



# Advancing Democracy Through Trusted Institutions: A Landscape Assessment of US Public Libraries as Producers of Social Cohesion

**Client:** Carnegie Corporation of New York

**Faculty Advisor:** Emily Drabinski

**Capstone Team:** Delores Huo, Alexandra Nour Lamirande, Juliet Nadis, Jonny Peña & Jun Pu

Spring 2026

---

## Abstract

As trusted public institutions, libraries provide access to a range of services and programs that reduce economic and social inequality. In politically polarizing times, libraries also serve as important sites for civic engagement and drivers of social cohesion. However, libraries face myriad challenges including aging infrastructure, under-investment and capacity issues.

Developed by the Columbia School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) capstone team in collaboration with the Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY), this report identifies the main needs and gaps faced by the American public library system and analyzes the funding landscape from federal, state and philanthropic sources. Based on primary and secondary research, this report identifies three areas of most urgent need for libraries: modernize and invest in physical infrastructure; bolster civic engagement programming to combat political polarization; and expand technological access to close the digital divide, particularly in rural and underserved communities.

Using a mixed-methods approach, this report incorporates findings from a literature review, qualitative and quantitative data from national surveys, expert interviews, and financial analyses of the funding landscape. Building upon these findings, this report recommends where a multi-year investment from CCNY would be most impactful for US public libraries. Public libraries are at the frontlines of combating the effects of political polarization by equipping their patrons with resources and tools to engage and inform themselves and their communities.

# Table of Contents

<b>I.</b>	<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>II.</b>	<b>Introduction: The State of US Libraries</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>III.</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>4</b>
	A. Qualitative Analysis	4
	B. Quantitative Analysis	6
<b>IV.</b>	<b>The Funding Landscape</b>	<b>7</b>
	A. Calculating the Economic and Social Value of Libraries	7
	B. Federal Funding	8
	C. State Funding	9
	D. Local Funding	10
	E. Philanthropic Funding	10
<b>V.</b>	<b>Issue Areas</b>	<b>12</b>
	A. The Physical Plant: Aging Library Infrastructure	12
	B. Libraries and Civic Engagement	19
	C. Libraries Address the Digital Divide	25
<b>VI.</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>VII.</b>	<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>VIII.</b>	<b>Appendix</b>	<b>34</b>
	A. National Funding Breakdown and Fiscal Stress Indicators	34
	B. Detailed Methodology	34
	C. Mathematical Formulations for Fiscal Stress Indicators	37
	D. Governance Models Fiscal Dataset	37
	E. Case Study Matrix	39
	F. Recommendations	44
<b>IX.</b>	<b>Endnotes</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>X.</b>	<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>54</b>

---

---

## I. Executive Summary

In a time of increasing political polarization and declining trust in institutions, American public libraries stand apart as valued, steadfast pillars of their communities. In 2023, there were over 800 million library visitors, double the visits in 2021.<sup>1</sup> Libraries continued to expand their reach, offering 1.2 million additional programs in 2023 to address the growing need for digital literacy, workforce development, emergency response and civic programming.<sup>2</sup> While libraries are eager to expand their scope to address emerging needs, this comes at a cost. Library staff and advocates consistently cite budget constraints, staffing shortages, mission creep and aging buildings as inhibiting factors to their success. If libraries are to continue their role as trusted hubs of information, resources, and services, significant strategic investments in their people, places and programs are urgently required.

This report examines the major needs and gaps facing the American public library system and makes recommendations to the Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY) on where significant, multi-year philanthropic investments in the field would be most impactful.

A literature review of academic journals, trade publications, and recent reports and surveys revealed recurring gaps and funding needs. Findings from this field review were substantiated by interviews with experts and thought leaders in the space. A quantitative analysis deepened an understanding of the library funding landscape from federal, state, local, and philanthropic sources. This mixed-method research approach revealed the pressing need to modernize and invest in physical infrastructure, bolster civic engagement programming, and expand technological access to close the digital divide. Based on in-depth analysis of each of these issue areas we developed the following recommendations:

### **1. MODERNIZE LIBRARY INFRASTRUCTURE:**

- a. Invest in a single library system's capital improvement project through a transformative city-level partnership with local stakeholders
- b. Support a cohort of libraries implementing small-scale infrastructure and civic design improvement projects at a national scale through a sub-granting model
- c. Equip library buildings and staff for disaster response and climate emergency preparedness through planning and programming

