



Library Profile

FLETCHER FREE LIBRARY

CHITTENDEN COUNTY, VERMONT

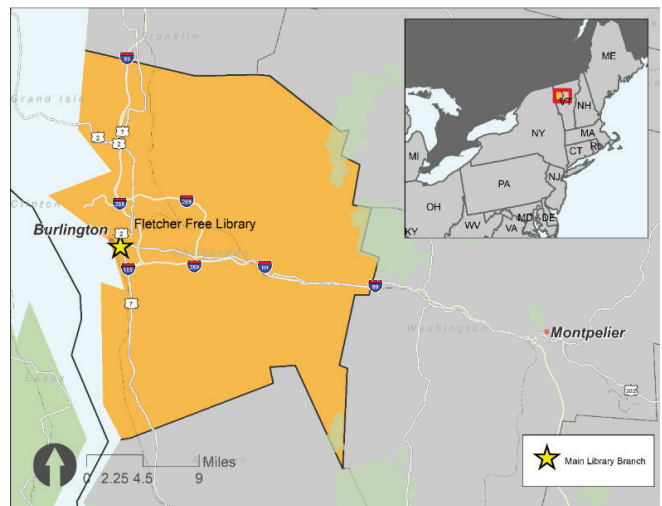
Library Profile: Fletcher Free Library



CHITTENDEN COUNTY, VERMONT

The Fletcher Free Library (FFL) is a single-branch library serving the city of Burlington and located in its downtown. FFL is a department of the city; the mayor appoints the library director annually, and the 10-person Library Commission advises the library's work. Burlington's mayor, city council, FFL staff, and trustees appoint or elect the members of the Library Commission. In 2016, FFL had a staff of 21 and recorded 244,440 visits and a total circulation of 330,451 materials.

Founded in 1873, FFL's mission is to inform, enrich, and nurture a community of lifelong learners. The library promotes wellbeing through a process of identifying resource gaps in its community, then working with partner organizations to meet patrons' needs. The library is also responsive to its community, working to build an inclusive space for Burlington's diverse population of new Americans.



CHITTENDEN COUNTY

Chittenden County, Vermont, is an urban county with a population of 160,510 residents. The county is 89.6 percent White and has a median household income of \$66,414. The city of Burlington, where just more than a quarter of the county's inhabitants live, is located on the shores

of Lake Champlain. The library is in the city center. Burlington is also a refugee resettlement community: Nearly 9 percent of residents are foreign born, and students in the local school district speak a combined 48 different languages.¹

	Population	% Change in Population (2000–2016)	% White	% Black	% Hispanic	% Asian	% Other	Median Household Income	% Families in Poverty
United States	318,558,162	13.2	62.0	12.3	17.3	5.2	3.3	\$55,322	11.0
Chittenden County	160,510	9.5	89.6	2.5	2.2	3.5	2.3	\$66,414	20.2

Compared to other urban counties, Chittenden County residents enjoy elevated levels of School Effectiveness. Chittenden County was in the top quartile of all urban counties on the School Effectiveness Index.² The top industries in

Chittenden County are Health Care and Social Assistance, Retail Trade, Education Services, and Manufacturing, accounting for almost half of working adults.

	Total Labor Force	% Health Care & Social Assistance	% Retail Trade	% Education Services	% Manufacturing
United States*	131,362,978	14.5	10.9	9.2	9.3
Chittenden County	92,717	16.0	12.0	11.0	10.0

Data Sources: 2012–16 American Community Survey five-year estimates; U.S. Census Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD), 2017.

*Continental figures for total labor force include the 48 lower states and Washington, DC.

¹ https://www.bsdt.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/BSD_AnnualReport_2020_COLOR_FOR_WEB-1.pdf page 9

² Data elements included in the School Effectiveness Index, along with measures for Chittenden County, can be found at the beginning of Appendix II.

SITE VISIT PARTICIPANTS AND DATA COLLECTION

In November 2019, the study team conducted interviews with three current staff and representatives from five different partner organizations. Site visit interviews focused on understanding FFL's programming and partnerships that support formal and informal education as well as FFL's institutional approaches to assessment, staff support, and sustainability.

