county participation. It makes the bond harder, as described in Challenging Factor 03, because voters look to their elected leaders for cues. And it affects Challenging Factor 04, because major donors are unlikely to give leadership gifts to a project whose own leaders appear divided.

What this means for next steps.
The data shows the barrier is alignment, not enthusiasm for the library. Public, visible support from all three Commissioners and every Foundation Board member and Trustee is the step that makes the project credible to donors, and it matches the recommendations in this report. Repairing the relationships between the Board of Trustees, the Library Foundation, and the community is equally important, and it must happen before a campaign launches. Identifying a respected champion, ideally someone with political influence, would give the project the visible leadership donors are looking for.

03. Historical and consistent lack of community support for passing bonds and levies.

When asked what issues or concerns could impact the proposed project, personal interview responses, focus group participants, and public survey respondents all shared how challenging it has been to pass bonds within the community.

Among personal interviews, 34% (23) pointed to a history of bonds and levies being challenging to pass, with most of them failing entirely. The school bonds were repeatedly brought up as examples of the Flathead Valley not supporting the community, with one participant stating, “They just don’t pass them here.”

Among all the gathered feedback, one of the most common reasons for why bonds do not pass is that community members have a hard time supporting something that doesn’t affect them personally. Because not every community member uses or sees the library as a necessity, the concern was that it would be even more challenging to get the necessary support for a majority vote.

The other most common piece of feedback as to why bonds don’t pass is the perception of already-high property taxes. While a significant number of personal interview and focus group participants pointed to the recent jail bond passing as a success, the positivity was tempered by concerns of a library bond raising taxes even higher.

Public Survey Data

- Of 94 respondents, 42% (40) cited property tax concerns and 15% (15) stated community support concerns, as to why a library bond may not pass

From the Interviews

“When the county turns down school bond issue after issue, saying it’s just wasting money and the county needs to figure another way, it makes you think if there is truly a belief in education and then a belief in libraries.”

“The library is not seen as a piece of infrastructure equal to the others. I think that more people would be supportive of a bond if they believed that the library wasn’t just for fun but also provides a lot of useful, educational value.”

Why the Bond Matters, and Why the Value of a Library Has to Be Understood

A bond is a public vote, and a public vote requires public understanding. People approve what they believe is worth the cost. When a community does not see what a library does, the bond becomes a question about taxes instead of a question about the community’s future, and the capital campaign inherits that doubt.

The sentiment gathered here was consistent. Interviewees, focus group participants, and survey respondents all described how hard it has been to pass bonds and levies in the Flathead Valley, with school bonds coming up as the example. Many said the library is not seen as infrastructure equal to public safety or schools.

Why historical challenges of bonds passing is a challenging factor:

1. **A campaign cannot succeed without a broad understanding of what it is raising money for.** The private goal and the bond are two halves of one project, and both depend on people believing the library is worth the investment. Donors and voters are largely the same community. If the public sees the library as optional, both asks will meet hesitation.

2. **People vote for what affects them personally.** Residents struggle to support something they do not use. Not everyone holds a library card, so the case has to reach people who have never walked through the door and show how a library benefits the whole community, including those who never borrow a book.

3. **The short-term effects are visible, but the long-term effects are the case.** In the short term, a new library means construction activity, a renewed public space, and a reason for residents and visitors to spend time downtown. In the long term, a library supports a more educated community, and a more educated community leads to a stronger workforce, higher earning potential, more local business creation, and more informed civic participation. Those outcomes attract employers and families, which is why an excellent library signals a thriving, healthy community. Voters who see the library as economic development, and not only a service, are far more likely to support a bond.

4. **Concern about property taxes is valid and has to be met with value.** The recent jail bond passing was seen as a success, but that optimism was tempered by worry that a library bond would raise taxes further. Tax concern does not disappear on its own. It shifts when people understand what they get in return and what the cost means for their household.

Based on what we learned through our interviews and collected data, commissioners will not place a bond on the ballot without knowing the project cost and how much of it would need to come from taxpayers. Without that number, voters never get the chance to decide. The tax impact shows why. For example, a bond that adds $1 per $100,000 of assessed value is a very different request than one that adds $35 per $100,000, and commissioners are unlikely to support a bond that raises taxes significantly. When they can see a likely range, they can support a concrete amount for voters to approve.

Other findings in this report reinforce this gap. The bond is harder to pass when leadership is not visibly aligned (Challenging Factor 02), because voters look to elected leaders for cues. It

also depends on the cost clarity described in Challenging Factor 01, since voters will not approve a number that looks loose. The education gap behind both is explored in Challenging Factor 05, which addresses the perception that libraries are no longer necessary.

What this means for next steps.
The barrier is understanding, not opposition to the library itself. An early, sustained public education effort should come before the bond vote. It should explain what a modern library does, what it means for the local economy and the community's education over time, and what the bond costs a typical household. Using the voices of residents who already rely on the library will help reach those who do not. Visible support from county leadership and donors and a clear cost estimate will strengthen the message. These steps match the recommendations to secure public commitment from the commissioners and board and to establish an exact cost before the campaign moves forward.

04. Uncertainty of the philanthropic community supporting the library.

While there is confidence in the Flathead Valley's ability to meet the private fundraising goal, there is uncertainty in whether or not those that have capacity, will support it, or if the relationship with the library even exists yet. As one participant stated, in regards to if they knew anyone who had the capacity to make a lead gift, "Yes, of course. But they don't have a relationship with the library."

