



# A Perfect Storm Brewing:

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## Budget cuts threaten public library services at time of increased demand

In a world where knowledge is power, libraries help make everyone more powerful. With more than 16,600 locations serving people of all ages in communities of all sizes, America's public libraries have a wide reach and a vital mission to connect people with the resources they need to thrive.

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**25 million Americans reported using their public library more than 20 times in the last year.**

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In the grip of one of the most severe recessions since the Great Depression, more Americans are turning to their libraries not only for free access to books, magazines, CDs and DVDs, but also for a lifeline to technology training and online resources for employment, continuing education and government resources. In January 2009, over 25 million Americans reported using their public library more than 20 times in the last year, up from 20.3

million Americans in 2006. It is likely this trend continued or increased through the remainder of 2009.

This level of use and reliance on public libraries was recently confirmed by new research conducted by the American Library Association (ALA) and the Center for Library and Information Innovation (CLII) at the University of Maryland. Initial findings from the study suggest a "perfect storm" of growing community demand for library resources converging with budget cuts closing library doors and reducing the staff available to assist library patrons. The study finds:

- More people are relying on public libraries for technology use, particularly to find employment and connect to online government services;
- The vast majority of public libraries support job seeking with specialized electronic resources, software and personal assistance from library staff;
- A majority of states report cuts in state funding to public libraries and to the state library agencies that support libraries and statewide library programs;
- The top challenge affecting public libraries' ability to help job seekers is a lack of adequate staff to effectively help patrons with their job-seeking needs; and
- Almost 15 percent of public libraries report operating hours decreased over the past fiscal year.

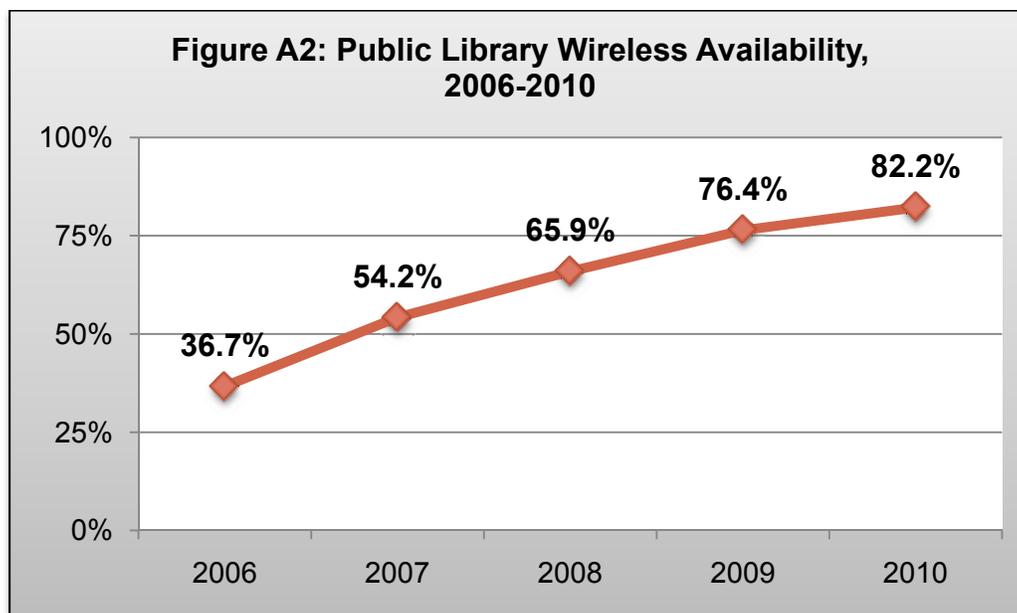
## Library Technology Use Jumps

America’s public libraries serve as community technology hubs for millions of people every day. Two-thirds of libraries report they provide the only free access to computers and the Internet in their communities. In 2009, libraries also overwhelmingly reported an increase in usage of public library computers over the previous fiscal year. More than three-quarters of all public libraries reported increased computer use (Figure A1).