### **2. BOLSTER CIVIC ENGAGEMENT:**

- a. Invest in national networks and major professional associations to scale civic education models and defend the library sector against legislative threats
- b. Catalyze regional civic health, government transparency, and trust-building by funding local community foundations and library systems to act as regional "Civic Hubs"

- 
- c. Expand a cohort of libraries implementing small-scale, grassroots civic engagement and advocacy programs through a micro-granting model

### **3. CLOSE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE:**

- a. Establish full-time digital navigator programs at small town and rural libraries to address the digital divide and increase digital literacy
- b. Invest in coding clubs to provide digital devices and increase digital literacy in children, young adults and senior citizens
- c. Launch a digital assets grant program for small town and rural libraries to purchase IT equipment, reliable internet service and digital devices

## **II. Introduction: The State of US Libraries**

This report comes at a time of a fractured, divided American public and an onslaught of politically motivated attacks on public libraries. Libraries and their staff members have had to contend with book bans and censorship, funding threats, and harassment. The Trump Administration's assault on public libraries included an effort to dismantle the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) in 2025, which would have eliminated crucial federal funding for libraries nationwide. Though advocates successfully struck down this effort, the White House's proposed Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 federal budget is again threatening cuts to IMLS and other library programs.<sup>3</sup>

Still, public libraries have remained resilient in the face of these many challenges, effectively responding to community needs and offering resources and spaces that produce positive social and economic outcomes. The resources provided by public libraries are as diverse as the people they serve. From social services to after school programming to emergency response, public libraries are uniquely positioned to serve communities, often overlapping services traditionally provided by welfare agencies, schools, and government. Yet, they receive far less state and local funding than other sectors.<sup>4</sup> Our analysis reveals that public libraries are overwhelmingly financed through local funding (85.7 percent), while state (10.2 percent) and federal (0.6 percent) budgets offer much smaller contributions. Philanthropic investments, meanwhile, only comprise about 3.5 percent of public library budgets ([Appendix A](#)). This funding spread varies by library system, but our findings are consistent with other funding analyses of the field. EveryLibrary found 94-96 percent of funding comes from government sources, while only 4-6 percent comes from philanthropy and other sources.<sup>5</sup>

While public libraries undoubtedly offer social and economic value to communities, the true impact can be difficult to measure. Data collection has been fragmented as localities, states, the federal government, agencies, and organizations have produced surveys and reports in silo. The most reliable and widespread data collection has been driven by IMLS, which has collected and disseminated data on public libraries through the Public Library Surveys (PLS) since 1988. These

---

surveys have provided insight into library operations and expenditures. This data revealed how instrumental public libraries were in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite widespread closures of physical facilities and services across sectors, public libraries served as a haven. Across all locale types, public libraries provided WiFi hotspots outside their buildings, offered virtual programming, and increased access to electronic and physical assets to patrons.<sup>6</sup> An influx of funding from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) helped sustain these services. As budgets temporarily grew from these funding sources, public libraries most often spent on capital improvements, materials, programming, and technology.<sup>7</sup> The majority of pandemic relief came from government sources, though philanthropic giving also flowed to public libraries during the pandemic. Though a national trend is harder to identify, individual systems like The Free Library of Philadelphia recorded an increase in donor-advised funds and unrestricted giving between 2020 and 2021. Despite this surge, overall trends in giving by US private and community foundations dropped post-pandemic and did not keep pace with inflation.<sup>8</sup>

Trends on the American public's relationship with public libraries are easier to track. A 2019 Gallup poll found visiting a library is the most common cultural activity for Americans compared to other forms of leisure and activities.<sup>9</sup> Younger people are also increasingly turning to libraries as trusted third spaces. Third spaces are understood to serve a unique community-building function that is separate from home or workplaces. An American Library Association (ALA) survey conducted in 2022 found 54 percent of Gen Z and Millennials physically visited libraries within a twelve-month period.<sup>10</sup> More than half of them did not identify as readers, instead citing the library as a safe space, a professional development resource, and programming use as reasons for visiting. Finally, the Urban Libraries Council (ULC) 2025 Libraries Insights Survey revealed that physical visits, program attendance, and computer usage in public libraries have risen between 2019 and 2024.<sup>11</sup>

Despite this promising outlook, funding uncertainties from government and private sources threaten to collapse this fragile ecosystem. IMLS funding interruptions revealed how quickly system disruptions reverberate across the nation. Small and rural libraries braced for short- and long-term impacts of eliminated funding by cutting services and programs.<sup>12</sup> Federal funding uncertainties have been reflected across state and local budgets, leaving those 2026 budgets strapped.<sup>13</sup> The implication for public library funding, which overwhelmingly relies on local funding, is severe. Less reliable public funding means thoughtful and strategic private giving is especially urgent. For public libraries, support from philanthropy could be a lifeline.