The relationship uncertainty also showed up in the participation of the Study Summit. A total of 147 individuals were asked to participate as a personal interviewee or focus group participant. Of those that were asked, 69% (102) chose to participate and were added to the schedule. From those 102 individuals, 85% (87) attended their interview or focus group.

Among the personal interviewees and public survey respondents, a willingness to give was strong, but often undefined. While 92% (46/50) of the personal interviewees that were asked if they would donate to the project said yes, only 48% provided an estimate, with the total amounting to $395,000. In totalling the dollar figures provided from all personal interviews and public survey responses, the potential gift range is between $454,600 to $513,834.

Public Survey Data

- Of 224 respondents, 34% (78) said they would consider making a personal gift to the campaign, 18% (41) said they would not, 28% (63) said they would possibly consider making a gift, and 18% (42) left the question blank.

From the Interviews
"There's a lot of wealth in this community. But it's part-time, not full-time. Trying to get a wealthy person who's here part time, you have to be careful because their heart might not be there."
"Depends on how many big fish you have, that have a serious heart for the library. That's a lot of money to raise."

Why Philanthropic Confidence Matters, and Why Uncertainty Cannot Be the Majority

Capital campaigns are won by a relatively small group of donors who give early and give large. A campaign readiness study is the best way to learn whether those donors exist, whether they are connected to the project, and whether they are willing to say so. Belief that the money is in the community is not the same as evidence that it will be given.

The sentiment gathered here was encouraging but undefined. Interviewees and survey respondents said they would consider giving, but many could not say how much, and several noted that the people with the greatest capacity have no relationship with the library yet. Participation in the Study Summit showed the same pattern. Many of the people invited declined or did not respond, and some who agreed did not attend.

Based on a review of the interview pools from other campaign readiness studies conducted in this region over the last decade by a local firm, we found similar ranges of participation, declines, and non-responses. Where participation has been high and declines have been low, campaigns have gone on to succeed. Where participation has been low and declines and non-responses high, campaigns have been difficult. The library's results look more like the second group than the first.

Why uncertainty in philanthropic support is a challenging factor:

1. **Participation is a measure of relationship.** People engage with a study when they feel connected to the organization and invested in the outcome. When a large share of those invited decline, do not respond, or do not show up, it suggests the connection to the library is not yet strong enough to complete a campaign, even among people who were identified as likely supporters.

2. **Willingness to give is not the same as a commitment.** Many people said yes or possibly, but few attached an amount. A campaign needs defined gifts to meet a goal range, and until those gifts are identified, the goal rests on assumptions and not on evidence.

3. **A goal amount cannot be responsibly set yet.** A goal range is built from the gifts a campaign can expect from its lead donors, and that information does not exist yet. Until lead gifts are identified and relationships exist to support them, any number set today

would be an estimate of what the community could give, not measure what it has said it will give.

4. **Some uncertainty is normal, but it cannot be the majority.** Campaign goals can still be reached when some prospects are undecided. When the majority of responses are uncertain, as they are now, there is not enough confirmed support to build a campaign plan around. Uncertainty at this level is a signal to build more support before launching.

5. **Capacity without connection does not produce gifts.** Part-time residents and wealthy individuals may have the means, but they give where their hearts are. A potential lead donor who has no relationship with the library is unlikely to make a leadership gift when first asked, which is why cultivation has to come before solicitation.

This factor is reinforced by others in this report. The lack of a secured site and confirmed plans (Challenging Factor 01) gives prospective donors nothing concrete to respond to, which keeps their answers vague. Questions about leadership alignment (Challenging Factor 02) make major donors cautious about committing before they see unity. And the limited understanding of the library's value (Challenging Factor 05) makes it harder for undecided prospects to move toward a yes.

What this means for next steps.
The data shows the barrier is relationship and definition, not capacity. Before a campaign launches, the library and foundation should begin personal cultivation of the donors most likely to lead, with the goal of turning general willingness into defined gifts. Those gifts are what allow a goal range to be set. Securing the land, confirming the cost, and showing unified leadership will give those donors something to respond to. Reassessing readiness in six months, as recommended in this report, allows time to build those relationships and to measure whether uncertainty has given way to commitments. A second round of conversations with a stronger, more engaged pool would show whether a goal range can be established and the campaign is ready to proceed.

05. Uncertainty about the community's support for a new library due to a perceived limited understanding of a library's full capabilities and potential.

Nearly all personal interview and focus group participants who were asked about the value of a library stated things like, "I firmly believe in libraries, and they're essential even in the age of the internet." However, those opinions were equally hindered by concerns that the broader community may not fully understand the library's capabilities or recognize the value of a new building. It was mentioned several times if libraries were seen as necessary by the broader community because information, books, and other resources are readily available online. As one personal interview participant shared, "The rhetoric we hear is that libraries aren't necessary any

more since we have everything on our phone. Where is the level of value of the library when we have access to everything?"

Because of this questioning around the value of libraries, several personal interviewees and focus group participants expressed concern around the community members who do not regularly use the library not understanding the need for a new building.

While there were a range of ideas on how to communicate the true value of a library as being a place to help community members navigate finding information, research, and resources, an equal concern was shared around whether a more all-encompassing vision for the library would be accepted by library leaders or community members.