In addition, the following data were used to create the network map included in this profile:

- 2016 Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) Public Libraries Survey
- Interview notes and related materials collected by the case study team

This site profile includes the following:

- A summary of select FFL programming and partnerships that support education and learning in Chittenden County
- A descriptive network map that illustrates the scope and variety of connections FFL maintains with local partners throughout the county and beyond

FFL CREATES AND MAINTAINS PARTNERSHIPS THAT FILL GAPS TO SUPPORT SOCIAL WELLBEING

FFL's thoughtful programs and partnerships; deep roots in the community; and convenient, walkable location are key to fulfilling its mission. Library staff focus on partnerships where they can fill a gap in the community or play to their organizational strengths to make meaningful, sustainable impacts with their partners.

One resource gap that FFL identified was a lack of kindergarten readiness and early literacy education among children in the area, and it relied on its partnerships to address that gap. FFL's Early Literacy Outreach Program was developed in response to concerns around inequity in kindergarten readiness and the desire to reach early learners unable to access the library. For the initial phase of the program, FFL drew on preexisting relationships with day care providers and focused on home day cares with three stars or fewer from the state's

quality recognition system.³ FFL hoped that targeting these providers would keep the pilot a manageable size and bolster the library's work to help home day cares earn higher ratings. The program initially ran three times per week and was staffed by an AmeriCorps volunteer using curriculum-based early literacy lesson plans to support kindergarten readiness and model high-quality programming in participating home day cares. After a year, FFL wanted to scale up the program, and Burlington's mayor suggested recruiting volunteers to do so. FFL trained volunteers and matched them with day cares; at the time of the site visit, the program was active in 13 home childcares and two community organizations across Burlington. The program demonstrates FFL's commitment to working beyond its doors, within the community it serves, and to targeting resources toward those who most need them.

³ Programs with three stars or fewer are licensed, have a commitment to strengthen their practices, and made some progress or substantial progress in at least one of the four areas (staff qualification and training; interaction with and overall support of children, families, and communities; provider assessment and planned improvement; and strength of operating policies and business practices), but they have not yet met several standards of quality in all four areas.

FFL conducts other forms of outreach in partnership with others within its community. These partners bring materials to and facilitate discussions at area senior centers and the local community center. The library's subsidized lunch program is part of a national initiative to feed children during the summer months. The program runs from Monday to Thursday and ties into library programming, like giving out books and offering activities.

FFL also amplifies the outreach efforts of other community-based organizations through a Community Partner Desk. FFL hosts nonprofit organizations at a desk in the front of the building that can engage in outreach and promote its programs to interested patrons. For instance, the Howard Center, a social service agency that addresses mental health, substance abuse, and developmental needs, participates regularly.

FFL CONNECTS PARTNERS TO RESOURCES THAT STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY NETWORKS

In some cases, FFL's work with other organizations goes beyond one-on-one partnerships. FFL also strengthens broader community networks and enhances sustainability in its community by introducing new resources and providing administrative support and free meeting space.

FFL provides an array of supports directly to schools in Burlington. School librarians reported that they had limited budgets for materials and technology. Through FFL, students can access digital resources, and school librarians can borrow library games and musical instruments. FFL acquires books and makes schools "exclusive borrowers" of those books to mitigate materials budget gaps. FFL also supports school librarians by curating books and developing discussion materials for school-based book groups. Rather than competing with the school libraries, they instead work with them to "meet the students where they are" and design relevant, engaging

In partnership with Burlington's Art and Parks and Recreation Departments, the library addressed another resource gap—there were no camps available for young people during the last two weeks of summer, and each were unable to independently respond to this particular community need. Working together, they created the Parks, Art, and Library program (PAL). Parks and Recreation takes the lead on staffing; the Arts department and FFL each take responsibility for programming a few afternoons; and FFL provides lunch via its summer meals program. Evaluations indicated the camp has been well received. During the summer months, the local YMCA also needs space for its own programming, and the library reserves its multipurpose space for use by the YMCA. Participants in both camps benefit from close partnerships between all involved: "It feels like we're all in this together," one partner remarked.

book-group topics. FFL's librarians go into schools on a regular basis to share materials, provide book recommendations, and promote the library's summer reading program.