The needs of public libraries are vast and varied. Our report highlights where investments from CCNY could be most effective, providing a range of small to large investments. We've identified three areas where targeted investment can drive meaningful impact: modernizing and investing in physical infrastructure, strengthening civic engagement, and expanding technological access to close the digital divide.

---

### III. Methodology

There are over 9,200 library jurisdictions nationwide.<sup>14</sup> Given the complex realities of the public library system and broad research topic, we adopted a mixed-method approach to comprehensively evaluate the funding disparities and operational vulnerabilities within the public library system. This approach is aligned with existing research on public library services and funding and allowed us to produce high-level insights while capturing the administrative intricacies unique to individual library systems.

Our qualitative analysis included a comprehensive literature review and semi-structured expert interviews. This enabled us to provide a deeper analysis of nuances that raw quantitative datasets and high-level reporting may not be able to fully capture. These components complemented our analysis of fiscal models that identified structural frictions, such as capacity constraints and physical infrastructure maintenance burdens. See [Appendix B](#) for more details on methodology.

#### A. Qualitative Analysis

##### Literature Review

During our initial exploratory phase, we analyzed recent surveys, papers, reports, and articles published in academic journals and periodicals, by advocacy groups, and other relevant sources. This approach helped identify recent field findings and gaps in research, as well as common themes and issues faced by public libraries today. Given the broad scope of this report, our team chose to narrow our recommendations to three key areas where CCNY could create immediate impact. **Based on our literature review, infrastructure, the digital divide, and civic engagement all emerged as core issues which also aligned with CCNY's mission.** These themes were reflected in our key findings across surveys<sup>15</sup> and reports<sup>16</sup>:

- **Library usage and in-person engagements increased post-pandemic.**
- **Digital inclusion needs grew**, evidenced by check outs of hotspots, e-books and audiobooks as well as more public library offerings of digital equipment lending and digital literacy training.
- **Grants were overall the largest source of funding for technology** for city, suburban, and town/rural public libraries.
- **Despite a reliance on physical space to offer programs and services, deteriorating physical infrastructure has been a barrier.** Still, libraries have renovated their public spaces in recent years, carving out age-specific programming space, community areas, and meeting rooms.

- 
- **Physical assets are also crucial to serve the public during emergencies.** Half of libraries have special designations related to emergency services and disaster relief, positioning public libraries as first responders.
  - **Civic engagement was ranked as the third most pressing community need that libraries are actively addressing,** just behind literacy and educational achievement and digital equity.

Surveys and reports helped guide our priority area selection, but a myriad of case studies informed which tactics and approaches might be most effective in creating impact. We have featured several of these case studies throughout the report and in [Appendix E](#).

## Expert Interviews

Conversations with experts and thought leaders helped contextualize our qualitative and quantitative findings and provided invaluable insights on opportunities and challenges faced by public libraries. See [Appendix B](#) for a full list of interviewees.

Key takeaways and themes that emerged from the interviews included:

- **Funding Uncertainty** from public and private sectors, making strategic planning and capacity building for public library administrators difficult
- **Public-Private Partnerships** as effective in sustaining libraries, rooting community needs and local input without applying a one-size-fits-all approach across all library systems
- **An Evolving Digital Landscape** that positions libraries as a hub of services and resources widely accessed, connecting diverse age groups and communities with professional development, education, and welfare resources
- **Physical Infrastructure Investments** as urgent and necessary to sustain public libraries' ability to provide services and resources, and crucial to enhance social trust and community engagement
- **Administrative Capacity** constraints which vary according to library size and system type, creating barriers for smaller library system managers struggling to respond to grant opportunities and survey requests
- **Research Gaps** and varied methodological practices in gathering national and local data that prevent effective storytelling, and would help bolster public libraries investments from public and private sources
- **Grantmaking Strategy** refinement to ensure direct grants and re-granting can reach more small and rural libraries and reduce burden on library staff in seeking out funding opportunities