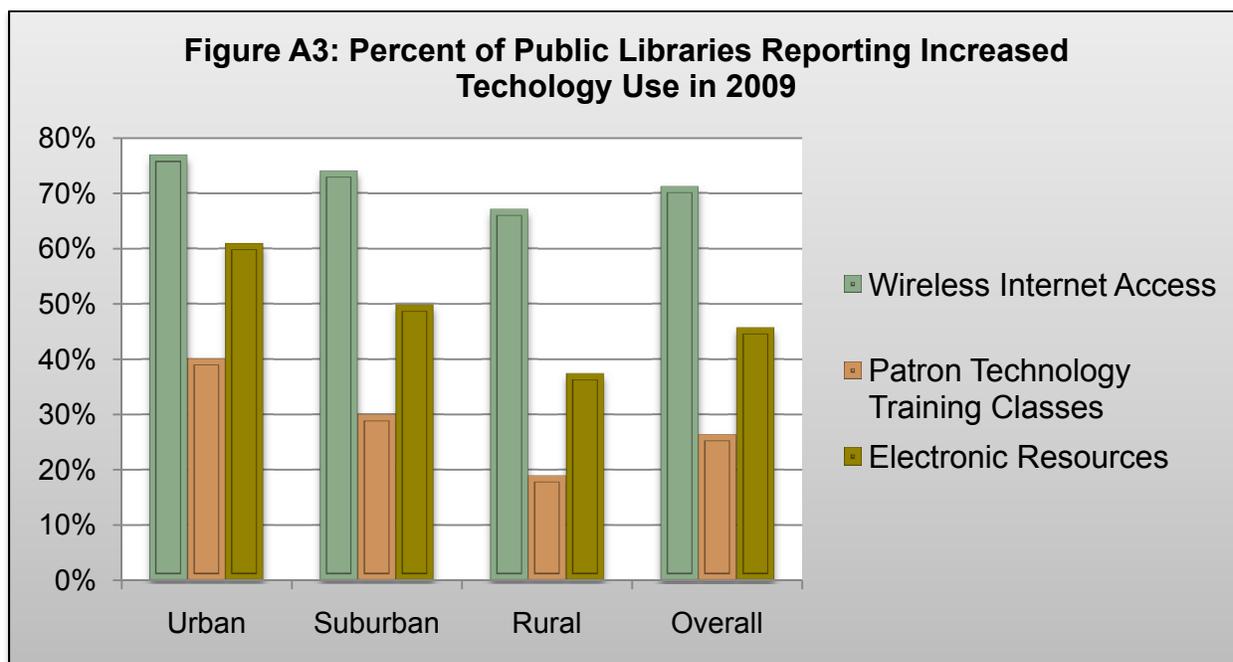
<b>Figure A1: Use of Public Internet Workstations, by Metropolitan Status</b>				
<b>Use of Workstations</b>	<b>Metropolitan Status</b>			
	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Suburban</b>	<b>Rural</b>	<b>Overall</b>
Use of workstations increased since last fiscal year	79.0% (n=2,114)	77.6% (n=4,203)	73.2% (n=5,527)	75.7% (n=11,844)
Use of workstations decreased since last fiscal year	2.8% (n=75)	3.5% (n=191)	2.9% (n=216)	3.1% (n=482)
Use of workstations have stayed the same since last fiscal year	16.8% (n=450)	18.1% (n=980)	23.1% (n=1,744)	20.3% (n=3,174)
Weighted missing values, n=336				

For example, the Appleton (WI) Public Library reports its public computer use is up as much as 52 percent over 2008. “It really took a jump as the recession hit us,” said Library Director Terry Dawson, as reported in the December 12 *Post-Crescent* newspaper. “It’s something we’re seeing on a national level with more employers requiring electronic applications to apply for a job. With this economy, more people are losing their high-speed Internet subscriptions, and they are relying on the library now.”

Seventy-one percent of public library survey respondents report they’ve also witnessed increased use of the library’s wireless Internet access. More than 82 percent of public libraries currently offer wireless access, up from 76 percent last year (Figure A2).



Similarly, close to half (45.6 percent) of all public libraries reported increased use of their electronic resources (which encompass a range of Internet-based services, including jobs databases, online test preparation services, investment tools, reference sources and downloadable books and audio) and more than one-quarter reported increased use of patron technology training classes.



