A valuable complement to the public library and state library surveys is a qualitative component to better understand the quantitative responses. Each year, the research team conducts field interviews with library staff in at least two states. This year, the research team interviewed 22 public library staff members – mostly library directors and library IT directors – in two states: California and Oklahoma.
Summary
Libraries were selected from a pool of those responding to the Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study survey, and by recommendations made by staff at their respective state libraries. Interviewees were representative of rural, suburban, and urban libraries, as well as geographical diversity within each state. State library staff were also interviewed to provide a statewide context for these field interviews. The interviews are not meant to provide a comprehensive view of public library technology in each state, but rather as descriptive, qualitative data gathered to deepen the understanding of issues related to library funding and sustainability.

Key findings
The current funding landscape is significantly different for libraries in California and Oklahoma. Most California libraries interviewed are struggling with the effect of significant, cumulative year budget cuts. In comparison, Oklahoma libraries reported neither significant budget reductions or increases. Even with this difference, there are some common threads found in these interviews:

- Most libraries do not anticipate any improvement in funding for FY2012. California libraries expect further reductions at the state and local levels, while Oklahoma libraries anticipate flat funding. As a result, many library directors reported a reduction in hours, frozen or reduced staffing levels, and deferred computer replacements.
- The majority of libraries had either recently launched downloadable e-book collections, or were in the process of funding an initial e-book collection.
- With increased Wi-Fi availability and usage, many libraries expressed concern about the growing strain on connectivity capacity and speed.
- Nearly all libraries reported an increase in technology use since last year. Job-seekers and e-government services are the reasons for much of this increase; there are also insufficient computers and available staff to meet patron needs.

Executive Summary
For the past three years, California libraries have been battling the effects of the state’s ever-growing financial crisis. In 2010, California had the third highest foreclosure rate in the nation—one in 200 households in foreclosure—strangling property tax revenue support.

Libraries interviewed for this study cautiously projected that the steep plunge in local funding might begin to level off in FY2012.

Close to half of the California libraries interviewed had increased Internet capacity over the past two years. Libraries continued to install fiber optic connections as more funding became available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, private grants and group discounts. In 2010, California received funding from the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP), benefitting libraries in Los Angeles and in the Central Valley. Statewide, 82.6 percent of libraries reported Internet access with maximum speeds of 1.5 Mbps or higher, matching the national average.

While budget constraints kept most libraries from making new technology purchases benefitting the public, many libraries reported that protecting their technology budget was a priority. Without exception, libraries reported delaying their public access computer replacement schedules by one to two years, supported by varying levels of IT support.

To meet the public demand for Internet connectivity, California libraries, along with the rest of the nation, increased public wireless Internet access (Wi-Fi). A number of libraries reported the increased use of Wi-Fi has put a tremendous strain on Internet capacity and access speed: the challenge to meet user needs and expectations is ongoing.

The most important Internet services provided to communities continues to be support for job-seekers and for those needing to access e-government resources. An FY2010 Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) Literacy and Workforce Development grant is providing 14 California libraries, located in counties where the unemployment rate and low literacy rate are higher than the state average, with training resources for computers, and online career and educational tools.

Background
California has 181 public library jurisdictions with 1,123 physical locations and 63 mobile libraries (bookmobiles) to serve a population of over 38 million. The state ranks first in the nation for its number of physical locations. By jurisdiction, there are 46 county, 117 municipal, 12 independent special districts, and six joint powers of authority (JPA) libraries.

All but five of the 181 public libraries belong to one of the
eight regional cooperatives, established for the purpose of providing collaborative reference, communication and delivery services, staff development training and grant administration.

State-level support for public libraries comes from the Public Library Foundation, which provides per capita allocations; the California Library Services Act, which provides partial reimbursements for direct and interlibrary loans (transaction-based reimbursement); and the California Library Literacy and English Acquisition Service, which provides English language literacy instruction to native and non-native English-speaking youth and adults.

The State Library provides training for library staff through Infopeople, funded by annual grants from the Institute of Museum and Library Services through LSTA. Infopeople offers fee-based onsite and online training, and free webinars.

In FY2009 (the most recent year for which national statistics are available), California’s public libraries reported hosting 172.4 million visits, answering 36.2 million reference questions, and circulating more than 237.9 million items. California residents are served by 12,375 employees, of whom 3,596 hold a Master’s degree in Library and Information Science.