FFL staff have also introduced schools to additional funding opportunities through FFL's relationship with the Children's Literacy Foundation (CLiF). Resources from the CLiF were involved in strengthening the partnership between FFL and the Sustainability Academy, a magnet K–5 elementary school where 82 percent of the children qualify for Free/Reduced Price Lunch and 30 percent are English Language Learners (ELLs). FFL won a \$25,000 grant to provide books and literacy supports to the Sustainability Academy for the 2017–18 school year. The grant strengthened the relationship between the school and the library. Through CLiF's Year of the Book program, a local magnet elementary school was able to increase the number of books in its school library and went

on to successfully apply for its own CLiF grants. Another CLiF grant supports a summer program at the magnet school, which engages children from the Sarah Holbrook Community Center. The school credits FFL with connecting it to funding streams that create opportunities for high-need children: “Now, all of those kids get a summer program, and that’s all [FFL’s] advocacy.”

The local Head Start also reported that it began its relationship with CLiF thanks to inclusion in an FFL grant. FFL reached out to Head Start and received the grant on Head Start’s behalf. The

grant money has funded field trips to museums that families might not otherwise be able to afford as well as books for Head Start classrooms and for children to take home. Head Start has also gone on to successfully apply for its own CLiF grants to target sites with a high share of new Americans and dual-language learners. These examples demonstrate FFL’s role in connecting community organizations to resources that support the positive work it is already doing and the importance of partnership and collaboration in addressing the need for resources in the area.

FFL BUILDS WELCOMING AND ACCESSIBLE SPACES FOR THE WHOLE COMMUNITY

One librarian commented that, “The library is that common ground. It is that safe, welcoming place for people to come to.” Burlington is home to many new Americans, and the library strives to serve them all. FFL curates a varied, vibrant collection and offers programming beyond books to serve Burlington’s diverse immigrant community.

For example, one program, In Translation, featured literature and film from the Arab world and a discussion led by scholars. FFL plans to feature other languages, with the idea that raising awareness of work outside the English language will give patrons a better understanding of the world. Another program, Burlington Rising, was delivered in partnership with the Vermont Humanities Council. It was a six-month series centered around the importance of bread baking in many cultures; people from various backgrounds came to teach program participants how to make bread but also about their cultural identity and family life. “It was an opportunity for people who didn’t grow up in those cultures to learn about their neighbors,” explained a librarian.

FFL offers weekly beginner and intermediate ELL classes to fill this niche in the community. “We don’t turn anyone away at all; you don’t need documentation and can just drop in; each class is stand-alone,” said one librarian. Instructors are flexible and adjust classes based on who attends. Some participants lack strong family connections in the area, and the classes offer a means of social interaction and support. A staff member provided this example of international students at the University of Vermont (UVM):

“If you come in as a refugee, you have connections to social service agencies, and there are communities who speak your language. But if you come as a student to UVM and your spouse doesn’t speak English . . . some people who take our classes go back to their country, but it gives them a positive experience in the US they can bring back.”

FFL hosts a formal network, Refugee and Immigrant Service Providers Network (RISPNET), which meets every six weeks. It comprises Vermont legal aid staff, area hospital staff, education providers, and other social service organizations serving Burlington’s refugee and immigrant community. The group discusses common problems, like transportation, and works to address immigrants’ issues together.

Meeting the needs of Burlington’s immigrant and refugee populations is another way FFL excels in facilitating and strengthening connections between organizations to support the broader community.

FFL offered multilingual computer training programs at a time when there were few free non-English programs available. After several years of providing this resource, other organizations also began to offer similar courses. FFL recognized the niche it had been filling was adequately resourced. FFL stopped offering the computer classes but continues to offer free ELL classes.