- **Advocacy Efforts** can be strengthened by increasing collaboration and community coordination on trainings and messaging

*“In rural libraries, which are open twelve hours a week with barely a volunteer director, we’re asking staff to fill out four different annual data surveys. Meanwhile, they’re trying to worry about the fact that the toilet’s clogged again. That’s a challenge.” – Jeremy Johannesen, Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA)*

## B. Quantitative Analysis

To account for the fluctuations in systemic funding, our analysis set aside mostly consistent contributions from IMLS’ Grants to States program, focusing strictly on local revenue streams to better isolate the impact of municipal fiscal shifts on funding stability. This approach accounts for the systemic funding fluctuations observed in recent years, particularly the transition from pandemic-era emergency relief influxes to current stabilization and contraction phases. **Our analysis found Grants to States leaves little flexibility on spending for libraries since most of the funding is directed to operations.**

Using IMLS data, we developed an External Dependency Index (EDI) to examine the extent of local reliance within the national funding mechanism and across different locale classifications. To quantify budget flexibility, we also calculated a Capital Autonomy Index (CAI), which shows the margin available after mandatory costs. The final index we developed is the Digital Innovation Efficiency (DIE), which tracks the actual innovation output relative to total overhead. As illustrated in **Figure 1**, the CAI is severely constrained by an 80 percent “friction layer” of fixed operational costs. This leads to a DIE of only 3.99 percent, indicating that **nearly all revenue is absorbed before reaching digital initiatives.**

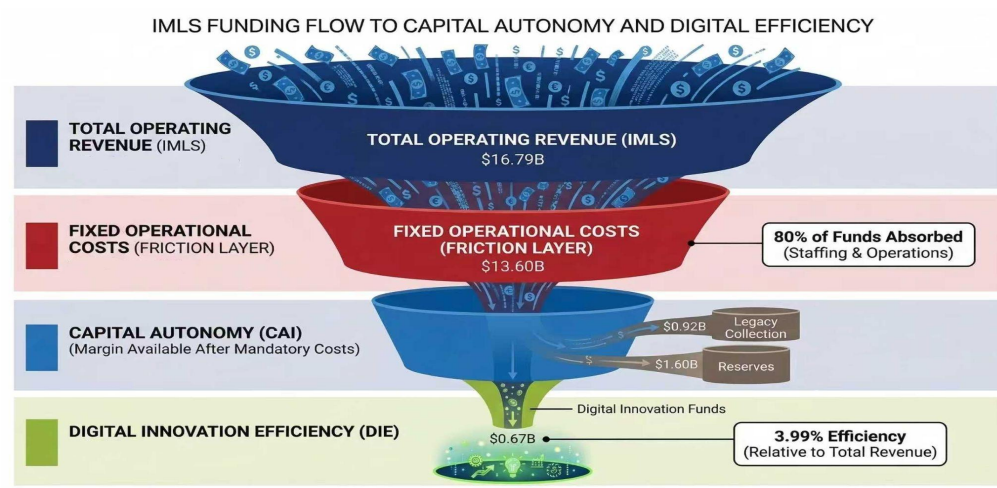


Figure 1: The Fiscal Friction Layer

---

To ensure analytical comparability across the diverse landscape of US public libraries, we integrated US Census Bureau data and National Center for Education Statistics locale classifications as the foundational denominators for data normalization. By anchoring IMLS financial raw data to these population-based and geographic benchmarks, the model generated equitable per-capita metrics that isolates unique fiscal pressures within urban, suburban, and rural library ecosystems.

## IV. The Funding Landscape

Recent federal funding decisions have revealed the extent to which the public library's funding infrastructure is vulnerable. As libraries are often underfunded and overlooked, providing evidence on the value of public libraries is pivotal to advocacy efforts and the survival of these spaces. By critically analyzing funding streams at all levels of government and in the private sector, we can present a more comprehensive outlook on funding streams and pressure points that make library systems vulnerable to collapse. Philanthropic investments are uneven and slim, yet important amid tightening federal, state and local budgets.