The state ranks 48th in the nation for full-time equivalent (FTE) staff per 25,000 residents, with 8.36 FTE compared to the national average of 12.31 FTE. The state also ranks 28th (including the District of Columbia) in public access computers per 5,000 residents.

Twelve library staff members—mostly library directors or library IT directors from 11 libraries, and one regional library system director—were interviewed between September 2010 and January 2011. They represent service populations ranging from 24,000 to 1.3 million people. Only one library provides service through a single location; the other 10 libraries have from three to 36 outlets. Research staff also interviewed California State Library staff. Although the interviews are not meant to provide a comprehensive view of public library technology in the state, interviewees’ comments help illuminate trends, challenges and successes of serving the public in California libraries.

**Funding**

California’s economic crisis looms large, with a FY2010 budget deficit of 52.8 percent, and a projected 29.3 percent deficit in FY2012. Widespread foreclosures have depressed property values that, in turn, support libraries. A downturn in sales tax revenues has also affected local funding.

California libraries receive local revenues in different ways, depending on library type. City and county libraries typically receive general funds, while special district and county libraries benefit from dedicated property tax revenue. JPA libraries generally include a blend of both funding patterns.

All 11 interviewed libraries reported a decrease in public funding; in fact, most have reported decreases consecutively for the past two to four years. The annual reductions generally are in the 8–12 percent range, with three libraries reporting two-year cumulative reductions between 24–40 percent. Libraries noted that the cuts they experienced are typically representative of those sustained by other city or county agencies. In 2006, the passage of Proposition 1A allowed the state to borrow from local governments twice in ten years. In 2010, many libraries are impacted by these state “takeaways.”

One library director reported flat funding for three years, with the expectation that one more year would be at the same level. Another library director was mildly optimistic that her library would only have a 4 percent reduction for FY2011, after experiencing 8 percent reductions in both FY2009 and FY2010. The interviewees had varied opinions regarding how soon these funding reductions would level off.

The Chula Vista Public Library, which serves a community with one of the highest foreclosure rates in the nation, has experienced cumulative budget decreases of 40 percent over two years, and 60 percent over four years. During that same period, the library’s collection budget has been reduced by 80 percent, and the staff has been reduced from 71 people to 20.

With city funding down 25 percent over two years, the San Jose Public Library has responded with cuts in staff and hours. The library has not yet had to reduce the technology or collection budget, thanks to parcel and transfer taxes. The library, located in Silicon Valley, has been affected by nine years of budget cuts following the dot.com bust. Outlets are presently open only four and a half days per week, with the expectation of further reductions to three days next year.

In the face of continued reductions in funding and revenues, most of the libraries interviewed were intent on protecting their technology
funding. They expressed the common belief that “technology is our bread and butter.” Generally, the first level of cuts was to collections, often in the 25-30 percent range, followed by reduced hours, and then staff layoffs. “Technology was formerly a backbone of libraries,” said the director of the San Diego County Library, “and now it’s become the front door of public service.”

Libraries are investing in new technology infrastructure and service models to experience increased savings over time. Many of the libraries interviewed had already installed, or were in the process of implementing, RFID systems, automated materials handling and self-check terminals. The investment will likely be recouped in staff savings, generally not obtained through layoffs, but by freeing up staff to work in other areas.

The Plumas County Library is migrating to an Open Source integrated library system (ILS) with a grant for the migration and first year support. “Overall, the cost of our ILS will be much less, and I am confident that it will provide an excellent user experience,” said the library director. Plumas County is the only library that reported its technology budget is 100 percent grant-funded.

Libraries reported more examination of outsourcing options in response to continuing economic challenges to free up staff for other work. Two libraries reported outsourcing cataloging services, and one library was outsourcing its inbound calls to a call center.

Even when the technology budget is not cut, interviewed libraries are unable to expand or upgrade systems and hardware. Alternative sources to fund new purchases include grants and sponsorships, and the important contributions from Friends organizations. At the Palos Verdes Library District, funding for programs and Sunday open hours comes from their Friends, which increased the contribution this year from $200,000 to $300,000. In contrast, the Santa Clara County Library’s funding from their Friends, which had supported extra hours at one location for three years, has decreased by $162,500.

Technology Resources
The number of public access computers per location ranged from two at a rural library outlet to 400 at the central outlet of an urban library. All but one of the California libraries interviewed have wireless access at all locations.