FFL also works to make other populations that use the library feel welcome; interviewees cited the rise of opiate use and untreated mental illness in the Burlington area. One librarian observed that:

“We are trying to negotiate services so that we are welcoming to everyone, not just serving a small sector of population but for all demographics . . . it’s important to a healthy community that you can have people who are wealthy and educated, reading alongside the marginalized. The challenge is to make everyone feel comfortable and meeting needs of those who have more intensive needs.”

Part of creating welcoming spaces is reflected in FFL’s intentional recruitment and hiring of people with diverse backgrounds. The library’s goal is to reflect the community and make more people comfortable in accessing FFL’s services.

Located in the center of Burlington, FFL plays a central role in the community. FFL’s process of establishing program priorities by identifying gaps and working with partner organizations to build their capacity has contributed to fostering wider social wellbeing. FFL is proactive in seeking out opportunities, activating networks, and providing support wherever it can—both inside and outside the library walls. FFL’s approach addresses a wide range of needs, including social wellbeing, early literacy, formal and informal education, and promoting diversity in its community. One librarian summed up this sentiment, as follows:

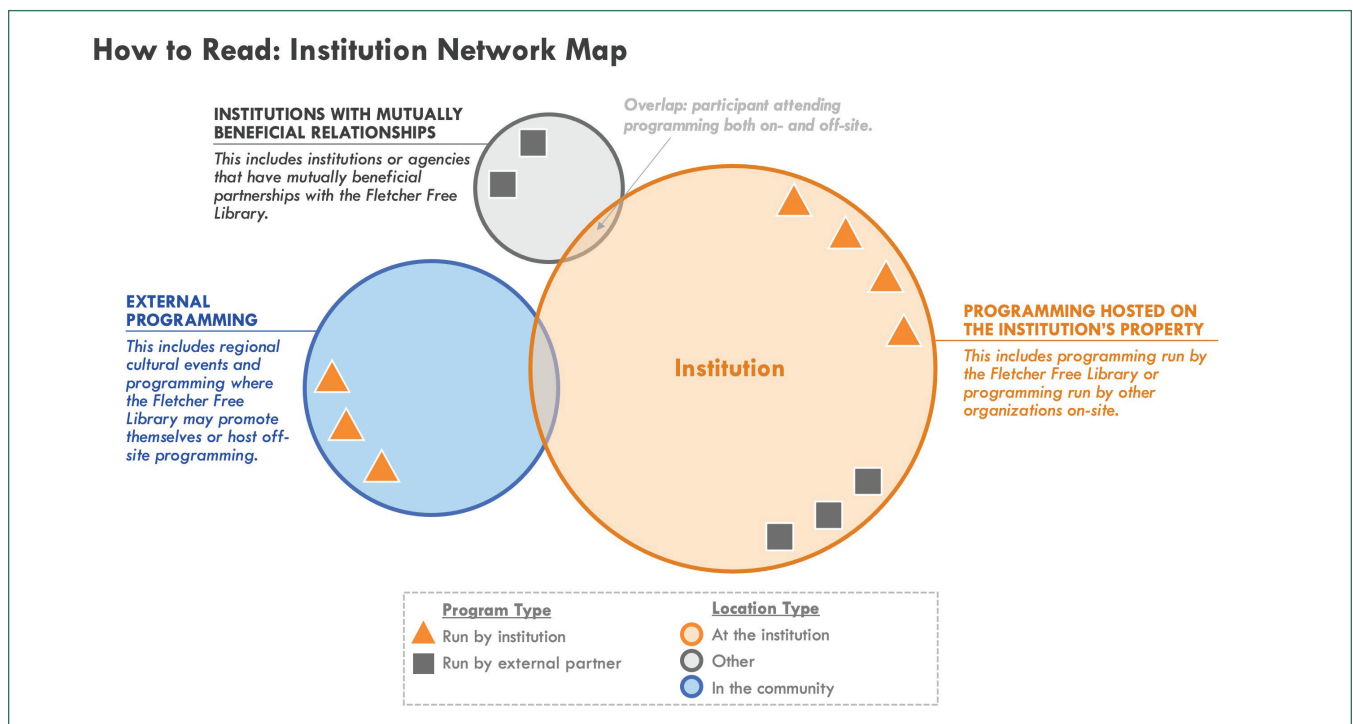
“We can connect in so many different ways . . . the emphasis on partnerships and collaborations has just strengthened what we are doing. I don’t see libraries dying or books going away . . . I just see us moving in different directions and listening to our partners and constituents in a different way. We are open to all the possibilities.”

