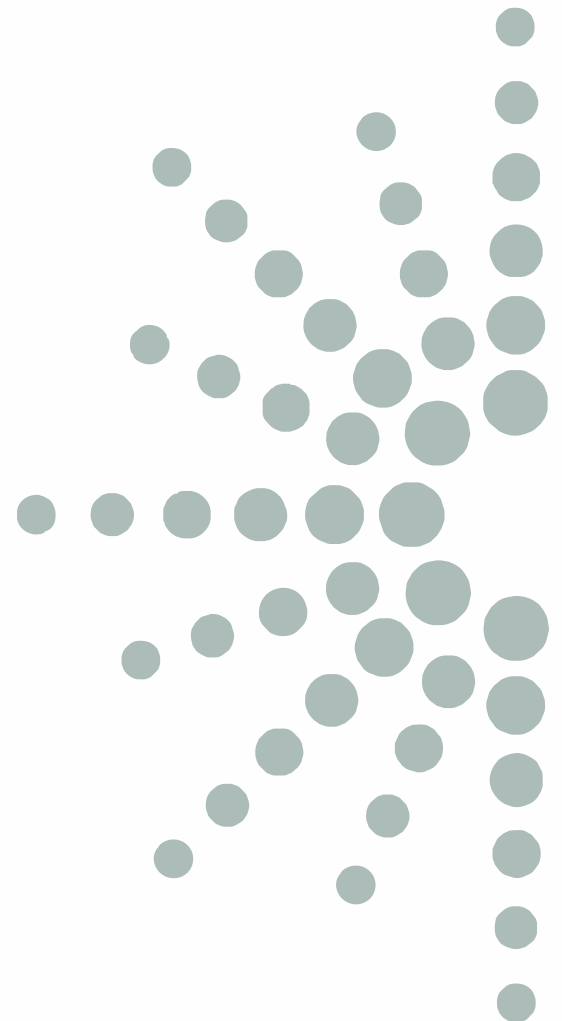


# Characteristics of Public Libraries in the United States: Results from the FY 2019 Public Libraries Survey

## Supplementary Tables



## **Institute of Museum and Library Services**

Crosby Kemper III

*Director*

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## *Introduction*

Public libraries have historically had an intimate relationship with their communities, connecting patrons to information that addresses the health, learning, and workforce development needs of residents. The role of the public library as a cornerstone of community engagement and development has expanded in recent years. Today, libraries are not only places where people can seek assistance with research and information needs from professional staff, they are also collective gathering spaces and important forums for community discourse. Public libraries continue to offer collections, technology, programming, and community spaces to connect individuals, families, businesses, and nonprofit organizations to information and to each other through resources that may not otherwise be readily accessible.

The Public Libraries Survey (PLS) facilitates data collection to examine when, where, and how public library services are changing. These PLS data, supplied annually by nearly 98 percent of public libraries across the country, provide long-term trend information that researchers, policymakers, and practitioners can use to make strategic data-based decisions about the support and management of public libraries.

In fiscal year (FY) 2019, 9,057 public libraries or public library systems (Table 1) operating in the United States and the District of Columbia met the Federal and State Cooperative System (FSCS) definition of a public library.<sup>1</sup> More specifically, 16,607 central and branch libraries and 671 bookmobiles in the United States provided access to information and services in FY 2019 (Table 3). Approximately 316 million people lived within a public library legal service area (LSA)—approximately 97 percent of the total U.S. population (Table 1).

A public library is established under state laws or regulations to serve a community, district, or region. Under the FSCS definition, a public library must, at a minimum, meet the following criteria:

- Contain an organized collection of printed or other library materials, or a combination thereof;
- Have paid staff;
- Have an established schedule in which the services of the staff are available to the public;
- Have the facilities necessary to support such a collection, staff, and schedule; and,
- Be supported in whole or in part with public funds.

Any given community may have only one public library, multiple public libraries, or a public library system (e.g., central library and multiple branches or bookmobiles). Any reference to a public library in these tables refers to the administrative entity, which may be a single-outlet library or a multiple-branch library system. References to outlets refer to central libraries, branch libraries, and bookmobiles.

This document provides an overview of PLS data on public libraries and the state rankings for key variables. The data presented are from the statistical tables published in Microsoft Excel format,

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<sup>1</sup> A public library or public library system, also referred to as an Administrative Entity (AE), has one or more points of service, also referred to as an “outlet,” which may be a physical building, a bookmobile, or a books-by-mail provider.

which can be found on the [IMLS website](#). The 71 tables are organized as follows (see appendix for a complete list of table titles):

- Tables 1-6A: Number and Percentage of Public Libraries by Select Characteristics (12 tables)
- Tables 7-13A: Public Library Revenue and Expenses (14 tables)
- Tables 14-25A: Public Library Services, Resources, and Programs (24 tables)
- Tables 26-27A: Public Library Staffing (4 tables)
- Tables 28-28A: Size of Public Libraries (2 tables)
- Tables 29-43: State Rankings on Key Variables (15 tables)

Tables without the Letter “A” after the number generally report data for all libraries by state and outlying areas. Tables with the Letter “A” after the number report tabulations based on the population size of the library LSA (except for Table 1A), using the following 11-category scheme:

- 1,000,000 or more people
- 500,000 to 999,999 people
- 250,000 to 499,999 people
- 100,000 to 249,999 people
- 50,000 to 99,999 people
- 25,000 to 49,999 people
- 10,000 to 24,999 people
- 5,000 to 9,999 people
- 2,500 to 4,999 people
- 1,000 to 2,499 people
- Less than 1,000 people

The top “Total” row in all tables includes the 50 states and the District of Columbia but excludes outlying areas, libraries that were closed or temporarily closed in FY 2019, and libraries that do not meet the FSCS definition of a public library.