> **From the Interviews**
> *"I think a lot of people think libraries are not relevant."*
>
> *"How to create the right public perception of what the library actually does? There are a lot of people that don't use the library. The library is not seen as a piece of infrastructure equal to the others."*

Why Perceived Value Matters, and Why a Library's Full Potential Has to Be Seen

Capital campaigns run on a shared belief that the project is worth the investment. When people understand what the library does, they can see what a new building makes possible. When they do not, the campaign has to explain the need before it can ask for support, and that requires time.

The sentiment gathered here was nuanced. Nearly everyone who was asked said they believe in libraries and consider them essential. The hesitation was about the broader community. Interviewees and focus group participants worried that the broader community, and especially residents who do not use the library regularly, may not recognize what a library offers today or why a new building is needed. Some also questioned whether a more all-encompassing vision for the library would be embraced by library leaders and the community alike.

A gap like this is not unusual in a campaign, and it is not one that cannot be overcome. It is important to name it plainly and address it openly, because a campaign that ignores it will spend its energy defending the project instead of advancing it.

Why uncertainty in the community's support is a challenging factor:

1. **People give to what they understand and value.** A donor who sees the library as a place for books alone may not see why a new building warrants a significant gift. A donor who sees it as a hub for learning, research, connection, and opportunity understands the

stakes. The perceived value of the library sets the ceiling on what people are willing to give.

2. **Belief in libraries and belief in this project are two different things.** Support for libraries in general is strong, but it does not automatically become support for a new building. The connection between the value of a library and the need for this specific project has to be drawn clearly and repeatedly, or people who agree in principle will stay on the sidelines.

3. **The "everything is on my phone" argument has to be answered.** Many people assume information and resources are available online, so a physical library seems optional. The campaign needs to show what a phone cannot provide: guidance in finding and evaluating information, technology access and training, space to learn and gather, and services for people of every age and background.

4. **A broader vision requires broader agreement.** If the case for the new library rests on a vision that leaders and community members do not share, the message will be inconsistent. Agreement on what the library is for has to come before the campaign tells that story to donors.

This factor is reinforced by others in this report. It is the root of the education gap that makes the bond difficult (Challenging Factor 03), since voters will not approve what they do not see as essential. It connects to leadership alignment (Challenging Factor 02), because a shared vision among the board and commissioners is what makes a consistent message possible. And it affects donor confidence (Challenging Factor 04), because prospects who are unsure of the library's value are slower to move from "possibly" to a defined gift.

What this means for next steps.
The data shows the barrier is perception, not opposition. The library, Board of Trustees, and Library Foundation should agree on a clear, shared description of what the library does and why a new building matters, and then tell that story consistently through the newsletter, Facebook, community conversations, and the voices of residents who rely on the library. Reaching people who do not use the library today, and showing them how it serves the whole community, is what turns general belief in libraries into support for this project. This work should begin now and continue alongside the steps recommended in this report, so the community understands the value of the library well before a campaign or bond vote.

Recommendations

Based on the brand and fundraising audit, challenging factors and favorable factors, we've broken our recommendations into two categories. Campaign Prep Recommendations include the activities and tasks we recommend completing before a capital campaign is started. Capital Campaign Recommendations are the activities and tasks we recommend completing during a capital campaign.

Campaign Prep Recommendations

Brand, Marketing, and Communications

1. **Initiate intentional rapport building between the Library Board or Trustees, the Library Foundation, and public/community:** Create a structured communications plan for the three groups to work as one team, with regular joint meetings and open community communications.

2. **Clarify the Flathead County Library's brand strategy:** Develop a brand strategy for the Flathead County Library system, setting a clear direction for the library and its future.

3. **Secure public support from all three commissioners:** Invite each commissioner into the conversation early and ask for a public statement of support.

4. **Unify the Library Board of Trustees around a shared vision for the proposed project:** Define a collective vision for the new library that everyone supports, and have each board member speak about it consistently.

Library Building

1. **Secure the land before a capital campaign moves forward:** Finalize the land's location with clear terms and ownership, and explore whether it could be donated or acquired at a reduced cost.

2. **Confirm the exact cost of the new building:** Work with architects and contractors to narrow the estimate to a firm number, rather than a $10M difference, and pair it with a plan for future annual operating and maintenance costs.

3. **Develop a Building Committee:** Establish a small group of individuals who can meet regularly to provide ongoing feedback about a building's new location, design, and functionality.

Fundraising

1. **Seek monetary support from the City and County:** Explore options and make an ask for receiving monetary support from the City of Kalispell and Flathead County.

Capital Campaign Goal Amount

1. **Reassess campaign readiness in six months:** Delay a capital campaign for now, because specific gift amounts have not been identified and a goal range cannot yet be established. Use the six months to secure the land, confirm the cost, and begin personal conversations with likely lead donors, then reassess.

Capital Campaign Recommendations

Brand, Marketing, and Communications

1. **Develop a case statement:** Create a compelling and clear case statement that answers the key questions the community identified during the Study Summit, including location, cost, sustainability, and why a new building is needed.

2. **Create a campaign-specific communications plan:** Develop a communications plan with KPIs, metrics, and content pillars for the entirety of a campaign.

Volunteer Engagement

1. **Recruit volunteers:** Connect with, recruit, and train interested volunteers identified in the Study Summit.