FFL NETWORK MAP

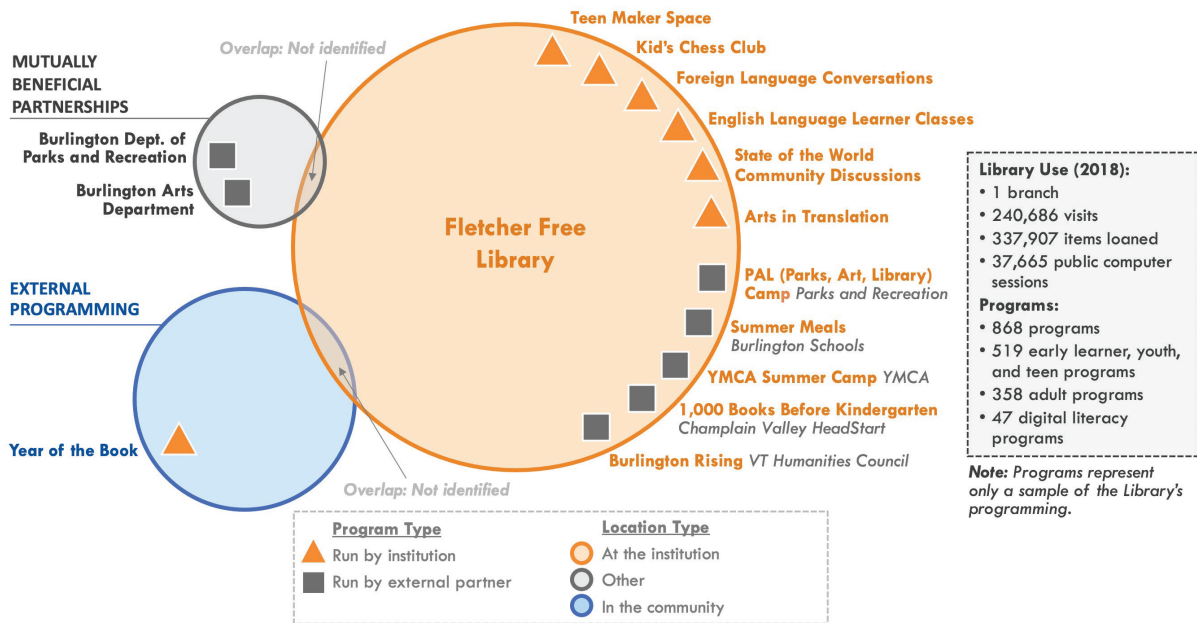
Using data provided by FFL, the study team developed a descriptive network map to highlight the different types of connections the library maintains with other institutions in the local community. The map illustrates the relationships between FFL and those entities that offer programming at the library itself and

those that support cross-marketing efforts or have reciprocal relationships with the library, and it includes examples of off-site, FFL-led programming. The map does not provide an exhaustive list of FFL's programs but attempts to illustrate a subset of the relationships that the library maintains.

NOTE: The network map is purely descriptive. The connections represented on the map do not necessarily, and are not intended to, provide estimates of the duration, durability, intensity, or broader impact of the relationships between FFL and any single entity—or the broader network itself. The goal of the network map is to represent the range and diversity of different types of institutions that connect to the library in different ways.



Fletcher Free Library Network Map



The figure above illustrates a *sample* of the connections across the programs offered by FLL. Within the orange circle are a small sample of programs conducted on the physical property of the library, both programs produced by FFL, and those produced by others. Within the blue circle is a sample of programs produced by FLL and offered off-site in the community. The gray circle represents a sample of connections with other regional organizations, which may include government partnerships.