INSTITUTE of Museum and Library SERVICES

Library Profile
DENVER PUBLIC LIBRARY

DENVER COUNTY, COLORADO

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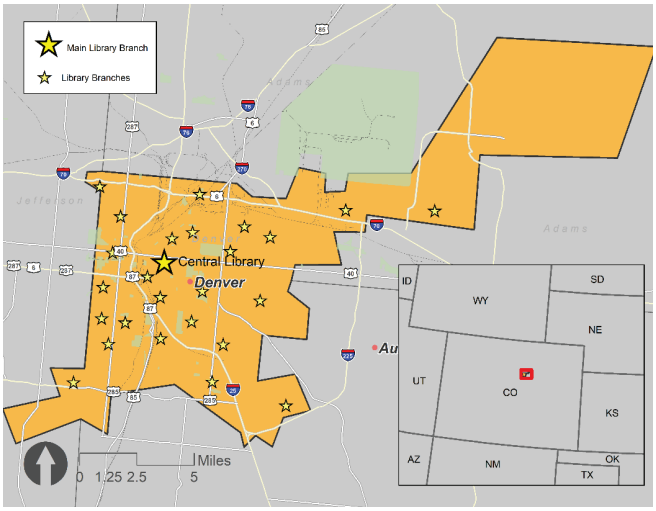
The Denver Public Library (DPL) is a large, complex library system that serves the city and county of Denver. DPL has 26 physical locations throughout the county, including a large Central Library, and an annual budget of more than $50 million (2018). DPL serves all of Denver County, the most populous urban county in Colorado with a population just more than 660,000. In 2018, the library hosted more than 4 million in-person visits across all 26 locations and more than 6.7 million website visits. Annual circulation included more than 2.5 million children's materials and more than 9 million total digital and physical materials.



DPL's 2019 strategic plan is guided by an overarching mission: "Together, we create welcoming spaces where all are free to explore and connect." It specifies that the library will measure its success in three specific areas that promote the civic, cultural, and educational health of Denver: (1) Children enjoy reading and learning and flourish in school and life; (2) People connect to resources and acquire the skills they need to thrive; and (3) We build community through fun, inspiring, and creative experiences. By supporting stronger social connectedness, creating a welcoming environment for all, and developing innovative programming and partnerships, DPL promotes the wellbeing of its patrons and the broader community.

DENVER COUNTY

Denver County's 663,303 residents are predominately White, and more than 30 percent of residents identify as Hispanic. The median household income is about $56,000 a year, roughly equivalent to the national median household income, and the county's 12 percent poverty rate is slightly higher than the national poverty rate.

	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
Denver County	663,303	19.6	53.4	9.4	30.8	3.4		$56,258	12.2

Compared to other urban counties across the country, Denver County residents enjoy elevated levels of overall community health. Denver County fell in the top quartile of the Community Health Index.[1] Health Care & Social Assistance; Professional, Scientific, & Tech Services; Accommodation & Food Service; and Retail Trade represent the largest employment sectors in Denver County, employing 34 percent of all working adults.

	Total Labor Force	% Health Care & Social Assistance	% Professional, Scientific, & Tech Services	% Accommodation & Food Service	% Retail Trade
United States*	131,362,978	14.5	6.7	8.9	10.9
Denver County	458,041	12.0	12.0	10.0	7.0

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 Data elements included in the Community Health Index, along with measures for Denver County, can be found at the beginning of Appendix II.

SITE VISIT PARTICIPANTS AND DATA COLLECTION

In fall 2019, the study team conducted interviews with 21 current library staff and representatives from six different partner organizations. Site visit interviews conducted with DPL staff and partners focused on understanding DPL programming and partnerships that support community health in Denver County as well as DPL's institutional approaches to assessment and sustainability.