With continued high levels of demand for Internet access, many libraries have reached their building’s space capacity. Libraries look to Wi-Fi to alleviate some of the need for additional public access computers. In-house lending of laptops and netbooks is in place at a few of the libraries interviewed. For example, the San Bruno Public Library was able to expand access beyond its 13 public workstations with the purchase of four netbooks for in-house use in April 2010. The netbooks are barcoded and tagged, and patrons must sign use agreements. With only three public electrical outlets, it was necessary to significantly expand electrical access and seating to support overall Wi-Fi use. Insufficient infrastructure for electrical access is not unique to San Bruno Public Library; 54 percent of libraries nationwide reported this as one of the important or most important factors influencing the addition of public library workstations.

Many expressed an interest in mobile teaching labs for both in-house use and for community outreach. However, financial constraints are limiting implementation by libraries such as Plumas County, which had obtained a grant for a mobile teaching lab with eight laptops. Their plans for public training had to be put on hold due to lack of staff availability.

The landscape for formal technology training for patrons varies greatly among those interviewed. One director told us, “Right now, it’s just about keeping the doors open.” Conversely, the San Diego County Library offers a robust offering of public technology training led by staff and community volunteers. The library, which has one of
the largest Arabic-speaking communities in the U.S., offers computer instruction in Arabic, as well as in Spanish.

The San Joaquin Valley Library System, one of California's eight regional cooperatives, provides support and services for 10 public libraries comprised of 113 outlets in the Central Valley. The system director reports a high success rate with classes offered at its member libraries. The libraries serve a population with approximately 18 percent unemployment and 40 percent adult illiteracy. The Tulare County Library was the first in the system to offer free computer classes, and still offers two to three per week. "People stay and progress through various classes. Several customers started at square one, and after several months of classes, bought a home computer," said the system director.

One California library is planning a pilot project that will use a club model rather than formal classes. The library director reports that "we're finding people are not sticking with the curricular approach, but do want support and continuity. We're looking to provide a place where students can learn from each other, with facilitation and coaching from staff or a skilled volunteer."

Most of the libraries interviewed have downloadable books; some have recently added e-books to their audiobook collections. One California library was able to supplement a limited budget for e-books this year with a grant that included a donation of 15 e-readers for checkout. Only one library did not yet have downloadable books, but is hoping to find a grant to start the collection with assistance from its library cooperative.

Libraries continue to provide the ever popular e-resources for homework help, adult learning, and job resources. A number of libraries purchase these collections through discounts from their regional cooperatives. Still, interviewees reported significant reductions in their database collections that they don’t envision recovering. "We’re cutting databases big time, and not because there’s a better alternative, but because nobody uses them. It’s just not good use of taxpayer money. And we can argue till the cows come home about whether people are getting better information elsewhere, but they’re getting their information elsewhere and I don’t know that I can be throwing good money after bad," said the Palos Verdes Library District director.

Most libraries expressed a desire to provide mobile applications (apps) for patrons, but a number expressed frustration at not having the staff available for the app development process. "We have to be where the people are. And where are they? On their devices," said one library director. The Contra Costa County Library received a grant to develop a mobile platform compatible with QR (Quick Response) code technologies. "We are using QR codes to provide a window into content in context, not just sending users to a mobile website," said a library staff member. The library currently has posters inside county buses which allow for direct access to downloadable audiobooks and e-books on smart phones; books are also being tagged with QR codes to provide direct access to read-alike recommendations.

The Santa Clara County Library has been able to expand reference services with the addition of embedded chat in the library catalog. Available at the library and remotely, the chat pops up when a user gets zero results, initiating chat with a librarian for modifying the search. "Once we started showing up when and where people needed us, they really started to use us," said the director. The Library’s e-reference (chat, e-mail, text) increased 33.6 percent in FY-2010 over the previous year’s e-reference. Traditional reference (in person and by phone) declined 3.6 percent during the same period.

Self-check systems are providing greater efficiencies for staff, and greater self-sufficiency for library users. One interviewee reported "the hard part was trying to convince the patrons and staff that the self-checks weren’t a budget or staff-cutting tool. I kept telling them, we already cut the budget; this is to help you with the budget cut." After two years, usage at that library is in the 70-80 percent range.

Connectivity

Libraries are continuing to migrate to fiber optic connections as more funding options—the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, consortia discounts, state and private grants, and E-rate—have become available, as well as some general pricing reductions.