In all cases, urban libraries reported the greatest surge in patron demand for technology services: 77 percent reported increased wireless use; 61 percent reported increased use of electronic resources; and 40 percent reported increased use of patron technology classes. Urban libraries also were the most likely to report their hours of service had decreased since the last fiscal year – illustrating the “perfect storm” that many public libraries and their communities are facing in FY2010 with increased demand for services and fewer resources available to meet those demands (Figure A3).

### Job Seeking Takes Center Stage

With more businesses – including a majority of America’s leading retailers – requiring applicants to apply online, job-seeking resources are among the most critical and most in demand among the technology resources available in U.S. public libraries.

A vast majority of public libraries help patrons complete online job applications (67 percent); provide access to job databases and other online resources (88 percent) and civil service exam materials (75 percent); and offer software or other resources (69 percent) to help patrons create resumes and other employment materials. Forty-two percent of urban libraries report offering

classes related to job seeking, and about 27 percent collaborate with outside agencies or individuals to help patrons complete online job applications (Figure A4).

Bethany Pisanchyn of Clarks Summit (PA) is one of many people who recently turned to the library when she was looking for work as a music teacher. “Over last summer, I found myself at the Abington Community Library for many hours a day, four to five days a week. One may ask what would cause me to do something like that, and I would quickly respond, ‘finding a job.’” Pisanchyn applied to over 70 different schools using library computers after her home computer stopped working, and she was unable to afford replacing it.

*“Over last summer, I found myself at the Abington Community Library for many hours a day, 4-5 days a week. One may ask what would cause me to do something like that, and I would quickly respond, ‘finding a job.’” - Bethany Pisanchyn of Clarks Summit, Penn.*

**Figure A4: Job Seeking Services of the Public Library Outlets, by Metropolitan Status**

Job Seeking Roles and Services	Metropolitan Status			Overall
	Urban	Suburban	Rural	
The library provides access to jobs databases and other job opportunity resources	89.3% (n=2,336)	91.6% (n=4,717)	85.3% (n=6,068)	88.2% (n=13,121)
The library provides access to civil service exam materials	85.7% (n=2,240)	78.9% (n=4,063)	68.0% (n=4,840)	74.9% (n=11,144)
The library offers software and other resources to help patrons create resumes and other employment materials	81.2% (n=2,124)	68.7% (n=3,535)	64.5% (n=4,591)	68.9% (n=10,251)
The library helps patrons complete online job applications	67.4% (n=1,762)	63.8% (n=3,287)	69.4% (n=4,937)	67.1% (n=9,986)
The library offers classes (either by librarians or others working with the library) on job seeking strategies, interview tips, etc.	42.0% (n=1,099)	30.7% (n=1,583)	13.6% (n=969)	24.5% (n=3,650)
The library collaborates with outside agencies or individuals to help patrons complete online job applications	32.9% (n=860)	20.6% (n=1,062)	22.3% (n=1,586)	23.6% (n=3,507)
The library collaborates with outside agencies or individuals to help patrons develop business plans and other materials to start businesses	26.5% (n=694)	13.2% (n=680)	10.5% (n=745)	14.2% (n=2,119)
The library helps patrons develop business plans and other materials to start businesses	22.1% (n=578)	14.0% (n=719)	9.5% (n=675)	13.3% (n=1,972)
Other	4.7% (n=123)	3.0% (n=152)	3.2% (n=228)	3.4% (n=504)
Will not total 100%, as categories are not mutually exclusive Weighted missing values, n=1,099				

“The library was able to offer me a wealth of valuable resources that are not only free, but also extremely helpful in my job search. The library offered me up-to-date computers with fast Internet service and printing capabilities. I also was given valuable advice and assistance from the friendly library staff. One of the staff members actually informed me of the resource that ultimately led me to finding a job in my field. There are many people in the library like me who are in there all the time and need the services. I even built a curriculum for my new teaching job using library materials.”