### A. Calculating the Economic and Social Value of Libraries

Estimating the value of library services is highly dependent on individual library systems and the makeup of the communities they serve. Studies have focused on calculating the return-on-investment (ROI) of individual library systems or specific issue-areas. For example, a study of Pennsylvania libraries found that 630 library outlets serving 12 million Pennsylvanians provided an ROI of \$5.50 in benefits for every \$1 of tax support.<sup>17</sup> Another study explored the value of providing high-speed internet access through US public libraries.<sup>18</sup> Authors found that local proximity to information via the internet can lead to positive educational outcomes, productivity, and future knowledge accumulation, all of which contribute to faster economic growth. This was especially true in more urban areas which serve larger populations and can provide more breadth and depth of information. Finally, a 2021 study that explored the impact of public library investments on children's development found that capital investments in libraries increased children's attendance at library events by 18 percent, item checkouts by 21 percent, and overall library visits by 21 percent.<sup>19</sup>

Beyond individual, targeted studies, a rigorous peer-reviewed assessment in calculating ROI would be challenging given the many services offered by libraries and their varied funding models. EveryLibrary's Library Funding Map estimates an ROI indicator by library system by incorporating 2022 IMLS data into an interactive map.<sup>20</sup> Using EveryLibrary's statewide data, we estimate that the national median ROI is \$4.02 per dollar spent (**Figure 2**). EveryLibrary acknowledges that its ROI estimates are conservative and the data is being updated on a rolling basis. While an important step towards evidencing the value of public libraries, without a systematic approach that can

control for key variables – such as library size, services offered, and administrative structure – inconsistencies in ROI findings are inevitable.

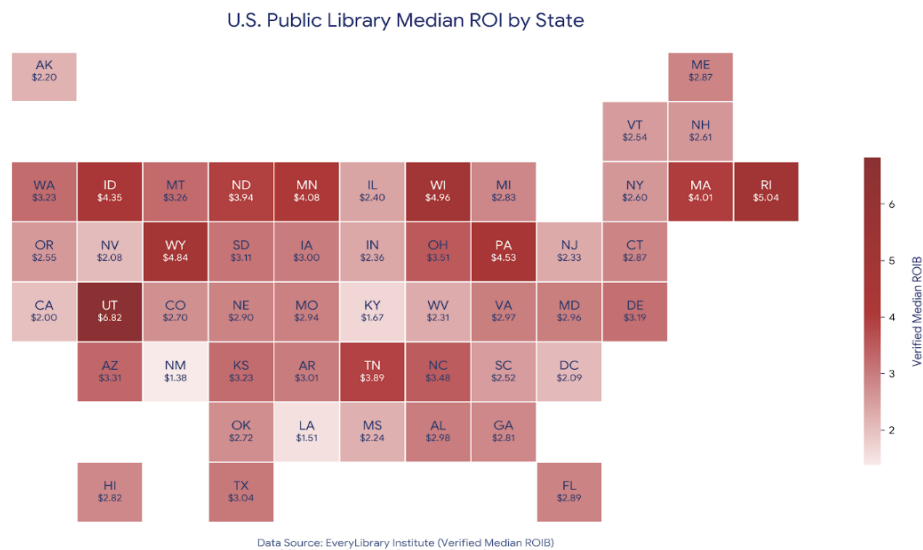


Figure 2: ROI Map

Smaller scale rapid-assessment calculators are an intermediary solution for libraries seeking to demonstrate value. The Library Value Calculator, adapted from work led by the Massachusetts Library Association and the Chelmsford Library, is an available online tool to compute the value of materials and services provided by libraries.<sup>21</sup> While inputs may not capture the full scope of library services, librarians can leverage this tool in advocacy efforts by tracking assets such as books borrowed, computer use, and program attendance. A Social Wellbeing Calculator is also available online, which attempts to capture more indirect impacts.<sup>22</sup> While these grassroots methods are useful, they continue to encourage a piecemeal approach. Additionally, whether librarians have capacity or training to take on valuation should be considered when promoting this calculation approach.