## *Methodology*

The PLS is a universe survey, meaning information is solicited from all public libraries in the United States. The PLS questionnaire was designed collaboratively by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, State Data Coordinators, and the Library Statistics Working Group.

Data were collected using the PLS Web Portal, an online data collection tool developed by the American Institutes for Research. After the data were collected, data review and imputation were performed. Historically, PLS response rates have been high. Since FY 2010, unit response to the PLS has been over 97 percent. For a detailed description of the PLS data collection methodology, see the [PLS Data File Documentation and User’s Guide](#) for the FY 2019 data collection on [imls.gov](#).

## *Public Library Indicators*

Table S1 below summarizes 12 indicators on public library financial health, public library resources, services, and usage, and public library staffing, and their location(s) in the Supplementary Tables.

Table S2 shows information about the collections and circulation at public libraries in the United States and the District of Columbia.

To enable comparability across states, indicators are computed per person based on the unduplicated population but are sometimes reported as per person, per 1,000 people, per 5,000 people, or per 25,000 people to obtain estimates that are most easily understood by a general audience.

As shown in Table S1, Americans visited public libraries 1.2 billion times, with 124.7 million attending one of the more than 5.9 million programs offered by public libraries in FY 2019. The 1.8 billion items in public libraries' collections were circulated 2.2 billion times, representing 6.9 items checked out per person in FY 2019. Moreover, 143,883 full-time equivalent (FTE) library staff answered 220 million questions for patrons (reference transactions).

### S1. Summary: Public Libraries in the United States, FY 2019

PLS Indicators	FY 2019 Total	FY 2019 Indicator <sup>1</sup>	Supplementary Table Reference(s)
<b>Public Library Financial Health</b>			
1. Total Operating Revenue	\$14.2 billion	\$44.88 per person	Table 7-8A and 29
2. Total Operating Expenditures	\$13.3 billion	\$41.90 per person	Table 9-10A and 31
<b>Public Library Resources, Services, and Usage</b>			
3. Collection Materials	1.8 billion	5.6 per person	Table 20, 20A, 22, 22A, and 37-39
4. Circulation	2.2 billion	6.9 per person	Tables 14,14A, and 34
5. Library Visits <sup>2</sup>	1.2 billion	3.9 per person	Tables 14,14A, and 33
6. Reference Transactions	219.7 million	0.7 per person	Table 33
7. Programs Offered	5.9 million	18.7 per 1,000 people	Table 16, 16A, and 40
8. Program Attendance	124.7 million	394.3 per 1,000 people	Table 17, 17A, and 40
9. Public-Access Internet Computers	299,445	4.7 per 5,000 people	Table 18, 18A, and 35
10. Public-Access Internet Computer User Sessions	224.0 million	0.7 per person	Table 18, 18A, and 36
11. Wireless Sessions	485.2 million	1.7 per person	Table 19, 19A, and 36
<b>Public Library Staffing</b>			
12. Staffing	143,883 FTE <sup>2</sup>	11.4 FTE <sup>2</sup> per 25,000 people	Table 26, 26A, and 43

<sup>1</sup> This is the number of in-person visits to public libraries; the FY 2019 PLS did not count digital visits to libraries.

<sup>2</sup> FTE = full-time equivalent.

Public libraries address the persistent digital divide by providing 299,445 public-access Internet computers. These computers logged more than 224 million user sessions and patrons accessed Wi-Fi services more than 485.2 million times. These public library resources and services cost an average of \$44.88 per person for the nearly 316 million Americans who lived in a public library service area in FY 2019 (Table S1).

Table S2 shows that the electronic collection items available from America’s public libraries now exceed the number of physical items. There were 3.1 E-books and downloadable audio and video items for each person compared to 2.5 print materials and physical audio and video items per person. Print item use exceeded that of the electronic items, with 5.8 physical items circulated per person and 1.1 electronic items circulated per person.

## S2. Summary: Collection Materials and Circulation Detail, FY 2019

Type	Total, FY 2019	Number of Items per Person	Supplementary Table References
<b>Total Collection Materials</b>	<b>1,765.5 million</b>	<b>5.6</b>	
Print materials	686.9 million	2.2	Tables 20 and 20A
E-books	615.7 million	1.9	Tables 20 and 20A
Audio: physical	40.9 million	0.1	Tables 22 and 22A
Audio: downloadable	326.1 million	1.0	Tables 22 and 22A
Video: physical	68.5 million	0.2	Tables 22 and 22A
Video: downloadable	27.5 million	0.1	Tables 22 and 22A
<b>Circulation</b>	<b>2,171.9 million</b>	<b>6.9</b>	
Physical Circulation	1,829.0 million	5.8	Tables 25 and 25A
Electronic Circulation	342.9 million	1.1	Tables 25 and 25A

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals due to rounding.