In addition, DPL staff provided the following data to create the network map included in this profile:

- 2018 DPL Annual Report
- 2018 Internal Revenue Service (IRS) 990 forms for the DPL Friends Foundation
- Interview notes and related materials collected by the case study team

This site profile includes the following:

- A summary of select DPL programming and partnerships that support the community health of library customers and the overall health of the broader Denver community
- DPL institutional approaches to measuring and assessing the contributions its efforts have in the local community
- A descriptive network map that illustrates the scope and variety of connections DPL maintains with local partners throughout the county and beyond

KEY PROGRAMS AND PARTNERSHIPS PROMOTE COMMUNITY HEALTH IN DENVER

DPL staff who participated in the study repeatedly pointed to the library's focus on building community and making the library welcoming for all as qualities that enhance the broader community's overall health and wellbeing. DPL offers programs that address both physical health (e.g., movement, yoga, nutrition) and social and emotional health and community wellness (e.g., Death Café; Memory Café), classes and workshops on wide-ranging topics (e.g., navigating the Department of Human Services or talking with children about race), and art and music programs. Across different types of programs, DPL addresses personal and public health needs by providing information and resources, helping participants increase their knowledge and skills, reducing social isolation, and creating an inclusive atmosphere so that all Denver residents feel welcome to access library services. Below, we highlight two examples of DPL's public and personal health efforts.

DPL's Community Resource Team Promotes the Wellbeing of Patrons and Staff

DPL's Community Resource Team (CRT) illustrates DPL's strong commitment to supporting public health. The CRT began in 2015 with one social worker and the goal of working with library customers experiencing homelessness. Since then, the team has grown to include four social workers and six peer navigators. Peer navigators have lived experience with some of the challenges the library's customers face as well as knowledge of relevant resources in Denver. They help customers navigate challenges through outreach, compassion, coaching, and connecting them to resources. While some positions were originally grant funded, all are now permanent library positions funded by the city. The CRT creates a welcoming atmosphere and weaves supports for public health into all its efforts.

The CRT helps customers address a wide variety of needs, including income assistance, food access, shelter, legal aid, behavioral health, and immigration services. They connect customers to services inside and outside the library and have developed multiple partnerships to support this effort. Peer navigators and social workers work across all 26 branches, connecting to customers through drop-in hours and outreach. They also work closely with security and library staff to identify customers in need of assistance and to de-escalate situations when needed. In addition, the team provides consultation, support, and training for library staff, and the team participates in city-, state-, and national-level conversations to develop institutional policies that challenge social injustice and respect the needs and dignity of all customers. Two CRT members described their roles:

> *"We want people to know that the library is a part of the solution to all of these issues . . . helping people engage with support systems they didn't know existed or didn't know how to access." (Social Worker)*

> *"This service opens our eyes and opens doors to the libraries for many people; they come here for refuge. It helps people start anew." (Peer Navigator)*

The CRT has influenced the library system and its support of and resources for addressing health and social needs in a number of ways. Social workers and peer navigators have provided training for staff on topics such as trauma, mental health, and homelessness. Close collaboration with the security team has benefitted both teams and helped shift the security team's role to a focus on keeping people in the library, rather than ejecting customers. A security staff person said, "We were not trauma-informed [then] to the extent we are now. [After training from CRT], we serve the community much better today, because we are better prepared, better educated, [and] our officers have new tools to understand our customers."

DPL's adoption of peer navigators has also helped other organizations in Denver see the value of the peer navigator role. The city created a request for proposal (RFP) to bring peer navigators to other homeless-serving groups, and the Denver Department of Public Health and Environment created two peer navigator positions to do outreach.

The CRT enhances the library's efforts to provide a welcoming, safe, and accessible space for all customers. The team provides concrete supports for customers' behavioral and physical health needs. In addition, the team supports staff in using trauma-informed practices to advance core library values of building community and connecting people to resources, including by engaging them in a variety of formal and informal education opportunities.