Fundraising

1. **Create a donor engagement journey map:** Document a donor's journey from awareness through major gift solicitation and advocacy, so it's clear how a supporter can be engaged.

2. **Create a donor recognition plan and matrix:** Define the criteria and activities that happen after an individual contributes to the campaign.

3. **Create a donor stewardship plan:** Define specific touchpoints, timing, and ownership for donors at each giving level.

4. **Develop a feedback loop process:** Confirm a process for capturing what Silent phase conversations reveal (where donors resonate, where they hesitate) and feeding that into updated talking points or FAQ materials for the Steering Committee.

5. **Seek outside support with fundraising:** Bring in outside fundraising campaign counsel to help engage in a comprehensive fundraising campaign, estimated at 33 months.

Proposed Project Updates: Timeline and Scope

The original proposal, shared in March 2026, outlined a path in four stages: the Campaign Readiness Study, followed by a Pre-campaign Phase, a Silent Phase, and a Public Phase, with a bond vote in November 2028.

Based on the Study Summit results, we are adding a six-month Campaign Prep Consulting approach, running January through June 2027, between the study and the Pre-campaign Phase. The six months align with the recommendation to reassess campaign readiness in six months.

Please note, the additional changes to the capital campaign timeline are estimated and would be finalized toward the end of the Campaign Prep Consulting contract. The Pre-campaign Phase would potentially begin in August 2027 and run for 11 months instead of 14, and the Silent Phase would run 8 months instead of 10. The tentative bond vote remains in November 2028, and the Public Phase occurs March through September 2029.

Original Timeline and Milestones	Proposed Updated Timeline and Milestones
Campaign Readiness Study July 2026 - November 2026 • 5 months	**Campaign Readiness Study** July 2026 - November 2026 • 5 months
	Campaign Prep Consulting January 2027 - June 2027 • 6 months
Pre-campaign Phase January 2027 - February 2028 • 14 months	**Pre-campaign Phase** August 2027 - June 2028 • 11 months
Silent Phase March 2028 - December 2028 • 10 months	**Silent Phase** July 2028 - February 2029 • 8 months
Bond Vote November 2028	**Bond Vote** November 2028
Public Phase January 2028 - July 2029 • 6 months	**Public Phase** March 2029 - September 2029 • 6 months

Depending on the size of the total goal, we project that 60 to 70% of it will be secured in either the silent or public phase. In some cases, the campaign may reach its full goal before the public phase begins, and we have seen the total goal raised entirely in the silent phase.

Next Steps

There are two main decisions for the Library team, Library Board of Trustees, and Library Foundation to discuss and vote on. The decisions will determine a starting point for everything that follows.

1. **Complete the Campaign Prep Recommendations before beginning a capital campaign.** The report outlines nine recommendations across four areas, and all of them need to be in place before the campaign moves forward.

2. **Determine whether to hire any outside support for any of the recommendations.** Some may be carried out with existing resources, and others may benefit from outside expertise. The first decision shapes the second, so we suggest leadership address them in that order.

A special note of thanks from BrandRaise:
We're incredibly grateful to the Flathead County Library team, Board of Trustees, Library Foundation, and Study Committee, whose dedication assisted in completing an effective review of stakeholders' views and ideas. Your commitment to the study planning process and assistance in contacting key individuals to interview was extremely helpful.

Thank you especially to Flathead County Library Director, Teri Dugan, Board of Trustee members, Jane Wheeler and Carmen Cuthbertson, and Library Foundation Operations Manager, Sharon Furlong. Your devotion to helping create a well-organized and well-executed Campaign Readiness Study was most appreciated.

We also want to thank all of the community members who took the time to participate in the personal interviews, focus groups and the public survey. Your responses were incredibly helpful in providing excellent input and thought-provoking questions.

Appendix

Public Survey, Personal Interview, and Focus Group Participants

Personal Interview Participants

Brian Aegerter
Sean Anderson
Roger Barber
Laurie Barron
Lana and Joe Batts
MB Bertram
Carol Bibler
Tony Brockman
Jill Carlberg
Jackie Carll
Ron Catlett
Lynnette Cattron
Lorraine Clarno
Jason Cronk
Christy Cummings-Dawson
Carmen Cuthbertson
Maggie Doherty
Tony Edmundson
Ryan Eney
Tom Esch
Frank Garner
Bruce Guthrie
Charlotte Housel
David Ingram
Mark Johnson
Becca Johnson
Jane Karas
David Koel
Joe/Colleen Kola
Josh Kroll
Dustin Leftridge
Jinnifer Mariman
Valeri McGarvey
Pete Melnick
Mary Pat Murphy
Scott Nicholson
Tim Obermiller
Rob Ratkowski
Morgan Ray
Heidi Roedel
Sue Rolfing
Carol Santa
Allen Slater
Mike Smith
Lucy Smith
Susan Smith
Tom Snyder
Mary Van Buskirk
Matt Venturini
Kyle Waterman
Dan Weinberg
Jane Wheeler
Connie Wroblewski