***“The numbers of people that need services are larger than our capacity,” said Davidson Works (N.C. county workforce development board) Executive Director Nancy Borrell.***

With 16,604 public library buildings nationwide, the impact public library staff and services can have in meeting the needs faced by unemployed and underemployed people is significant. With public computers, Internet, Wi-fi, electronic resources, technology training and staff to help support and guide users to job information, libraries are well-positioned to support employment and economic development – particularly in collaboration with other community and government agencies, including Department of Labor ONESTOP centers and other workforce development agencies.

“The numbers of people that need services are larger than our capacity,” said Davidson Works (N.C. county workforce development board) Executive Director Nancy Borrell. “The library (Davidson County Public Library) is a natural partner – they are located in all corners of the county and have the space, computers and trained library staff we need. We’re reaching areas of the county we’ve never been able to reach before.”

## **E-Government Role Expands**

As many government agencies eliminate print forms and even close satellite offices, U.S. public libraries are on the front lines of connecting people with essential government resources. Continuing a trend begun with the 2006-2007 survey, libraries report an increased range of e-government services for patrons. There was a 23 percent jump in libraries reporting they provide assistance to patrons applying for or accessing e-government services. Almost 79 percent of libraries report this is the case, compared with 54 percent last year (Figure A5).

“For anyone without a computer, you’re really out of luck without the library,” said Elsie Werdin, who spent almost two weeks on the telephone trying to get the information she needed to enroll herself and her husband in a Medicare plan that would cover her husband’s expensive medications. With assistance from the Pasco County Library System (FL) e-government librarian, she was able to complete an online Medicare enrollment form in less than 30 minutes. The Pasco library provided e-government services to more than 9,100 people from October 2008 to March 31, 2009, up 177 percent over the same period one year ago.

Two-thirds of public libraries provide assistance to patrons completing government forms; and one in five public libraries is partnering with other agencies to provide e-government services, up from 13.4 percent one year ago.

“People come in every day to apply for unemployment. They could also go to the unemployment office, but the lines are long there, and there is no one to help them navigate,” said an Indiana public library director. “The library’s hours also are more conducive since they can look for work all day, then come to the library at night.”

<b>Figure A5: E-Government Roles and Services of the Public Library Outlets, by Metropolitan Status</b>				
<b>E-Government roles and services</b>	<b>Metropolitan Status</b>			<b>Overall</b>
	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Suburban</b>	<b>Rural</b>	
Staff provide as needed assistance to patrons for understanding how to access and use e-government Web sites	91.2% (n=2,300)	88.8% (n=4,317)	87.9% (n=5,918)	88.8% (n=12,535)
Staff provide assistance to patrons applying for or accessing e-government services	75.9% (n=1,913)	78.6% (n=3,820)	79.9% (n=5,383)	78.7% (n=11,116)
Staff provide assistance to patrons for completing government forms	71.4% (n=1,800)	65.2% (n=3,168)	65.1% (n=4,386)	66.3% (n=9,354)
Staff provide assistance to patrons for understanding government programs and services	45.6% (n=1,149)	45.6% (n=2,215)	40.7% (n=2,742)	43.3% (n=6,106)
The library is partnering with government agencies, non-profit organizations, and others to provide e-government services	26.4% (n=666)	21.2% (n=1,030)	17.8% (n=1,201)	20.5% (n=2,898)
The library has at least one staff member with significant knowledge and skills in provision of e-government services	31.5% (n=794)	16.2% (n=789)	15.4% (n=1035)	18.5% (n=2,618)
The library developed guides, tip sheets, or other tools to help patrons use e-government websites and services	23.3% (n=588)	18.7% (n=907)	14.2% (n=957)	17.4% (n=2,452)
The library offers training classes regarding the use of government Web sites, understanding government programs, and completing electronic forms	22.9% (n=578)	7.3% (n=357)	4.8% (n=321)	8.9% (n=1,256)
The library is working with government agencies (local, state, or federal) to help agencies improve their websites and/or e-government services	11.0% (n=277)	8.2% (n=398)	6.0% (n=405)	7.7% (n=1,080)
The library offered translation services for forms and services in other languages	11.1% (n=279)	6.6% (n=321)	4.2% (n=280)	6.2% (n=880)
Other	4.8% (n=121)	3.3% (n=159)	4.4% (n=298)	4.1% (n=578)

## Library Funding Under Threat

At the same time demand for critical services has climbed, many state and local libraries are facing growing funding challenges. Among the more complex challenges are state library's reallocation of financial support of public libraries from state sources to already stretched federal sources, or the disappearance of support altogether. As part of the *Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study*, the ALA surveyed the 51 Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (50 states and the District of Columbia) in November 2009.