Multiple DPL Programs Support Older Adult Health and Wellbeing

DPL's Older Adult Services (OAS) provides a variety of programming that aims to enhance health and wellbeing by helping older adults access needed services, get information about health needs, build community, reduce isolation, and increase social connectedness. The department also seeks to promote an age-positive philosophy within the library and across Denver. OAS's programming contributes to an ongoing cultural shift at DPL that includes a positive vision of older adults—a vision that translates into a broader variety of trainings and programs for older adults and for library staff. For example, trainings on how the older brain learns is helping better prepare librarians to create effective health and educational programming for older adults.

DPL runs a number of ongoing programs to support older adult health and wellbeing in which partners play a supporting role. For example, Medicare Mondays, offered in partnership with Benefits in Action, a state-authorized assistance program for older adults, provides one-on-one assistance in understanding and applying for Medicare and other public benefits. Memory Café, an ongoing program at multiple branches, offers support; resources; and fun, enriching activities to people

living with memory loss and their caregivers. About half of the participants find out about the Café through the Alzheimer's Association, which helps with marketing. Memory Café has spread to multiple branches within DPL, and librarians from other parts of Colorado have visited to observe it for possible replication. DPL has also spearheaded mindfulness programming for older adults, including meditation classes, Qigong classes, and gratefulness gatherings. These are grounded in research about the benefits of mindfulness for older adults, and they are among the most well-attended programs that DPL offers.

Key Partnerships Support Programming for Older Adult Health and Wellness

The Denver Art Museum and DPL are located on the same plaza, and they partner in multiple arenas, including early learning and older adult areas. In their work with older adults, the Denver Art Museum and DPL collaborate on programming, use each other's space, provide training for each other's staff, and participate together in a Creative Aging Forum. Training exchanges have included DPL staff participating in an Art of Access Training (on how to increase access for people living with disabilities) at the art museum and art museum staff participating in a DPL training on "How the Adult Brain Learns."

One recent collaboration involved a Photography and Memory program, where DPL played a lead role. The program engaged students from a University of Denver photography course and older adults as partners over multiple sessions. The student-partner pairs exchanged stories focused on a treasured photograph, and the students created photo portraits of their partners. The process culminated in an exhibit hosted by the art museum in its Community Gallery.

In other examples, DPL helped the museum to bring art into the community by inviting the museum to share pieces from its collection at Memory Café sessions and to set up temporary exhibits at branch libraries. The Denver Art Museum initially convened and continues to play a lead role in the Creative Aging Forum, where arts and cultural institutions share ideas and expertise related to working with older adults; DPL is an active participant and has also hosted meetings.

Changing the Narrative, a Colorado-based communications and awareness campaign, seeks to reframe aging to counter ageist attitudes and stereotypes. Changing the Narrative's goals are to better support the health and wellbeing of older adults and to encourage stronger communities by valuing and learning from older adults' knowledge and experience. The partnership between DPL and Changing the Narrative includes the following:

- *Staff training*: Supporting culture change at the library through offering training to staff
- *Community education*: Community trainings and workshops
- *Hosting events*: Partnering on multiple events, such as a 2019 lecture by an anti-ageism activist, and sharing costs such as presenters' fees and catering, providing publicity, and creating invitations (with the library providing the space)

The partnership has influenced Changing the Narrative's work beyond Denver. When it initially enters a new community, its practice is to create a commission. Though libraries were not on their original "target list," Changing the Narrative now requests that local libraries be at the table because of its partnership with DPL. Changing the Narrative finds that libraries are helpful partners because they are trusted institutions frequently visited by older adults, and libraries do not carry the stigma that "senior centers" may have for younger seniors.

The NextFifty Initiative is a Denver-based foundation focused on the older adult population. NextFifty provided funding for the creation of DPL's OAS administrator position as well as much of the department's programming and training. NextFifty also funds some of the department's partners. Knowledge of the history of the CRT positively influenced NextFifty's

decision to fund DPL, and NextFifty hopes that the OAS Department will follow the CRT model. This trajectory would mean DPL incorporates OAS funding into its standard operating budget after the initial grant ends. It would also mean that OAS would then develop an advisory committee that includes older adults to inform programming and strategic directions.