Libraries in rural areas in the north and central parts of California report success in their pursuit of Internet connection upgrades to 1.5 Mbps. For example, 56 library outlets in the San Joaquin Valley Library System are in the process of upgrading to 1.5 Mbps as recipients of an Opportunity Online grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Overall, 72 California library outlets in 19 jurisdictions are participating in these grants that provide for one-time service upgrade costs, including equipment and technical support; E-rate application support; and funds for 50 percent of the telecommunications costs for two years.

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With increased Wi-Fi access and use, a number of libraries expressed concern about the accompanying negative impact on connectivity capacity and speed. One California library technology manager noted that “With so many mobile devices tapping into our system, we are close to hitting our saturation point.” The library’s public computers and Wi-Fi are on the same pipeline, which also adds to system strain. All branches have 15 Mbps out to a hub on a shared city network, so top speed is not always available at peak times. Library staff is researching a net equalizer that would even out download times between someone streaming video and an e-mail search, although there is not funding presently available to follow through on this project.

In 2010, California received American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding for grants in both Round 1 and Round 2 of BTOP. The only California library beneficiary in Round 1 was the Los Angeles Public Library, as part of the $7,496,157 grant to the Los Angeles’ Computer Access Network to expand and upgrade 188 public computer centers at libraries, workforce centers, parks, and youth and family centers in low-income and non-English-speaking communities.

Libraries in the Central Valley will benefit from a BTOP Round 2 grant awarded to the Corporation for Education Network Initiatives in California. The $46,619,757 grant will build a 1,371 mile fiber optic infrastructure through 18 counties, providing direct fiber optic connectivity to 63 anchor institutions and access by another 40 anchor sites, and hundreds of thousands of businesses and residences. The library community was a key player in connecting various organizations in the state in discussions that directed the planning for this successful grant application.

Technology Support and Maintenance
The libraries interviewed universally reported delaying their public workstation replacement schedules by one or two years, providing for four- to five-year equipment retention cycles. Two libraries reported purchasing new warranties to cover their public access computers for an extended five-year period, so were less concerned about maintenance issues.

One city library reports that slashed budgets have delayed workstation replacements beyond five years. “At this point we are not refreshing equipment, but instead relying somewhat on hand-me-downs from the city’s enterprise department as they cycle equipment on a more frequent basis.”

Overall, libraries reported that computers were rarely out of service for any extended time. Interviewees noted that efficient setup and tight security programming appear to address minimal software problems; the primary maintenance is in response to the expected and eventual “end of life” for the hardware.

The level and source of IT support varied greatly among the interviewed libraries. At the Plumas County Library, the director handles all computer updates for its four outlets that are spread out across 3,600 square miles. Sierra County Library also contracts with Plumas for remotely handled IT services for its four outlets. “Due to staff shortages, there are always delays. For example, it was two months after the acquisition of a new online career
resource by our system before I had time to load the link to our website,” commented the director.

One library director reports that her library has no in-house IT staff, and depends on the city’s understaffed IT department. “We had a donation of three laptops for patron use, and a year later, we are still waiting for the city IT staff to complete the setup. If they could have turned them around in a month, we could have gone back and asked for more,” said the library director.

The San Jose Public Library reports supporting 1,000 public access computers system-wide with 10 FTE for IT. “In spite of cuts, we’ve kept this constant. Technology is at the heart of what a library is about,” said the San Jose Public Library director.

**Changes Over Past Years**

All the interviewed libraries confirm the tremendous growth in use of library Wi-Fi, supplementing nearly 100 percent public access computer use at peak times. The Plumas County Library reports use of public computers increased 13 percent last year, and 40 percent over the past three years. The library director reports that some patrons have said they have canceled home Internet access and cable to save money. Sixty-seven percent of California libraries reported an increase in use of Wi-Fi over the last year.

Services for job-seekers and access to government information and services remain among the most important services provided to the community. One library director reports that with the continued influx of job-seekers, “there are still many people at a complete loss as to how to search online.” To support the work of its member library jurisdictions, several of the regional cooperatives developed LSTA grant programs to expand resources and services for workforce recovery.

To meet the increasing demand for downloadable books, many libraries are looking for funding in grants and donations. Two libraries are expecting to be able to add e-book collections this year with discounts arranged through their regional cooperative system. Statewide, 77.3 percent of libraries reported offering e-books, an increase of 12 percent over two years.