Focus Group Participants

Jana Aasgaard
Jean Agather
Lune Axelsen
Curtis Brown
Liz Camarillo
Katie Cantrell
Valerie Carlin
Ned Cooney
Cathy Cooney
Liz Cummings
Dorothy Drury
Melissa Dunning
Mandy Gerth
Melissa Hardman
Marissa Hoyne
Janice Kalvig
Kate Lufkin
Anne Lee Maude-Simpson
Sonny Mazzullo
Deidre McMullin
Jenny Nygren
Susan Powers-Healy
Tina Presta
Meredith Shepherd
Bryce Wilson
Mellissa Wood

Public Survey Respondents

** indicated no last name was provided*

Susan*
Ellie*
Hutton*
Andrea*
Dianne*
Trisha*
Emily*
Isabelle*
Sara*
Melissa*
Kristie*
Natasha*
Alexa*
Lynnette*
Rachel*
Jeni*
Jared*
Molly*
Devynn*
Constance*
Sara*
Kelsie*
Jennifer A.
Jean Agather
Cathy Allard
Camas Anderson
Martha Artyomenko
George August Giavasis
Helen Babbitt
Holly Bennett
Stefan Berry
Tycy Berry
Susan Bodurtha
Tanath Bradley
Jim Browder
Stephanie Brown
Leslie Budewitz
Gail Bulfin
Susie Burch
Julianne Burnham Denney
Merannda Button
Sally Cameron-Russell
Bri Camillucci
Candice Campbell
Jill Carlberg
Leah Carlburg
Kris Carlson
Sandy Carlson
Suzanne Catalfomo
Shannon Chamberlain
Carol Comstock
Sue Corrigan
Nikki Crow
Molly Cummings
James Cummins
Chris Cunningham
Margaret D.
Joe Dane
Maggie Davis
Patricia Davis
Kaitlyn Davis
Elissa Dean
Caleb Deitz
Lee Denmark
Jennifer Desch
Tyeli Dixon
Dorothy Drury
Zach Duval
Ken Fielder
Katie Flass
Margery Fox
Lara Frank
Sadie Fuller
Beth Gardner
Mandy Gerth
Bill Goodman
Casey Graffam
Joseph Grana
Bruce Guthrie
Dan Hansen
Richard Hartnett
Ari Hess-Headlee
Brandon Hill
Sandra Johnson
Bonnie Johnston
Janice Jones
Patty Jones
Melissa Jones
Janice Kalvig
Hannah Kauffman
Mary Kelly
Nicholas Kelly
Flo Kiewel
Lily Kirsanow
Mary Knotts
Angela Knox
Wendy Lauman
Britney Lavina
Paulette Lawrence
Jennifer Li
Maureen Louden
Corrie Lowry
Sylvia Luehr
Kristen Lyle
Caitlin Mallery
Denise Manning
Jenny Mattern
Lynmarie Maves
Sonny Mazzullo
Jenna McCrorie
Cathryn McDevitt
Valeri McGarvey
Trinity McGlenn
Rosemary McKinnon
Cyndi Meuchel
Julie Miller
Travis Miller

Linda Miller
Quincy Moore
Barbara Nelson
Kitty Nelson
Morgan Newby
Elizabeth Oh
Jeffrey Ort
Valerie Parsons
Wren Patten
Jessica Pedersen
Shelley Pelc
Margaretta Poler
Terry Puch
Jana Pursell
Heidi Raanes
Thomas Randall
Elizabeth Rank
Darcy Rasmussen
Morgan Ray
Shannan Reichenberg
Jeff Richer
Marcy Roberts
Cindy Roberts
Carrie Rogers
Joelle Romo
Kimberly Roobish
Shari Roubinek
Dale Saverud
Jazmin Schaller
Randall Schumacher
Judy Schumacher
Courtney Schwartz
James Scott Wheeler
Carol Seilhymer
Courtney Shaeffer
Cindy Shaw
Alisha Shilling
Sylvia Smith
Erin Sprunger
Peter Stoll
Margaret Strainer
Darcy Thomas
Tepi Torrence
Sue Treadwell
Andrea Urban
Sarah V.
Sandi Vashro
Mary Wallace
Sara Walsh
Andrew Walters
Sierra Wardjamin
Melissa Wells
Ashley Wenz
Linda Westman
Jane Wheeler
Kassandra Williams
Kate Wilson
Renell Wilson
Tazia Wisdom
Mellissa Wood
Laura Workman
Patti Young

Study Summit Questions and Answers

Please note, some answers are intentionally left out for confidentiality reasons. Qualitative input from personal interviews, focus groups, a public survey respondents was collected to guide the strategy of the campaign, and themes are shared in summary rather than attributed to individuals.

Interview Questions and Answers

Sixty-one interviews were completed Monday, October 5, 2026 through Friday, October 16, 2026. Not all participants answered all the questions.