## B. Federal Funding

IMLS 2025 funding disruptions have upended the operations of public libraries nationwide. While on average libraries rely more heavily on local funding, federal grants are nevertheless crucial to sustaining operations, particularly for small and rural locations. According to IMLS, 77 percent of public libraries qualify as small and rural libraries. IMLS’ Grants to States has been a source of consistent funding for libraries. Over the last decade, appropriations have increased from around \$155 million to \$180 million for FY24.<sup>23</sup> **Figure 3** demonstrates these investments over time and

incorporates the influx of emergency relief funding from ARPA and the CARES Acts in response to the pandemic. The temporary loss of IMLS funding caused grants and staffing interruptions that have shaken public libraries. Federal decision-making necessarily dominoes into state and local

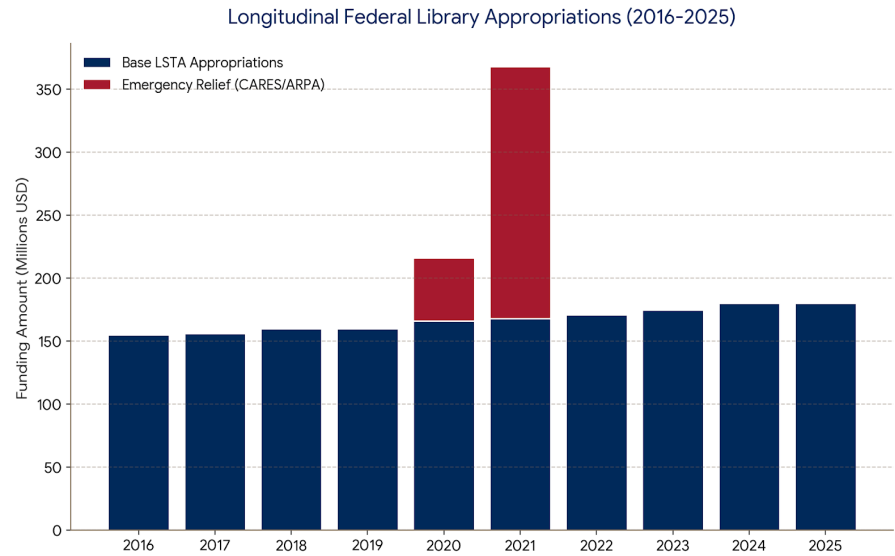


Figure 3: IMLS Funding Histogram

uncertainties. The Seattle Public Library, for example, had spent \$90,000 in funds before IMLS cuts were threatened, and would have had to absorb those costs if federal funding was not recovered.<sup>24</sup> State and local governments, as well as their library systems, may hesitate to spend on service, staff, and programming given federal funding uncertainty.

### C. State Funding

State support is highly variable. While some states bake library funding into yearly budgets, others do not have a state strategy for public library funding. For example, Delaware has a “Library Standards” line in its state budget, which helps ensure 15 percent of funding for public libraries comes from the state, with the remaining 85 percent coming from local funding sources. The Delaware Library Association and Friends of Delaware Libraries continue to advocate for increased library funding through the Library Standards budget line.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, in Louisiana, state aid for public libraries was eliminated in 2012.<sup>26</sup>

IMLS’ Grants to States program allocates funding to State Library Administrative Agencies (SLAAs) through a population-based formula. A five-year plan developed by each of the SLAAs helps outline goals and must be approved by IMLS. Additionally, states are required to match funds which can be sourced from state, non-profit or private contributions, and equal approximately 50 percent of the federal allotment.<sup>27</sup> This structure is meant to encourage additional state spending on public libraries, often reliant on state operating budget funds. Since these budgets can fluctuate and vary by state, so too do investments in public libraries. Like local funding, state funding is vulnerable to the unpredictable state budget process, which can prevent libraries’ ability to plan in the short- and long-term.

---

## D. Local Funding

Most of the American public is unaware that local funding comprises the lion's share of their library's budget.<sup>28</sup> EveryLibrary identifies three common governing models which affect how libraries receive local funding: a local tax and governance model, a municipal department model, and a nonprofit corporation model.<sup>29</sup> The local tax model, which is based on a portion of local property or sales tax, is heavily dependent on local decisionmakers and the local economy. The municipal department structure provides library allocations from the general fund, which can create uncertainty for library funding as budgets are negotiated. The nonprofit structure, meanwhile, may be the least vulnerable to localized decision-making, and the lowest barrier to receiving private donations. Building on these governing models, our comparative analysis of more than 9,200 jurisdictions reveals that administrative structure is the primary determinant of per capita revenue ([Appendix D](#)). While school-district-based libraries utilize independent taxing authority to achieve a median revenue of \$77.87 per capita, multi-jurisdictional systems (which rely on fragmented funding agreements across multiple government agencies) operate at the lowest median revenue of \$24.50 per capita, and county-based systems report only \$31.36. This further complicates the funding landscape but underlines the necessity for advocates to understand how to best navigate specific funding models to maximize revenue.