Twenty-four states reported cuts in state funding for public libraries between FY2009 and FY2010. Of these, nearly half indicated the cuts were greater than 11 percent – almost four times the number that reported this was the case in the previous fiscal year. Also:

- Seven states and the District of Columbia do not provide state funding;
- Eleven states reported there had been no change between FY2009 and FY2010;
- Three states reported an increase in funding; and
- One state had not yet begun FY2010.

For many states, FY2010 cuts come on top of state funding cuts made between FY2008 and FY2009. In January 2009, 41 percent of responding states reported declining state funding for public libraries. Georgia, for instance, saw state funding reductions greater than 7 percent each year for the past three fiscal years.

Cuts at the state level frequently were compounded by cuts at the local level and cuts in the state library agency budget. Seventeen states (37 percent) reported they believed a majority of libraries in their states had received cuts in funding in FY2010, compared with FY2009. Of these, a majority reported decreases in the five-to-ten percent range.

Washoe County (NV) Public Library, for instance, has lost nearly 40 percent of its operating budget over the past two fiscal years. At the same time the county is reporting declines in property and sales taxes, the Nevada State Library and Archives reports state funding declines greater than 11 percent in both of the last two fiscal years. As a result, Washoe County Public Library has cut its operating hours 25 percent, and staffing is down 30 percent.

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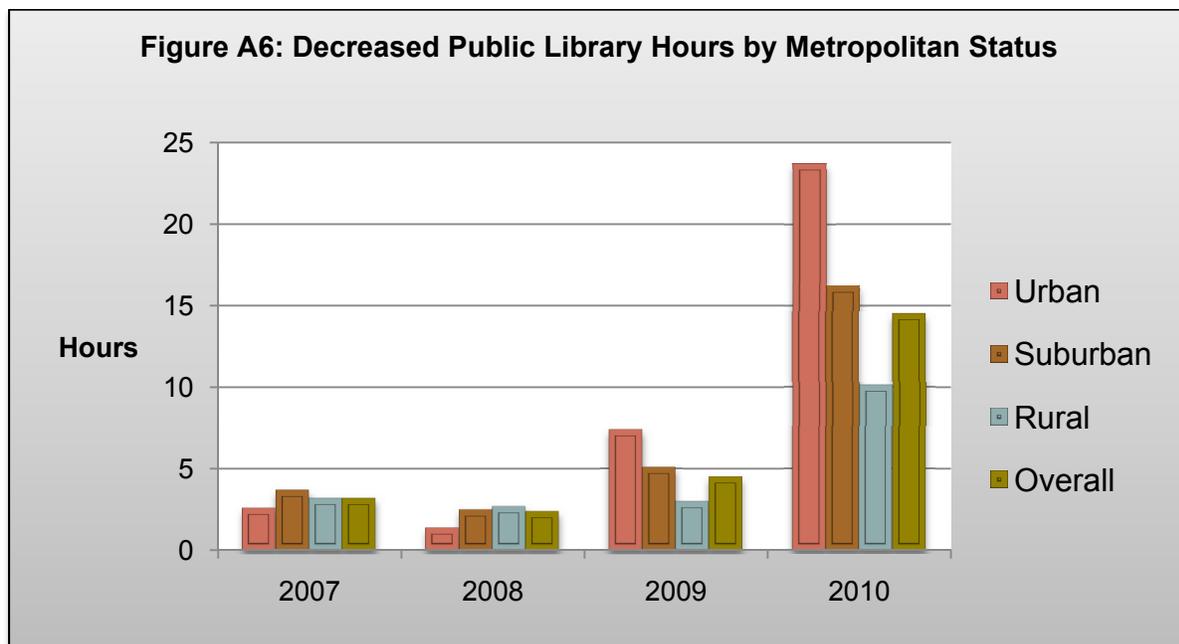
Nearly three-quarters of state library agencies reported their budgets had been reduced, decreasing their ability to support public libraries in their states, including lost staff to provide consultation and continuing education; reduced state expenditures for library collections, subscriptions, databases and new or replacement equipment; eliminated reciprocal borrowing and more. This is consistent with a separate survey conducted by the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA), which found that 77 percent (31 of 40 respondents) of state library agencies experienced a budget cut in the current fiscal year.

