



## Benchmark FAQs

If you have other questions that are not addressed here, please email [plabenchmark@ala.org](mailto:plabenchmark@ala.org). This list will be updated periodically based on user questions.

### General

#### *How does benchmarking benefit my library and my community?*

Peer comparisons, or benchmarking, can help library leaders better understand their performance and can support everyday decision making, such as establishing baselines and identifying opportunities to improve service. For instance, how does your library's staffing numbers compare with other libraries in your region that serve communities of a similar size?

Benchmarking is a [critical practice](#) for good government and nonprofit management. PLA is investing in tools and resources (like Benchmark, [Project Outcome](#), and the [Benchmark Briefings](#)) that help libraries understand and use data to plan, make informed decisions, tell the story of their impact, and advocate for themselves.

#### *How do I login to Benchmark?*

Visit [librarybenchmark.org](http://librarybenchmark.org)! All US public libraries have free access to complete PLA surveys and view key metrics. Each library has only a single login ID and password, which PLA initially provided to the library director. The director may add other contacts to the account (see below) and share login details with other library staff members as needed.

If you are not at a US public library, please contact [plabenchmark@ala.org](mailto:plabenchmark@ala.org) regarding access.

#### *What's my login ID?*

Your login ID is your library's FSCS key – the six-digit federal identifier assigned to each US public library at the administrative entity level. If you do not know your FSCS key, you can look it up using the [IMLS Search & Compare](#) tool, as shown in the screenshot below.



## Library Search & Compare

Home > Data > Library Search & Compare

To add a library to *My Libraries*, select the library and click *Add to My Libraries* in the pop-up. View [My Libraries](#)

To view library details, select the library and click *View Library Details* in the pop-up.

Explore data on:

FSCS Key: AK0001 Library Name: ANCHOR POINT PUBLIC LIBRARY Locale: Rural (43) Legal Basis: Non-profit Association or Agency FSCS Public Library?: Y Service Area Population: 2,090

FSCS Key	Library Name	Locale	Legal Basis	FSCS Public Library?	Service Area Population
AK0001	ANCHOR POINT PUBLIC LIBRARY	Rural (43)	Non-profit Association or Agency	Y	2,090

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### *How do I reset my password?*

Click on the “Forgot your password?” link on the Benchmark login page. Enter your library’s login ID and click “send reset link.” This will send an email to the main contacts associated with your account. If contact information is out of date or there are no contacts on file, please email [plabenchmark@ala.org](mailto:plabenchmark@ala.org) for further assistance.

### *How do I update my or my library’s contact details?*

In your account, click on “Manage Library” in the menu at the top of the page. Two tables will appear: one with the library’s information, and one with contact information, as shown in the screenshot below. To update your library’s information, click the icon in the far right of that table. To add contacts, click the blue “add contact” button that appears under the contacts table. If there are existing contacts listed, you can edit or delete them.



Screenshot of the Public Library Association's Benchmark tool interface, showing library management features.

The top navigation bar includes links for Home, Surveys, Resources, Peer Groups, Manage Library, Survey Metrics Dashboard, and Custom Report.

The main section is titled "Manage Library Information". It displays a table with columns for Street Address, City, State Province, Zip Postal Code, Country, Phone, Extension, Fax, Website, Category, Contact, Subscriber, and Edit. A row for "5 N. RIVER" is shown, with the "Edit" link highlighted by a red box.

Below this is a section titled "Manage Library Contacts". It shows a table with columns for Name, Title, Email, Phone, Notes, Main POC, and Exclude from Communications. One contact entry is listed: "PLA Benchmark" (Help desk, plabenchmark@ala.org, 1234567890). The "Main POC" checkbox is checked, and the "Exclude from Communications" checkbox is unchecked. A red box highlights the "Edit or delete existing contact" link at the bottom right of the contact table.

At the bottom left of the contacts section is a blue button labeled "Add Contact", and next to it is the text "Click to add a new contact".

Keeping contact information up to date is important to ensure your library can reset your Benchmark password as needed and to receive information about open surveys. This contact information is used for survey-related communications only.

### *How are my “peers” determined?*

Peer groups are clusters of individuals or organizations that share similar features. Understanding how your peers perform can be a powerful tool to support continuous improvement. PLA's new Benchmark tool provides subscribers two options for comparing your library to other similar libraries.

First, PLA invested in research by the American Institute for Research (AIR) to create 63 statistically valid and meaningful peer groups using nationwide data. The groups were developed and tested using key library measures such as expenditures, staffing and visits; library characteristics such as legal basis and community size; and community demographics. Simply pick a data point and easily see your library with this peer group and libraries nationwide. Second, you can hand-select your peers and run custom reports. In Benchmark, view the resource on Peer Groups for more detail.

## Subscriptions

### *How long does a subscription last?*

Subscriptions last for one year from the date of initial subscription.



### *What are the benefits of subscribing?*

As a subscriber, the value and power of your library's data for planning and advocacy is vastly multiplied with user-friendly tools and customization. Benchmark subscribers receive:

- access to a robust set of interactive data dashboards with visualizations and filters,
- a custom report builder that includes historic metrics so you can see change over time and track progress,
- and the ability to create custom peer groups that allow you to tailor comparisons on a case-by-case basis.