The partnership with DPL has shaped NextFifty's broader approach to working with libraries. An interviewee noted that they hope to build on the experience with DPL by connecting to other libraries around the state and create opportunities for the OAS administrator to share OAS's work more broadly outside Denver. One of the program partners said:

> *"The library is doing a fantastic job . . . with a wide and dispersed network, there's a lot of opportunity for supporting social wellbeing for the community. They demonstrate innovation and creativity in responding to the community's needs."*

DPL's programs, partnerships, and new OAS Department support the health and wellbeing of older adults in multiple ways. All programming is rooted in an age-positive philosophy, with related DPL staff training and community education. Programs offer resources, information, and support groups linked to particular health challenges. They also provide opportunities to engage with art, advocacy, and physical health and wellness programming. All programs offer opportunities for older adults to create and maintain social connections and feel part of a larger community.

DPL USES DATA TO TRACK OUTCOMES AND DOCUMENT IMPACTS

Virtually all DPL programs gather attendance data and stories of impact, and the use of satisfaction and program enhancement surveys is also widespread. In 2019, DPL took steps to strengthen its capacity to collect and use data. It created a new department: Strategy and Evaluation (S&E). S&E includes a department manager and a senior management analyst, and it recently adopted a new relational database to connect and analyze data from across an increasing number of sources. Goals for the department include establishing a consistent and more formal evaluation structure systemwide. Multiple interviewees expressed hope that S&E would help them better track outcomes. The following examples highlight some of DPL's early attempts to collect and analyze data related to its programmatic contributions to physical, behavioral, social, emotional, and community health.

Some programs and departments are expanding their data collection to capture program-specific impacts more rigorously. For example, the CRT gathers data about individuals' living situations, whether they are connected to any other services, and any substance abuse follow-up that takes place following their contact with the CRT. The CRT also tracks 911 calls made by library staff. Early data collection efforts show ongoing increases in numbers served and suggest that about one-third of customers who work with the CRT are not connected to any other supports; early data collection also suggests that DPL 911 calls have declined substantially since the CRT's inception. These data provide the CRT team with information about the health and wellbeing needs of the customers it works with. Early data tracking point to successes such as fewer 911 calls because the CRT team developed approaches to help meet customers' health and wellbeing needs and to de-escalate potential conflicts. Early data collection efforts also point to areas for further development, like helping customers connect with needed services to improve their health and wellbeing.

Sometimes, partners help to enhance DPL's ability to track outcomes. For example, LinkAGEs is a consortium of nonprofits that promotes intergenerational connections; it recently funded the Photography and Memory Project. During the program, LinkAGEs administered pre- and post-surveys for the younger and older adult participants. The results suggested some shifts in relationships and attitudes, including positive changes in younger participants' attitudes toward older adults, which directly addressed ageism. Changing the Narrative also develops evaluation plans for all its work, which extends beyond the library. It uses surveys immediately after workshops and trainings and subsequent follow-up surveys to identify changes in attitudes among participants as well as changes in future intentions and actions. The results of these evaluations provide evidence of participants adopting more age-positive attitudes as well as actions they have taken. This data collection helps OAS and its partners understand how programming is meeting their health and wellbeing goals, such as developing age-positive attitudes among younger participants; and also identify areas for improvement.