## Other Highlights

### Public Library Organization and Size

- Nearly 97 percent of people lived within the service area of one of America’s 9,057 public libraries and their 17,278 outlets (Table 1).
- More than three-fourths of public libraries serve areas with fewer than 25,000 people (Table 1A).
- The nation’s 671 bookmobiles brought physical materials with staff support on a regular schedule to meet patrons where they are. Many of these mobile libraries also bring Internet service to remote areas (Table 3).

- The average library (stationary point of service) is 12,792.4 sq. ft. in size. Size ranges from an average of 2,148.6 sq. ft. for libraries that serve fewer than 1,000 people to 19,922.4 sq. ft. for those that serve 1 million or more people (Table 28a).

## Public Library Finances

- Public libraries' \$14.2 billion in revenues were predominantly derived (85.9 percent) from local funding sources (Table 7). Staff salaries and benefits were the largest expense category for public libraries, accounting for two-thirds (66.7 percent) of their operating expenditures (Table 9).
- Libraries spent \$44.88 per person in FY 2019, with variations based on the size of the population served by the library. While libraries that served 1 million or more people spent \$41.28 per person; those that served fewer than 1,000 people spent \$74.29 per person (Table 8A).

## Public Library Services, Resources and Programs

- Overall, public libraries spend \$4.51 per person on collection materials (Table 10). Almost one third (31.1 percent) of the collection materials spending is for electronic materials (Table 11).
- America's public libraries provided more than 67.5 million items obtained via inter-library loan to their patrons in FY 2019 (Table 15).
- Children's programs accounted for 53 percent of all public library programs (Table 16), and there were more than 81 million attendees (Table 17) to the over 3.1 million children's programs (Table 16).
- Approximately 10 percent, or 596,106, of all young adult programs offered by America's public libraries] (Table 16) were attended by nearly 8.9 million people (Table 17).
- The average public library point of service (outlet) provided more than 29,000 wireless internet sessions during FY 2019 (Table 19).
- There was an average of just over 18 public access Internet computers per point of service (outlet) at America's public libraries. Libraries that served larger population sizes had more computers per stationary outlet than those serving smaller populations (Table 18A).

## Public Library Staffing

- Nearly half (46 percent) of public libraries have at least one full-time equivalent (FTE) librarian on staff with a master's degree accredited by the American Library Association, and less than a quarter (24 percent) of all library staff are librarians with such degrees (Table 26).
- More than two thirds (72 percent) of public libraries have fewer than 10 FTE staff (Table 27).
- All libraries that served populations of one million or more had at least 100 FTE staff. In contrast, 77 percent of libraries that served fewer than 1,000 people had less than one FTE staff member (Table 27a).

## *State Ranking Tables*

As noted in the methodology section, in order to make comparisons across states, indicators are computed at the per person, per 1,000 people, per 5,000 people, or per 25,000 people levels based on each state's unduplicated population. Because both Hawaii and the District of Columbia have one administrative entity for the entire jurisdiction, care must be exercised in making comparisons of these jurisdictions to others. In each of the 15 state ranking tables, which cover 34 metrics in total, the national level is included at the top of each table for benchmarking. State variations reflect how libraries meet the different needs of people within their jurisdictions.

- Staff salaries and benefits as a percentage of total public library expenditures in FY 2019 ranged from about 58 percent for Missouri to 75 percent for New Hampshire (Table 31).
- Nationwide, 37 states reported that half or more of people who live in a given library service areas had library cards in FY 2019 (Table 33).
- The average Ohio resident visited a public library almost 6 times in FY 2019 (5.9, the highest number of visits per person), while the average Mississippi resident visited 2.3 times (Table 33).
- Nationwide, each person checked out an average of 6.9 items from the library, but two states had more than twice this national rate: Ohio (15.6) and Oregon (15.4) (Table 34).
- The number of public access Internet computers per 5,000 people and the utilization of these resources show an inverse relationship. For example, Vermont had the most public access Internet computers (8.9 per 5,000 people) and each computer was used 415 times in FY 2019. On the other hand, Nevada had the fewest public access Internet computers (2.4 per 5,000 people) with each one logging over 1,700 uses (Tables 35 and 36).
- E-book availability varied greatly among the states. At the national level, there were 1.9 E-books per person, but six states had more than twice this national rate: Kansas (16.6), Wisconsin (10.3), Ohio (9.6), Iowa (7.2), West Virginia (4.9) and New Hampshire (4.8) (Table 37).
- Attendance at public library programs was highest in Vermont (750.6 per 1,000 people) and lowest in Georgia (236.7 per 1,000 people) (Table 40).
- The number of library staff (FTE) per 25,000 people also varied among the states. Ohio had over 20 FTE staff for every 25,000 people (20.6), and Georgia had 6.3 (Table 43).



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