1. What does it say about a community when its library is well-used and well-supported?
2. When you think about what a library is for, what comes to mind first?
3. How do libraries contribute to a thriving community? Are libraries entertainment or education?
4. **Are you on the Kalispell library's newsletter/email list?**
    a. Yes: 26
    b. No: 25
    c. Not answered: 8
    d. Unsure: 2

5. Which of the Kalispell library's social media channels do you follow? (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, none/didn't know)
6. **Do you view the Kalispell library as innovative?**
    a. Yes: 27
    b. No: 11
    c. Unsure: 17
    d. Not answered: 6
7. **Do you view the Kalispell library as community-centered?**
    a. Yes: 39
    b. No: 4
    c. Unsure: 9
    d. Not answered: 9
8. **Do you feel like the Kalispell library is a fun, welcoming place for everyone?**
    a. Yes: 31
    b. No: 4
    c. Unsure: 15
    d. Not answered: 11
9. What three descriptive words would you use to describe the Kalispell library?
10. **Are you a library card holder?**
    a. Yes: 32
    b. No: 11
    c. Unsure: 8
    d. Not answered: 10
11. How often do you visit the library in a month?
12. What do you visit the library for?
13. **Do you participate in any of the library programs? If yes, please share which ones.**
    a. Yes: 13
    b. No: 20
    c. Not answered: 28
14. What limitations of the current library building are driving the need for a new one?
15. What are the quality of life benefits for the proposed project for the Kalispell community?
16. Are there concerns you can identify about the project?
17. What do you think about the site and location?
18. Are there other issues or concerns you believe could impact the project?
19. **What do you think about the private fundraising goal amount? Is it reasonable? If it is not reasonable, what would be a reasonable goal?**
    a. Yes: 41
    b. No: 3
    c. Unsure: 7
    d. Not answered: 9
20. From your perspective, how would you describe the current economic conditions?
21. What concerns do you have about a potential library bond of $8-14M?

22. What questions do you have about a potential library bond?
23. What information would you need to feel confident making a decision about a library bond?
24. What do you think would make a bond vote successful in this community?
25. Do you know of any other major fundraising projects currently being planned in the Kalispell community/area?
26. **A lead gift is approximately 10 to 15 percent of a project's goal and is a vital element of a campaign. Are there entities or individuals who have the financial ability to make this lead gift to support the project?**
    a. Yes: 44
    b. No: 0
    c. Unsure: 3
    d. Not answered: 14
27. Who do you think are key citizens and/or businesses which should be involved to help the project reach its goal?
28. **Would you consider giving to the project? If so, how much would you consider giving?**
    a. Yes: 47
    b. No: 1
    c. Not answered: 13
29. Campaigns also require strong committees that work together to solicit and provide awareness for a campaign. Who are some possible community members who would make good volunteers? Please provide 3 to 5 names.
30. **Would you consider serving on one of the short-term committees? Please list which committee(s) you may be interested in serving.**
    a. Yes: 18
    b. No: 14
    c. Unsure: 17
    d. Not answered: 12
31. Do you have any final thoughts you wish to share?

Focus Group Questions and Answers

Six focus groups, totaling 28 participants, were completed Monday, October 5, 2026 and Tuesday, October 6, 2026. Following the focus groups, a survey was sent to participants to gather additional feedback. Not all participants answered all the questions.

1. Please share your contact information: Name, email and phone number.
2. What does it say about a community when its library is well-used and well-supported?
3. When you think about what a library is for, what comes to mind first?
4. How do libraries contribute to a thriving community? Are libraries entertainment or education?
5. **Are you currently receiving the organization's newsletter or email updates?**
    a. Yes: 17

    b. No: 1
    c. Unsure: 3
    d. Not answered: 7
6. **Do you follow Flathead County Library on social media?**
    a. Yes: 21
    b. No: 0
    c. Unsure: 4
    d. Not answered: 3
7. **Do you view the Kalispell library as innovative?**
    a. Yes: 4
    b. No: 2
    c. Unsure: 22
    d. Not answered: 0
8. **Do you view the Kalispell library as community-centered?**
    a. Yes: 4
    b. No: 0
    c. Unsure: 0
    d. Not answered: 24
9. **Do you feel like the Kalispell library is a fun, welcoming place for everyone?**
    a. Yes: 10
    b. No: 10
    c. Unsure: 2
    d. Not answered: 6
10. What three descriptive words would you use to describe the Kalispell library?
11. After reading the project summary, how would you describe the need for a new library in your own words?
12. What do you see as the most meaningful benefits of moving this project forward, for the library and the Flathead Valley?
13. Do you have questions about the project as it's been described? Please share them now.
14. Do you have any concerns about the project or the direction it's heading? We want to hear honest reactions at this stage.
15. **Based on what you know about the philanthropic community in this area, do you believe a $13M campaign would be embraced and supported by local leaders and donors?**
    a. Yes: 6
    b. No: 4
    c. Unsure: 13
    d. Not answered: 5
16. What concerns or questions do you have about a potential library bond?
17. What would make a bond vote successful in this community?
18. What information would you need to feel confident making a decision about a $8-14M library bond?

19. Successful campaigns tend to follow predictable patterns of giving. Please take a moment to review the gift table, which reflects those patterns for a $13M campaign. Based on what you know about your community, who do you believe might be in a position to make a lead gift at the 15-20% level?
20. Who would you expect to be among the most significant contributors to this campaign?
21. Campaigns also rely on engaged committees to help with outreach and solicitation. Please take a moment to review the campaign committee descriptions. Can you suggest three to five community members who would be strong volunteers for this effort?
22. **Would you consider serving on one of the campaign's committees? If so, which ones interest you?**
    a. Yes: 2
    b. No: 0
    c. Unsure:0
    d. Not answered: 26
23. Who in this community has the credibility and relationships to serve as general chair or co-chair of a campaign like this?
24. **Would you be open to taking on a leadership role in the campaign or in a committee if you were asked? If yes, what kind of role might be a good fit?**
    a. Yes: 0
    b. No: 0
    c. Unsure: 0
    d. Not answered: 28
25. Is there anything else you'd like to share, a reaction, a question, a name, or a thought we haven't asked about yet?
26. What would need to be true for you to feel confident recommending this campaign to someone in your network?
27. Is there anything that would make it easier for you personally to get involved?
28. If this campaign moves forward, what would success look like to you five years from now?
29. If you were advising the board right now, what's the one thing you'd tell them to do before launching a campaign?