A number of libraries interviewed reported an increased patron interest in mobile applications. Many libraries are developing applications for the website and catalog as well as for direct access to content, such as downloadable e-books and audiobooks. Santa Clara County Library’s mobile apps for a discovery-based catalog and for social networking are proving to be very popular. “We read online comments saying how excited people are about this way of using the catalog, which allows them to keep their own lists and share what they are reading,” said the library director.

**Challenges**

The greatest challenge libraries face in maintaining access and quality of service is the impact of the continued decreases in funding. Libraries are struggling between maintaining library hours with reduced staff and services, versus reduced hours with full, or close to full staffing levels that support higher service levels; in fact, 44.5 percent of California libraries reported a decrease in the number of open hours, well over the national average of 15.9 percent.

The Chula Vista Public Library director said, “I believe it is better to keep the doors open with fewer people. Service suffers, but people want a Wal-Mart type schedule: I know you’re open at 8 and open till 10. When you close the doors, people go away and don’t come back.” Another library director commented that “she did not want to decrease library hours because she didn’t want the library to become less relevant.”

For others, the mission of the library can only be served if funding for technology is preserved. “Our plan is to protect technology at basically all costs, but there’s a finite
amount we can do when your funding is flat... We really need to reduce our hours so that we can spend more money and have a quality library system, rather than keeping a skeleton crew out there.”

Most of the interviewees commented that having staff trained and comfortable with new technologies continues to be a challenge. Staffing shortages resulting from budget cuts reduced the time available to staff for training. For some libraries, even with state or consortia discounts, the fees for training sessions are prohibitive.

One of the greatest barriers in providing the appropriate level of service cited by many is the continued reluctance of some staff to engage with new technologies. The reluctance from staff was attributed to a lack of interest, and a lack of comfort with the continual changes in technology and related services.

In response to demands of the ever-expanding technology, one library director explained that, “We are looking at hiring non-librarians to work in some positions on the frontline because we need a higher level of technical skills and sometimes it makes more sense to hire that skill than to train for it.”

With the growing popularity of downloadable e-books and audio-books, many interviewees expressed frustration with the issues of digital rights management controls, download complexity, and device compatibility. There is concern that libraries cannot provide adequate service, which may cause people to give up on the library. “It’s wonderful to have a little thing in your hand and push a button and there’s a book. But I think people are going to get tired of paying an online bookseller every time they want to read something. But to have really strong downloadable content, we have to free ourselves. We need to rework our library products — they are much too difficult. You go through 50 steps and the thing still doesn’t work,” said one library director.

**Successes**

The interviewed libraries reported past year accomplishments that made a difference in meeting the needs of their community. Contra Costa County Library’s success was echoed by other interviewees: in light of two consecutive years of extensive budget cuts due to the loss of property tax revenues, a Contra Costa staff member said, “the ability to continue to extend services or provide new services in the face of reduced funding has been one of our greatest accomplishments.”

A number of library directors shared the observation that, due to current economic pressures and the perception of serving an “anti-tax community,” there is little prospect of additional tax funding. However, last year the San Diego County Library and the Lemon Grove School District received 73 percent voter approval for a bond to fund a new joint-use facility, one of five new capital projects that will come to fruition within the next two years.

New technology-based service models, such as RFID, self-check machines, and online payment and registration are expected to provide continued growth and improvement in processes. “For us the issue is always about self-sufficiency,” said the former library director described as “an experiment in terms of being more relevant to what people want.” The pilot project purchase includes everything from children’s book readers to Kindles and an LSTA matching grant, the San Bernardino County Library purchased 100 portable devices for what the former library director described as “an experiment in terms of being more relevant to what people want.”

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As part of the working group that developed the BTOP grant that will bring high bandwidth to 18 Central Valley counties, the director of the San Joaquin Valley Library System reflected on how the project raised
the profile of California libraries. “County administrative officers and city managers are beginning to see libraries as key players in the information age. It elevates our status with the cities and counties, which we can leverage for visibility. Vendors have come to see the library as an anchor institution. It’s an opportunity to bring the library in as a player.”

In looking to the future, many libraries are actively exploring new partnerships and services that could provide greater sustainability for the library in the coming years. Some libraries are considering expanding their business center services, such as printing and videoconferencing, and in higher-income communities, plan to develop a fee schedule for a new revenue stream.