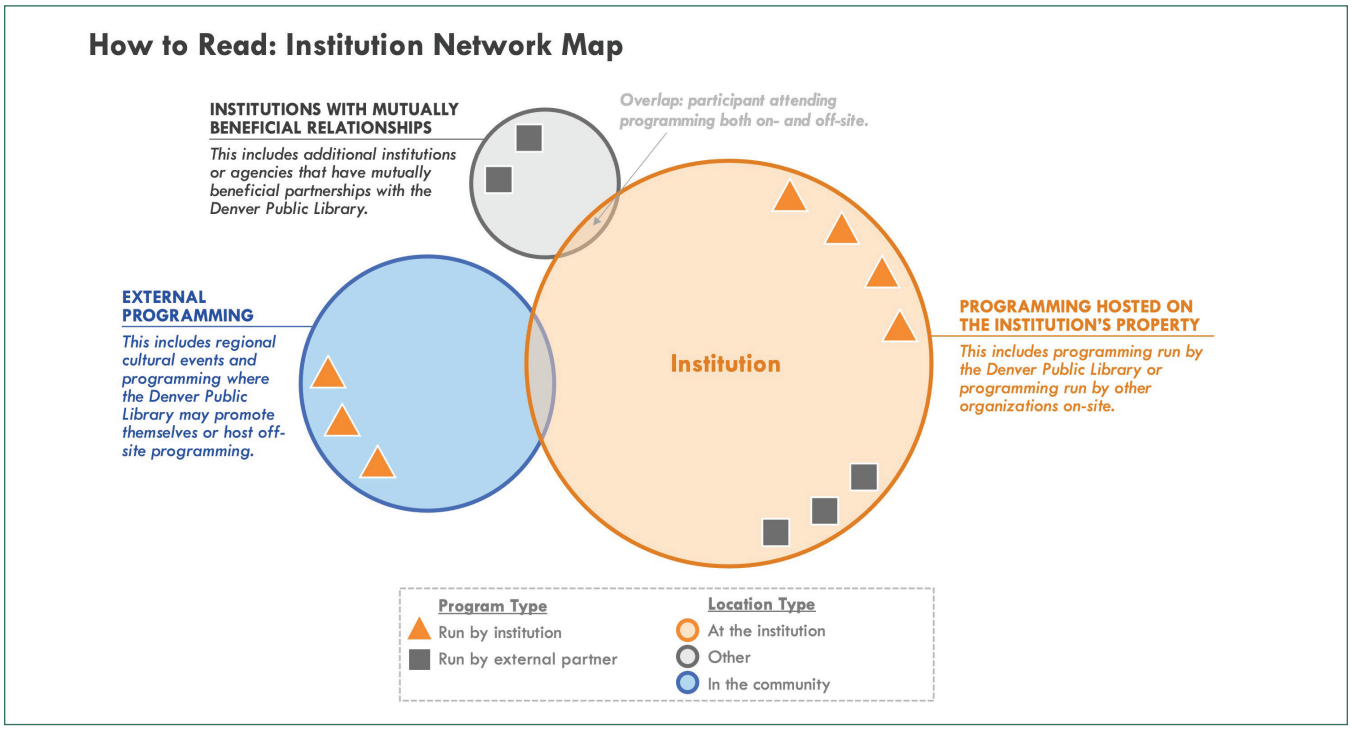
The library's goals to build community and foster strong relationships are both central to its efforts to support positive health and wellbeing. However, community strength and the durability of personal and institutional relationships within broader networks can be difficult to measure. Some DPL staff are developing exploratory tools that seek to capture these outcomes. For example, DPL's makerspace, IdeaLAB, has developed an approach to assess the strength of relationships between staff and program participants and is working to develop a behavioral observation tool to document collaboration between DPL staff and customers and collaboration between customers themselves.