Public Survey Questions and Answers

Seventy six percent of respondents answered from a 55901 zip code. There were a total of 223 respondents to the online public survey. Not all participants answered all the questions.

1. Please share your contact information: Name, email and phone number
2. **Do you believe building a new and expanded Flathead County Library in Kalispell is important? If yes, please list in what ways? If not, please share a short explanation of why.**
    a. Yes: 165
    b. No: 29

    c. Mixed or unsure: 11
3. Based on the brief summary of the project, what do you believe to be the benefits of the potential campaign to build a new Flathead County Library in Kalispell?
4. **After reading the project summary, do you have any questions? Please elaborate if so.**
    a. Yes: 54
    b. No: 86
    c. Not answered: 83
5. **After reading the project summary, do you have any concerns? Please elaborate if so.**
    a. Yes: 94
    b. No: 53
    c. Not answered: 71
6. **Do you believe the proposed $13M fundraising campaign will be accepted and supported by area philanthropic leaders?**
    a. Yes: 117
    b. Possibly: 88
    c. No: 10
    d. Not answered: 8
7. **Are you on the organization's newsletter/email list?**
    a. Yes: 92
    b. No: 58
    c. Didn't know they have a newsletter: 66
    d. Not answered: 6
8. Which of the organization's social media channels do you follow on social media? Select all that apply. (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, none/didn't know)
9. Years of experience in capital campaigns teach us that most successful campaigns have similar patterns of giving. Please review the $13M gift table that represents the giving patterns for typical successful campaigns. You can view the gift table here. Who do you feel would be able to contribute 15-20%, or a lead gift, of a campaign goal for the project if a campaign is to move forward?
10. Whom would you suspect may be the largest contributors to this campaign?
11. **This is at a very initial stage of a potential capital campaign, but do you believe you (or your company/foundation) would consider making a personal gift to the campaign, if you are asked?**
    a. Yes: 78
    b. Possibly: 70
    c. No: 41
    d. Not answered: 34
12. If you answered yes, what possible amount could you see giving over three to five years, even if it is a minimal amount to help the Flathead County Library Board of Trustees consider if they are able to move forward?
13. Do you have a recommendation for someone that has credibility within the philanthropic community to serve as general chair or co-chair of the campaign?

14. Campaigns also require strong committees that work together to solicit and provide awareness for a campaign. Who are some possible community members that would make good volunteers for this campaign? Please list 3 to 5 names.
15. **Would you consider serving on one of the short-term committees? Please list which committee(s) you may be interested in serving.**
    a. Yes: 44
    b. No: 0
    c. Not answered: 179
16. **Would you consider accepting a leadership position in a campaign, if you are asked? If yes, please list which committee you may be interested in serving.**
    a. Yes: 9
    b. Possibly: 29
    c. No: 118
    d. Not answered: 67
17. Do you have any final thoughts you wish to share?

Campaign Committee Job Descriptions

Interviewees, focus groups participants and public survey respondents reviewed the following campaign committee job descriptions when asked about their personal involvement or the recommendation of involvement by others.

Leadership Development Committee This committee ensures campaign success by identifying and recruiting the top volunteer leadership for campaign co-chairs.

- Composed of four to six individuals
- Committed to the Flathead County Library - Kalispell and invested in the benefits of the project
- Knowledgeable about the business, philanthropic, and social relationships that exist within the area
- Meets three times within the first months of the pre-campaign phase to identify and recruit general campaign co-chairs
- Meetings would tentatively begin in February 2027

Steering Committee This committee directs all activities of the campaign.

- Composed of five to eight area leaders plus one chair from each additional committee
- Provides input on the foundation for a successful capital campaign
- Oversees all committees to help ensure campaign success
- Holds monthly meetings over approximately 12 to 16 months (exact timeframe to be determined after the campaign readiness study) or until the goal is met
- Members will eventually solicit three to five potential donors alongside another team member
- Meetings would tentatively begin in February 2027

Case Statement Committee This committee provides feedback on case statement development and validates it with key donors.

- Composed of 12 to 14 individuals
- Committee chair also attends Steering Committee meetings (one chair of the committee is needed)
- Knowledgeable about the full scope of the campaign
- Provides input to help develop a strong, compelling campaign rationale
- Answers key questions about the campaign and fundraising plan
- Tests and validates the case statement
- Meets approximately 11 times within the pre-campaign phase
- Meetings would tentatively begin in February 2027

Prospect Committee This committee ensures the campaign is connected to the right people and resources.

- Composed of six to ten community members, donors, and volunteers knowledgeable about the Flathead Valley
- Familiar with key regional, state, and national philanthropic organizations, corporations, and foundations
- Suggests potential area donors who may be interested in supporting the campaign
- Helps match solicitors to donors where possible
- Committee chair also attends Steering Committee meetings (one chair of the committee is needed)
- Meets six to eight times over the course of the campaign
- Meetings would tentatively begin in February 2027

Communications Committee This committee helps tell the campaign's story and build community awareness.