A priority for many interviewees is the establishment or expansion of partnerships with schools. State and federal grants can provide substantial support for combined services and facilities. For example, in Santa Clara County, the library director expressed tremendous potential in school partnerships. “As schools are laying off librarians, and dropping databases, we are getting calls from schools to see what we can offer to teachers. Some say this is not our job. Yet, it might be our future mission. This is a great opportunity to become the classroom for the community in a bigger way.”

Conclusion
California libraries are bracing for new deep reductions to state funding after consecutive years of struggling to retain services after decreased local funding. There is the very real potential that key public library programs will be eliminated. Many California library directors report that, even with current budget levels, the choice will not be whether to make service cuts, but where to make the cuts. Libraries continue to search for ways to meet the high demand for public computers and Internet access, training and assistance with critical job search and e-government needs, while juggling insufficient technology, reduced staffing levels, and fewer open hours.

Executive Summary
Oklahoma’s cities and towns are spread throughout a state that remains largely rural in the majority of its 77 counties. One of the most frequently identified essential tools that a community must have to expand its economic potential and community growth is access to technology.

While most library directors reported that budgets have remained stable in FY2011, funding for the coming fiscal year is not likely to increase. In order for libraries to provide better assistance to patrons for education, job-seeking and e-government services, more staff and staff expertise are needed and, with no future increase in funding anticipated, these will remain major challenges. Oklahoma libraries reported total operating expenditures in FY2010 at $28.11 per capita, unchanged in FY2011.

Nearly every library director reported that they have or will be getting connection speeds up to or greater than 30 Mbps, thanks to a major BTOP grant received by the Oklahoma Department of Libraries to upgrade broadband and computing capabilities at 44 public library sites around the state. Four rural public libraries interviewed for this study are part of this $2.3 million BTOP grant. “High speed access and new equipment will open up a host of educational and economic opportunities for these communities,” said Oklahoma Department of Libraries Director Susan McVey.

The BTOP program, titled OkConnect, will be leveraged with a matching grant of $1 million from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Oklahoma will have $3.3 million with which to implement improvements to technology resources and broadband capabilities for many of the state’s public libraries.

Background
Oklahoma has 115 public library systems with 206 physical locations and four mobile libraries (bookmobiles) to serve a population of three million residents. The majority of libraries are organized as municipal government libraries (87.8 percent), and almost all libraries are single outlet libraries (92.2 percent). In FY2009 (the most recent year for which national statistics are available), Oklahoma libraries reported hosting more than 14.5 million library visits; answering 2 million reference questions; and circulating more than 20 million items (e.g., books, films, sound recordings, audiobooks).
The state is slightly below the national average of circulating items per capita – 6.95, compared to 7.72 nationally.

Oklahoma residents are served by 1,283 employees, of whom 227 hold a Master's degree in Library and Information Science. The state ranks 34th in the nation (including the District of Columbia) for full-time equivalent (FTE) staff per 25,000 residents, with 10.77 FTE compared to a national average of 12.31 FTE. Oklahoma ranks in the bottom half (36th) of the country in operating revenue per capita - $30.91 per capita, compared with a national average of $38.62.

Five library directors, two library system directors, and two IT directors at seven libraries were interviewed between January 2011 and March 2011. They serve communities ranging in population size from 700 to 600,000 residents. Five of the libraries interviewed provide service from one single outlet, while the other two library systems have 15 to 25 outlets. Research staff also interviewed members of the Oklahoma Department of Libraries whose comments helped illuminate trends, challenges and successes of serving the public in Oklahoma libraries.

Funding
With primary funding from a diverse blend of sales taxes, property taxes, and utility revenues, the overall funding landscape for those interviewed is neutral, with stable funding expected. As a result, Oklahoma library directors have been carefully trimming to meet current budgets and are cautiously planning future expenditures.

Langley, Miami, and Ponca City public library directors all report flat funding for FY2011, with the same expected for FY2012. “Our city is fairly conservative in terms of the way they budget. And as a result we don’t have a lot of really catastrophic dips; we tend to be pretty stable,” said the Ponca City library director.

In fact, Oklahoma libraries reported total operating expenditures in FY2010 at $28.11 per capita, the same amount reported for FY2011. This follows a 20 percent increase in operating expenditures from FY2007 to FY 2010.