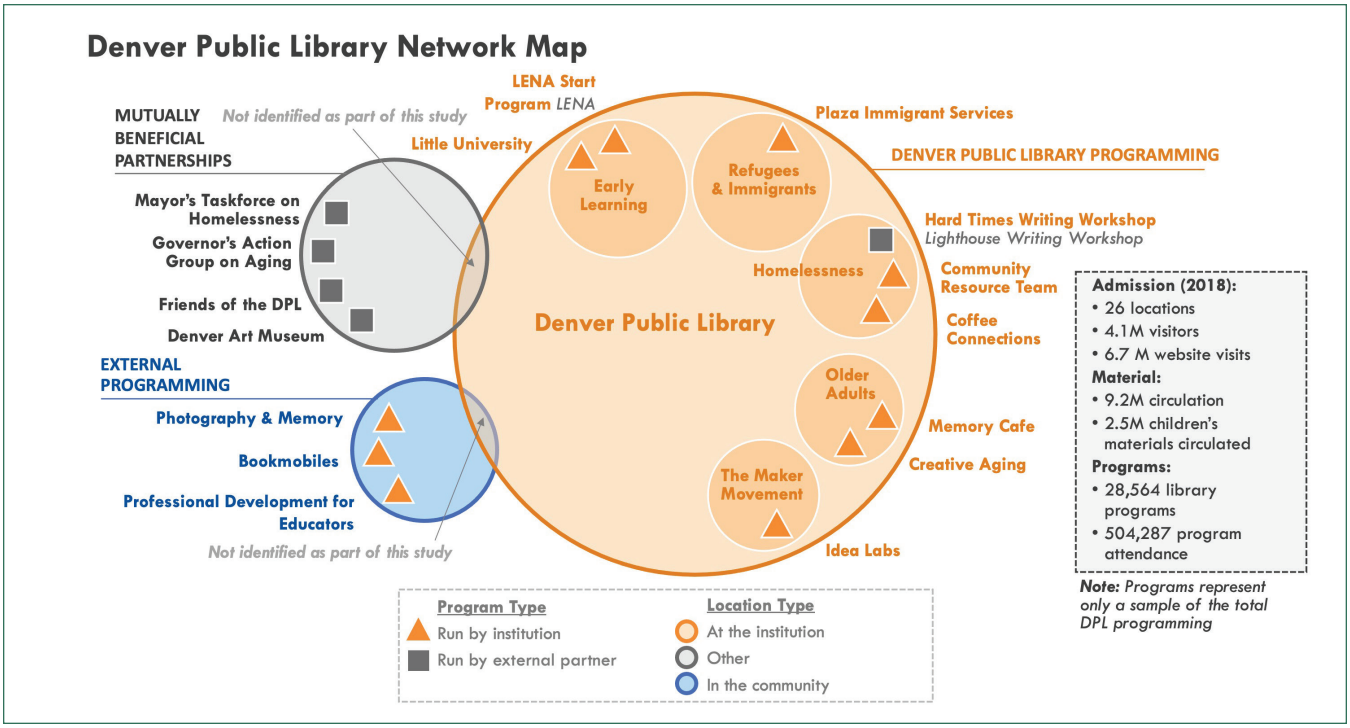
The programming, partnerships, and institutional practices presented in this profile are just a sampling of the diverse ways DPL supports the wellbeing of its staff, customers, and the broader Denver community. To live the institution's commitment as a place where all are welcome to enjoy what the library has to offer requires DPL to meet the community where they are (on- and off- site), to honor and respect the lived experiences that walk through its doors, to make its staff and spaces accessible and responsive to its patron's needs, and to be a leading example for other organizations in Colorado and beyond for what it means to be a public-serving institution.

DENVER PUBLIC LIBRARY NETWORK MAP

In addition to the interviews conducted during the site visit, the study team also collected a range of data from DPL to better understand the connections between DPL and other organizations in the community. Using these data, the study team developed a *descriptive* network map to highlight the different types of connections DPL maintains with other institutions in the local community. The map illustrates the relationships between DPL and those entities that offer programming at DPL itself and those that support cross-marketing efforts or have financial relationships with DPL, and it also includes places where DPL hosts off-site programs. The figure below provides guidance for understanding different elements of the network map.

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 economic impact of the relationships between CDRI 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 museum in different ways.





The figure above illustrates a *sample* of the connections of the more than 28,000 programs offered across DPL's 26 locations. Within the orange circle are a small sample of programs conducted on the physical property of the institution, both programs produced by DPL, and those produced by others; these are organized in terms of key program areas identified by DPL. Within the blue circle is a sample of programs produced by DPL and offered off-site in the community. The gray circle represents a sample of connections with other regional organizations and initiatives with whom the library has reciprocal relationships.