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America's public libraries need billions of dollars for construction and renovation

ALA estimates that U.S. public libraries need **\$32 billion** for construction and renovation. At current funding levels, it would take **25 years** to meet today's needs.

America's public libraries operate approximately 17,000 locations nationwide across more than 210 million square feet. Americans visit these public libraries more than 1.3 billion times per year.

The average public library building is more than 40 years old, including hundreds of buildings that are more than 100 years old. Over time, these buildings must be renovated, expanded, or replaced to serve growing populations, meet new community needs, and protect the safety and health of library users and workers.

The physical plant of public libraries includes building structures such as foundations and roofs, grounds such as walkways and parking lots, building systems such as HVAC and plumbing, and technology infrastructure such as electrical outlets and WiFi routers.

Nine states (Alaska, California, Delaware, Hawai'i, Illinois, Maryland, New York, Washington, and West Virginia) plus the District of Columbia have assessed statewide public library facilities needs in the past four years.⁶ Across these states, public libraries need more than \$8 billion for construction and renovation.

These assessments represent libraries that serve one in four Americans.⁷ Extrapolating from these states in proportion to their share of the national population, we estimate that public libraries nationwide need \$32 billion for construction and renovation.

At current levels of funding, based on nationwide capital expenditures over the last five years, it would take more than 25 years to meet today's estimated national needs for construction and renovation.

Public library needs for construction & renovation

State	Needs
Alaska ¹	\$ 116,337,000
California ²	\$ 5,000,000,000
Delaware	\$ 124,500,000
District of Columbia ³	\$ 195,000,000
Hawai'i	\$ 188,278,124
Illinois	\$ 527,060,920
Maryland	\$ 171,029,969
New York	\$ 1,525,758,812
Washington ⁴	\$ 259,595,079
West Virginia ⁵	\$ 56,256,833
Total (9 states + DC)	\$ 8,163,816,737

NOTES

1. Reflects responses for 40 out of 95 public library outlets in Alaska (42%).
2. Estimate based on partial response; \$3.9 billion in reported needs (reflects responses for 70% of public library outlets in California).
3. Needs estimated between \$175–195 million in the District of Columbia.
4. Needs assessed only for “rural distressed counties” (21 of Washington’s 39 counties).
5. Includes only West Virginia libraries self-assessing their facilities as critical, poor, or fair condition.
6. Assessments conducted according to the particular methodology used in each state and may not reflect the full scope of needs.
7. State population figures from the 2020 Census. Washington assessment and population figures reflect only 21 of the state’s 39 counties; since 2020 county population figures have not yet been released, 2019 Census Bureau estimates were used.

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ALA American Library Association

The American Library Association (“ALA”) is the foremost national organization providing resources to inspire library and information professionals to transform their communities through essential programs and services. For more than 140 years, the ALA has been the trusted voice for academic, public, school, government and special libraries, advocating for the profession and the library’s role in enhancing learning and ensuring access to information for all. For more information, visit ala.org.

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