- Composed of ten to 12 people knowledgeable about branding, communications, marketing, and media
- Provides input on promotional elements and campaign materials
- Helps raise community awareness about the project
- Provides input on coordinating a large campaign launch event
- Committee chair also attends Steering Committee meetings (one chair of the committee is needed)
- Meets monthly for 11 months to review materials, provide feedback, and plan the public event
- Meetings would tentatively begin in February 2027

Gift Table

A gift table is a tool utilized in fundraising that helps identify one approach that outlines how many gifts and at which level are needed in order to reach a capital campaign goal.

$13,000,000						
Range of Gifts		Number of Donors Required	$ at this Level	Total Donors Asked	Total Dollars	Percent of Goal
From	To					
$2,000,000.00	$2,500,000.00	1	$2,250,000.00	3	$2,250,000.00	17%
$1,500,000.00	$1,999,999.00	1	$1,749,999.50	3	$3,999,999.50	31%
$1,000,000.00	$1,499,999.00	1	$1,249,999.50	3	$5,249,999.00	40%
$500,000.00	$999,999.00	3	$2,249,998.50	5	$7,499,997.50	58%
$250,000.00	$499,999.00	6	$2,249,997.00	8	$9,749,994.50	75%
$100,000.00	$249,999.00	9	$1,574,995.50	11	$11,324,990.00	87%
$50,000.00	$99,999.00	11	$824,994.50	13	$12,149,984.50	93%
$25,000.00	$49,999.00	13	$487,493.50	15	$12,637,478.00	97%
$10,000.00	$24,999.00	17	$297,491.50	19	$12,934,969.50	99%
$1,000.00	$9,999.00	22	$120,989.00	24	$13,055,958.50	100%
	<1,000	many				

Project Summary

The project summary was reviewed by all personal interviewees, focus groups participants and public survey respondents prior to answering questions.

A Rich History: Serving The Valley Since 1892

The history of Flathead County Library dates back to 1892, when the first public reading room opened in Kalispell. By 1897, the Reading Room featured 300 books and had hired a paid librarian, Mrs. Florence Madison. In 1901, a group of citizens applied to Andrew Carnegie to build a Free Library in Kalispell, early proof of this community's belief in public libraries.

More than 130 years after its founding, the Kalispell branch serves as the county-wide hub for our community. It has operated out of its current school district-owned building for 57 years. Registered cardholders grew from 34,302 in 2022 to 43,704 in July 2026, a gain of more than 9,400 patrons.

Supporting a Growing Community
Since 1969, the library has operated out of a leased school district building. That lease expires in 2033, and vital infrastructure is failing:

- Moisture and water intrusion have damaged interior spaces and walls
- Heating, cooling, and plumbing systems are inefficient and deteriorating
- Maintaining a 50-year-old elevator has cost more than $50,000 in just the last two years

Roughly 800 people visit the library every day, despite the constraints of an aging, leased building. Our growing Flathead Valley needs a growing library. In recent years, the library has considered more than 20 locations, including renovating the current leased site. But shoring up aging infrastructure cannot be the long-term answer for our library. The time has come to act.

Taking the Next Steps Toward a New Kalispell Library
Our desired two- to three-acre parcel, part of the current Center Street Mall property, sits centrally in downtown Kalispell with direct access to the newly developed Parkline Trail. The project will provide:

- Space for a robust book collection with room to grow
- Full ADA accessibility throughout the building
- Dedicated library parking
- A purpose-built library that adheres to current codes and standards
- Cost-effective operations, reducing long-term maintenance burden
- A history room with public access to historical documents and local archives, which are currently stored off-site
- Faster, more reliable interlibrary loan and shared catalog access
- Expanded digital collections and technology

Capacity for programs and activities that a maxed-out facility can't support today
When Bigfork's branch moved into a larger, remodeled space in 2024, it saw 7,416 more visitors (a 45% increase) and 13,788 more items checked out (a 49% increase) within two years.

Funding Structure
The library's funding strategy draws on multiple sources including public and private partnerships to make this project a reality:

Dedicated County Fund, as of 7/2026	$750,000
Potential Grants	$50,000

Designated Foundation Seed Gift	$200,000 (committed)
Flathead County Library Capital Campaign Goal	$13,000,000
Potential Bond	$8,000,000 - $14,000,000

Cost Estimates

Land Purchase (estimated)	$3,000,000
Library Building Construction (40k - 50k sq.ft.) (estimated)	$16,000,000 - $25,000,000
Total Project Cost (estimated)	$19,000,000 - $28,000,000

This estimate reflects a standard, functional library, sized and finished in line with comparable Montana library projects like Missoula and Bigfork. It is not a premium build.

Partnering with BrandRaise for a Campaign Readiness Study
Flathead County Library - Kalispell has partnered with BrandRaise, LLC to complete a Campaign Readiness Study assessing community interest in and philanthropic capacity for a $13 million fundraising goal. The BrandRaise team will conduct virtual focus groups, 1:1 interviews, and a public online survey. No solicitation will take place during the Campaign Readiness Study. Recommendations will be presented to the Library Trustees, with the campaign proposed to launch following the study's completion.

This is not a new dream. It is a well-researched next step. In 1901, Kalispell asked a single donor to build its first library. Today, we're asking the Flathead Valley to build its next one.