The Tulsa City-County Library and the Southeastern Public Library System report that about 95 percent of their funding comes from property taxes. Tulsa is expecting a flat budget for the next year because the tax base for the county will be leveling off, but the library administration believes they will be able to maintain the same level of service as over the past few years. The Southeastern Public Library System reported that funding almost doubled in two counties in the past four fiscal years due to revenues from natural gas drilling. But they are also predicting a decrease for FY2012. “The joyride is over, but we have been trying to prepare for as soft a landing as possible,” said the library director.

Due to sales tax shortfall, the Guymon Public Library, along with other city departments, implemented an 8 percent budget reduction in January 2010 through FY2011. The library adjusted by rebalancing full- and part-time positions, implementing a hiring freeze, and making cuts to the program budget. The Wagoner Public Library reported a slight budget cut that was covered with a reduction in Saturday hours and closer attention to the bottom line. “The library just tightened up. Staff watched their overtime and we were cautious about what was being spent and we made it through,” said the library director.

Technology Resources
The number of public access computers among the seven libraries...
Interviewed ranged from eight in a small rural library to 650 in a large urban library system. The state average of public workstations per building (13.2) is slightly below the national average of 16. All provide wireless Internet access, reflecting a statewide trend; more than 95 percent of libraries offer free public access to Wi-Fi (11 percent above this year’s national average of 85.7 percent).

Four of the public libraries interviewed—Guymon, Miami, Ponca City, and Wagoner—will be expanding their technology resources as beneficiaries of the OkConnect (BTOP) program. The new funding will provide for videoconferencing equipment and services, laptops and faster Internet connections. OkConnect participants will also have a chance to test-drive educational databases BrainFuse, Tutor.com and Learning Express, with the option of selecting one database to add to their own collections.

The availability of downloadable e-books and audiobooks varies from library to library. While many of the interviewees have well-circulating audiobook collections, others are just beginning to add e-books to their collections. The Tulsa City-County Public Library launched its e-book collection in December 2010. “We pushed to get it out at that time, and it was really a good time to kick it off because everyone was getting a reader device as a holiday gift,” said the IT manager. “We just had a remarkable response there.”

The savings from a consortia purchase made it possible for the Miami and Ponca City libraries to begin offering e-books via the OK Virtual Library at the beginning of 2011. The Southeastern Public Library System has plans to implement e-book availability in the first half of 2011. A few library directors commented that they wanted to more fully understand the technical requirements of e-book collections before bringing the popular technology into their libraries. “There is a desire [for e-books] in the community; that is why we are trying so hard to figure out exactly what we can do so we can put it in place for them,” one rural library director said.

Just over half of the interviewed libraries offer computer classes to library patrons. With only eight public access computers, the Langley Public Library schedules classes during the lunch hour, during which they are typically closed. The Miami Public Library received a Public Library Innovation Grant from the International City/County Management Association and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to expand its computer lab and provide classes targeting the community’s large (15 percent) Native American population. The program focuses on Native American cultural and language revitalization, and explores joint economic development ventures with the tribes. The library’s new computer lab has also enabled the library to offer a variety of other technology training classes to the general public.

**Connectivity**

Over the next three years, Guymon, Miami, and Wagoner public libraries will upgrade their broadband speeds from a minimum of 4.6 Mbps up to 100 Mbps through OkConnect.

Another essential OkConnect service is the creation of a statewide broadband map. This data identifies broadband access, gaps in broadband services, and opportunities for expansion of broadband services throughout the state. “We’re very excited about the new grant and what it is going to bring to our community and the access it is going to give our citizens,” said one library director. Statewide, there has been a 7.3 percent decrease in the number of libraries offering Internet speeds less than 1.5 Mbps. Oklahoma libraries reported that 32.7 percent of libraries now offer speeds greater than 10 Mbps, almost 8 percent above the national level.
Changes over the past year
All interviewed report an increased use of their wireless Internet connections and library technology resources, especially those used to access government forms or complete job applications. Tulsa City-County Library has experienced an increase in Wi-Fi demand due to the variety of mobile devices tapping into the system, as well as their patrons’ increased use of laptops.
“We’ve had to increase our bandwidth several times and I think a lot of it is the new streaming of video, listening to music, playing games—all of that is demanding more and more bandwidth.”

Another director echoed this observation. “The biggest story we’ve faced over the past two, three years has been just not having enough bandwidth to keep up with the wireless demand.”