View the [Resources](#) (login required) for further information and a preview of the functionalities offered to subscribers.

### *How do I subscribe?*

Subscriptions are [available here](#). If you have a problem with your subscription, please email [PLAsubscriptions@omeda.com](mailto:PLAsubscriptions@omeda.com) or call 800-293-6178 (toll free) or 847-513-6272.

### *Can Canadian or other public libraries outside the US subscribe to Benchmark?*

Yes, public libraries outside the US are welcome to subscribe at the standard public library rate (\$400 USD). Contact us ([plabenchmark@ala.org](mailto:plabenchmark@ala.org)) to start by setting up a free account for your library. However, please note that for the most part you will be benchmarking against US public libraries as much of the data in the system is US-based (including the IMLS Public Libraries Survey and 2020 PLA Technology Survey). If your library had previously participated in PLDS surveys (as some Canadian public libraries did), you will have access to those responses as well as historic PLDS data.

## **Surveys**

### *Does my library have to subscribe to participate in surveys?*

Survey participation is open to all public libraries (administrative entities); subscriptions are *not* required. In fact, we hope that every public library in the country will contribute data to build the most complete understanding possible of U.S. public libraries, library workers, and library programs and services.

### *Why should my library participate?*

First, your participation will help make the results powerful and actionable for your library and libraries across the country. Your input will enable PLA and ALA to provide nationally



representative data to engage and inform elected officials, the media, and funders about public library initiatives and needs. PLA will share aggregate results widely with the field, and plan relevant professional development opportunities.

Second, all responding public libraries will be able to view select summary data for their library and peer group through the Benchmark tool. All public libraries have free access to complete surveys, view past survey responses, and manage their contact information. In addition, the survey questions may inspire new ideas for your library.

Finally, survey participants are eligible for discounted Benchmark subscriptions.

#### *How will survey results be used?*

The survey results will be incorporated into the Benchmark data dashboards, so your library will be able to see how you compare to your peers and to other libraries in the United States. PLA will also use the survey results to advocate on behalf of public libraries at the national level and develop and refine professional development resources and training. We will publish a free report summarizing the aggregate results on the [PLA website](#) for each survey cycle.

#### *When will the survey results be available?*

PLA publishes the annual survey results within one year. For the 2022 Public Library Services for Strong Communities Survey, we anticipate making the data and report available by summer 2023.

#### *How are the new surveys developed?*

PLA's [Measurement, Evaluation, and Assessment Committee](#) works with PLA staff and other stakeholders in the field to develop and test our surveys. Based on feedback from virtual townhall meetings with PLA members and partners calling for better peer comparison data and less redundancy in data collection, PLA will gather unique data as a complement to the IMLS Public Library Survey and state library surveys.

#### *Is there a schedule for the surveys?*

Yes, PLA will annually rotate three surveys each fall/winter. The planned topics focus on public library technology (2020 and 2023), staff and diversity (2021 and 2024), and public programs and services (2022 and 2025).

#### *Can Canadian public libraries participate in PLA topical surveys?*

This may be possible in future. Unfortunately, in 2021 we do not have the capacity to support survey participation beyond US public libraries. You are still welcome to contact us



([plabenchmark@ala.org](mailto:plabenchmark@ala.org)) to set up a free Benchmark account for your library and learn more about the tool. Understanding the level of interest from libraries outside the US will help us gauge what we can provide in future.

## Dashboards & Reports

### *Can I see data from other individual libraries?*

The data in Benchmark includes some potentially sensitive information, including data on salaries and staff demographics. To protect this information, you will only see your own library's individual data. Peer group and national comparisons aggregate data from multiple libraries, protecting privacy.

### *Can I view and export data tables?*

Absolutely. Any of the charts can be viewed as a table. All tables can be exported as Excel or CSV files. More information about viewing tables and exporting data can be found in the [Resources](#) (login required).

### *What other libraries are in my peer group?*

The resource on Peer Groups describes the methodology used to create the peer groups and the characteristics of each. Benchmark subscribers can see a list of the other libraries in their primary peer group in the Survey Metrics Dashboard. It is important to note that the libraries within a peer group are *not* exactly the same. However, they share similar characteristics that have been shown to impact the library's outputs and outcomes.

### *How does Benchmark differ from other tools?*

Benchmark enables data analysis and peer comparison using multiple datasets including the [Public Library Data Service \(PLDS\)](#), IMLS's [Public Libraries Survey \(PLS\)](#), PLA's annual [topical surveys](#), and the [American Community Survey](#). All US public libraries have been assigned to peer groups developed by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to facilitate benchmarking. Libraries also have the option of selecting their own peers.

IMLS's [Library Search & Compare](#) tool enables data analysis and peer comparison using Public Libraries Survey data. The Urban Libraries Council's [Edge](#) tool enables technology benchmarking and planning based on libraries' responses to a self-assessment. [Gale Analytics](#) provides information about libraries' populations based on integrated library system (ILS) data and Experian's Mosaic® USA proprietary household segmentation system. Finally, many state



library agencies offer either [Bibliostat Connect](#) or [Counting Opinions' LibPAS](#) to public libraries for purposes of data analysis using Public Libraries Survey data.