*“The innovations we see in this [funding] space are from philanthropies that understand where the public-private partnership leverage points are within broader municipal or government structures. These kinds of opportunities are limited, partially due to government structure issues but also because the library leadership sector is not very financially literate when it comes to these kinds of mechanisms.”*  
– John Chraska, EveryLibrary

Regardless of how libraries are legally structured, they are vulnerable to local decision making and economic conditions. Libraries in states like Wyoming, for example, are facing closures and slashed budgets due to reduced local revenue.<sup>30</sup> This resulted from state-level legislation that set a 25 percent exemption on the first \$1 million of a property's fair market value, shrinking revenue for municipalities and districts. Plummeting local revenues have left some of Wyoming's library systems more reliant on private grants and donations, which have failed to completely recover the public sector losses.

## E. Philanthropic Funding

Philanthropy has been essential in shaping public libraries as critical public spaces, knowledge centers, and resource hubs. Today, CCNY, the Mellon Foundation and the Knight Foundation are leading philanthropic support to public libraries in the US. The Gates Foundation was also an instrumental contributor throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, particularly successful in

---

narrowing the digital divide.<sup>31</sup> Mellon contributes to public libraries primarily through its Public Knowledge program, making its largest allocations to archives and special collections, as well as digital collections and preservation, in the past five years.<sup>32</sup> The Knight Foundation funds libraries through its Communities program. Knight has increasingly focused on funding innovation in libraries and collaborations to help them adapt to twenty-first century needs and preferences.<sup>33</sup> These investments reflect a trend in which philanthropic giving has been primarily driven by programmatic and initiative-based investments, rather than operational sustainability or staff capacity.<sup>34</sup> While programs and initiatives are easier to fund, this can leave libraries struggling to manage basic operations and cover staff needs.

Still, these funding streams can be more predictable than secondary sources of giving from corporate funders. This giving is often rooted in partnerships with larger organizations like ALA. UnitedHealthcare, for example, advanced an online health literacy initiative in partnership with ALA to support telehealth access for adults.<sup>35</sup> Google provided \$1 million to the Brooklyn Public Library to support AI education and digital skills.<sup>36</sup> Like foundation-based giving, these contributions are often piecemeal and program-focused, making them difficult to track.

Finally, individual donors have had a long track record of sustaining libraries, primarily through locally based fundraisers like Friends of the Library groups. These Friends groups are often pivotal in engaging community members and stakeholders, conducting outreach and advocacy at a local level, and educating the public on the value of libraries. The United for Public Libraries Association, a division of ALA, provides resources and support for Friends Groups, Trustees and other volunteers, reaching around 5,000 members.<sup>37</sup>

This complex landscape can be challenging for public library administrators and funders to navigate, especially as grantmaking and giving is fractured and unpredictable. Friends groups provide unique on-the-ground insights on community needs and capacity constraints but may have more limited funding sources. Meanwhile, foundations and corporations may be better resourced but less attuned to specific needs of individual library systems. Library associations like ALA, ARSL and ULC are central in weaving these efforts together and fostering further collaboration that moves beyond project-to-project survival for libraries.

**Case Study:** In 2021, the Denver Public Library Friends Foundation formed a community task force to tackle sustainable funding. That work led directly to the Measure 2I ballot campaign in 2022. The Friends Foundation contributed \$315,000 toward passing the Strong Library Strong Denver ballot question,<sup>38</sup> which raised property taxes to secure wage increases, tech improvements, additional programming, and expanded hours at Denver's public libraries. This modest contribution of private dollars helped secure \$32 million per year for expenses.<sup>39</sup>

## V. Issue Areas

### A. The Physical Plant: Aging Library Infrastructure

#### Background

Andrew Carnegie’s success in the steel industry made him one of the wealthiest industrialists of the twentieth century. He was also a committed philanthropist who left an invaluable mark on the burgeoning American public library movement. From his origins as a poor Scottish immigrant to steel magnate, Carnegie recognized the importance of public libraries in serving as an equalizing force for educational opportunity. During his lifetime, Andrew Carnegie gave \$41 million to build over 1,600 libraries across the country, as well as hundreds more abroad.<sup>40</sup> By 1920, Carnegie had financed the construction of nearly one third of all US public libraries and paved the way for other philanthropists to follow.<sup>41</sup> Carnegie libraries emphasized interaction in their architectural design, stipulating that each building have a community room for lectures and social programming. Today, Carnegie libraries continue to serve as valued community spaces. However, public libraries – those built by Carnegie and otherwise – face serious resource gaps and infrastructure challenges that hinder their ability to provide essential services and programming.