Over 85 percent of Oklahoma public libraries report assisting library patrons with accessing and completing government forms online. Miami Public Library has experienced an increase in the use of library technology resources for access to e-government forms and for personal financial use. “We are getting to the point where everything is accessible by Internet. You can do your taxes, you can get your application to file for voter registration, and you can maintain all of your bills and accounts. So we have become that central hub for everything electronic,” said the library director.

The director of the Wagoner Public Library reports that a major employer in the area no longer provides W-2s to employees. Since only a small percentage of the residents in the library service area have Internet access at home, a large number of employees had to depend on use of library computers and printers to retrieve their W-2 forms for tax filing.

Langley Public Library reports that they have seen a significant increase in patron technology use, due to the popularity of social networking for teens, and the adult patrons’ use of e-government or job resources. The Ponca City Library director concurred, “People want to be connected or share items but they still have no Internet resources at home, and overall I’m seeing a general expectation of faster, better, and more, more, more.”

Challenges
“One of the things the state and federal agencies have been doing in recent years is saying, ‘we can save money by putting this online and telling people if they don’t have Internet at home, they can go to their library,’ and oh, boy, has that been happening,” said the director of the Southeastern Public Library System. “The same goes for people looking for jobs. The Workforce Oklahoma offices in southeast Oklahoma are few and far between, so again, people are coming to the libraries.”

Finding the time and money to develop staff expertise for e-government and job search support continues to be a challenge. More online training was mentioned as a partial solution. “We’re getting a lot of people coming in wanting to know about insurance and filling out the paperwork and we don’t want to mess it up for them,” said one rural library director.

Several rural library directors reported that they handle the IT support for their library; frequently just one other staff member assists with maintaining their public access computers. “We’re not having a problem with getting equipment but if you don’t have the staff to keep it maintained or the staff doesn’t have the ability level to deal with the network issues, it can be a challenge,” said one library director. The director of the Guymon Public Library commented that “Keeping up with technology is like changing a tire on a moving vehicle. The challenge is not becoming road kill.”

The libraries have responded to these challenges by adhering to their public access computer replacement plans. One rural library director tries to replace at least two computers a year, although most of the time it is not a total computer replacement but more of a “gutting and fixing it and bringing it into the next generation.” The same replacement and maintenance approach is shared by another rural library di-

"Keeping up with technology is like changing a tire on a moving vehicle. The challenge is not becoming road kill."

Miami Public Library reports that, although the library tries to replace two computers a year, their replacement plan consists of having no more than 20 percent of the public access computers that are older than three years old. This year, they may have to let some of the computers age due to reduced funding projected for FY2012. The Tulsa City-County Library moved from a three-year cycle to a four-year rolling plan, relying on a new
Public computers at the Ponca City Library

four-year warranty plan for the library’s workstations.

Successes
All seven libraries interviewed report a number of success and accomplishments over the past year. One big success for Oklahoma public libraries has been the award of the BTOP grant funding that will expand broadband capacity and technology resources services for 44 public libraries around the state, including four libraries participating in these field interviews.

The Guymon Public Library is going to use the BTOP funds to furnish a computer lab in their newly constructed facility that will break ground next year. The Wagoner Public Library plans using laptops acquired through the grant to teach computer technology classes out into the community.

The Tulsa Library Trust partially funded the new e-book collection for the Tulsa City-County Library that immediately proved to be a valuable addition to the library’s digital collection. The library has also successfully launched a mobile application used to access the library’s website and is developing additional applications using QR (Quick Response) code technology.

The Southeastern Public Library System has established video conferencing services at four of the system’s branches, so the service is now available within an hour or less of each of its 15 branches. If the coming year’s Priority 2 E-rate application is funded, several additional branches will receive videoconferencing equipment.

The library is now perceived as an important service that the city provides, reports the Ponca City Library. “I think that we’re seen as being an asset to the community... a sign of being a healthy community is having a healthy library.”

Conclusion
Supported by a 2010 BTOP award and a matching grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, more than 20 percent of Oklahoma public library outlets will receive new public access computers, video conferencing equipment, and faster Internet connections. As in most states, Oklahoma library directors are continuing to find ways to meet the increased demand for wireless Internet access, while trying to find the proper balance of staff and staff expertise needed to assist patrons to effectively understand and access education, job-seeking and e-government services.