The South Carolina State Library’s budget, for instance, has been reduced 37 percent since fiscal year 2008. State aid to public libraries has been reduced from \$2.25 per capita in FY08 to \$1.32 in FY10. The reduction to state aid in FY10 was offset by (one-time) American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds in the amount of \$0.42 per capita. State Library agency staff positions are down 23 percent. “With staff numbers decreasing, programs may have to be curtailed or eliminated,” according to state library staff.

### Fewer Hours, Staff to Meet Demand

Thirteen states (28 percent) reported they were aware of public library closures in their states the past 12 months. Twelve states reported closures of five or fewer libraries; and one state (Indiana) reported more than five closures in the past year.

The 2009 national survey of public libraries also found a significant increase in the number of libraries reporting a decrease in the hours they are available to serve their communities. Nearly one-quarter of urban libraries and 14.5 percent of all libraries (up from 4.5 percent last year) report operating hours have decreased since the previous fiscal year. Nationally, this translates to lost hours at more than 2,400 public library branches, and the trend is likely to continue in 2010 unless funding is restored or new funds identified (Figure A6).



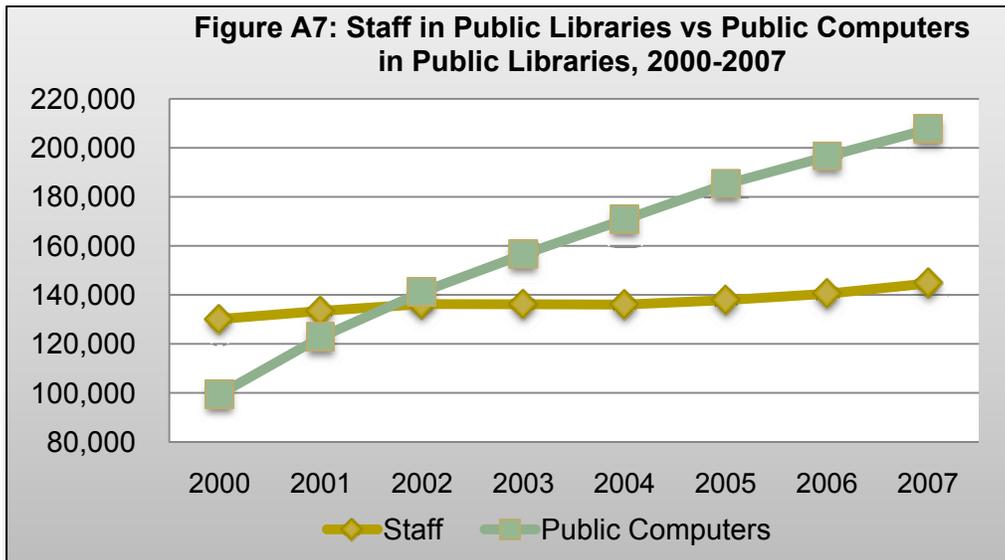
Decreased funding also is impacting staffing levels at many public libraries at a time when patron demand is vastly increasing. The number one challenge affecting libraries' ability to help job seekers is a lack of adequate staff to effectively help patrons with their job-seeking needs.

Almost 60 percent of libraries strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that the library does not have enough staff to help patrons. About 52 percent agreed or strongly agreed that library staff does not have the necessary skills to meet patron demand; and about 36 percent agreed or strongly agreed the library has too few public computers to meet demand.

**Nearly one-quarter of urban libraries report operating hours have decreased since the previous fiscal year. The trend is likely to continue in 2010 unless funding is restored or new funds identified.**

In 2008, 90 percent of libraries provided formal technology training classes or one-on-one assistance to library patrons using public Internet computers. Budget cuts at Broward County (FL) Library System, however, included 12 instructors that previously taught technology classes. The library system has lost 28 percent of its funding and one-third of its staff positions over the past three years, while circulation has increased 27 percent over the same period.

Along with a 90 percent increase in the number of computers available in U.S. public libraries between 2000 and 2007 (Figure A7), Americans visit their public libraries 1.4 billion times and check out almost 2.2 billion items each year according to the most recent data from the Institute of Museum and Library Services.



Institute of Museum and Library Services, <http://harvester.census.gov/imls/index.asp>

“(When budget cutting), I try to select areas where it would do the least harm,” said Sierra Vista (AZ) Public Library Director David Gunckel. “But I’m really at the point now where none of my choices are painless. Service is going to deteriorate in some way.” With a hiring freeze in place, the library already has lost 70 staff hours per week compared with one year ago, and the director expects longer lines, fewer new materials, putting off computer replacements beyond five years and reducing operating hours.

## Looking to the Future

America’s public libraries are first responders in a time of economic uncertainty and are, and should continue to be, part of both national and community-level responses to supporting employment and economic development efforts.

Some libraries and their communities already have been selected to benefit from one-time federal stimulus funding (ARRA).

- The Arizona State Library, Archives and Public Records, for instance, received a \$1.3 million grant to enhance public computing facilities in more than 80 public libraries throughout the state. More than 1,000 computers will be added in a state where more than 90 percent of public libraries reported they do not have enough public computers to meet demand some or all of the time.
- The city of Boston will use stimulus funding to expand computer and Internet capacity at the Boston Public Library and its 26 branches.

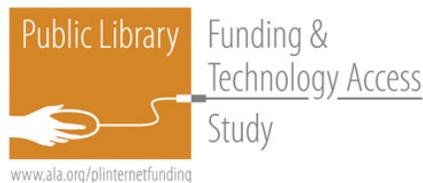
State libraries also are teaming with other state agencies to cost-effectively train librarians to assist newly unemployed residents.

- In North Carolina, which has had one of the highest unemployment rates in the country, the State Library collaborated with the Employment Security Commission and the Department of Commerce to train librarians, create an online job search toolkit and expand job-related library collections.
- The Tennessee State Library & Archives purchased resume software for 100 libraries in the state; awarded six Library Service Technology Act (LSTA) grants to create job-training centers in public libraries in collaboration with local agencies, such as adult education centers and career centers; and partnered with the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development to provide training for library staff, “Our local communities are hurting. One county was devastated – with 27 percent unemployment. Public libraries are stepping up to the plate and becoming anchors of the community – offering services many people don’t have available at home,” said Assistant State Librarian for Planning and Development Jane Pinkston.

Community, government agency and library collaborations are one of many keys to aiding American families in weathering this economic storm. Together, they have the opportunity to:

- Increase awareness of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century services and resources available in U.S. public libraries;
- Ensure sustained funding and staffing for public libraries;
- Improve coordination and implementation of e-government and economic development activities at all levels of government; and
- Recognize public libraries as an anchor institution that connects all Americans to the Internet, technology training and assistance, trained staff and rich electronic and print collections.

Libraries are part of the solution for Americans struggling to regain their footing in uncertain economic times. Keeping library doors open with sufficient staffing is vital to ensuring that every person has equal access to essential employment, continuing education and government resources.



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The *Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study*, funded by the ALA and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, provides the most current national information available on public library funding and technology use and services. This brief report presents selected preliminary findings from the 2009-2010 study's public library and state library agency surveys. The 2009-2010 public library survey was available for completion between September 7, 2009 and November 13, 2009. The survey produced 7,393 responses, for a response rate of 82.4 percent response rate. Forty-five states and the District of Columbia responded to the state library agency survey in November 2009, for a total response rate of 90 percent. For more information on the study, please visit [www.ala.org/plinternetfunding](http://www.ala.org/plinternetfunding).