#### Issues

Across the country, the physical library plant is deteriorating due to aging infrastructure and limited financial resources for renovations and repairs. Libraries’ poor physical condition was consistently cited as a

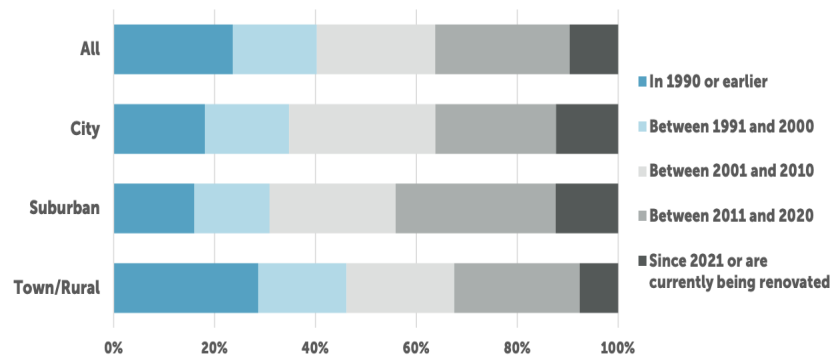


Figure 4: Ages of Library Facilities (Source: PLA Survey 2022)

top concern in the literature review, national survey data, and expert interviews. According to ALA, **the average American public library building is over forty years old.** Nationwide public libraries need an estimated \$32 billion for renovation and repairs: at current funding levels, this would take twenty-five years to address.<sup>42</sup>

The results of the 2022 Public Library Association’s (PLA) Annual Survey reinforced this finding. The survey found **that 40 percent of libraries have not undergone major renovations in the past twenty years,** with the number being even higher in small and rural communities.<sup>43</sup> Under investment in infrastructure and physical space was among the top three reported challenges, along with staffing and post-pandemic recovery. According to the survey findings, libraries that have

---

undergone recent renovations focused on creating and upgrading meeting spaces, signifying the important role libraries' play as social hubs.

In 2025, the US Government Accountability Office (US GAO) published a comprehensive report on the conditions of public library buildings, based on findings from a national survey, site visits and data analysis.<sup>44</sup> Key findings include:

- **Thirty-eight percent** of libraries reported at least one building system in poor condition, such as heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC).
- **Over 60 percent** of library respondents reported a building feature that posed a health or safety concern, such as accessibility, mechanical systems, or the presence of mold or lead paint.
- **Nearly 70 percent** of libraries have a backlog of deferred maintenance and repairs which is predicted to stay the same or increase in the next three years.

**These findings underscore the need for significant investment in capital improvements.** Since the majority of US public libraries were built in the twentieth century and have not undergone major renovations, they are vulnerable to what the GAO refers to as “aging building syndrome.”<sup>45</sup> Older buildings in poor condition are less resilient to natural disasters and extreme temperatures, putting their collections and physical infrastructure at risk, and furthering the cycle of disrepair.

**Funding Constraints:** According to the GAO report, the main constraints that librarians cited are funding availability and construction costs.<sup>46</sup> The GAO also found that competing priorities from the city or municipality often relegate libraries to the “back burner.” Furthermore, small and rural libraries lack capacity to apply for, manage grants, and raise matching funds, which further exacerbates the funding issue.

Kate Laughlin, Executive Director of ARSL, identified infrastructure as the single most urgent need for small and rural libraries. Repairs can range from leaky roofs, broken shelves and faulty HVAC systems to more hazardous conditions that can shutter under-resourced libraries.

*“The Bagley Public Library in Iowa abruptly closed because the foundation of their building has been determined to be unsafe for staff or patrons. And they have nowhere to turn. They just had to close their doors.” – Kate Laughlin, ARSL*

In addition to lack of staff capacity to apply for funding opportunities, public funding for libraries is highly limited and context specific. IMLS does not allow its grants to be used for construction or repairs, which means libraries must rely on state and local funding for renovations and capital improvement projects.<sup>47</sup> According to the GAO report, 90 percent of libraries rely on local funding for infrastructure projects. However, local funding is dependent on the wealth of the area –

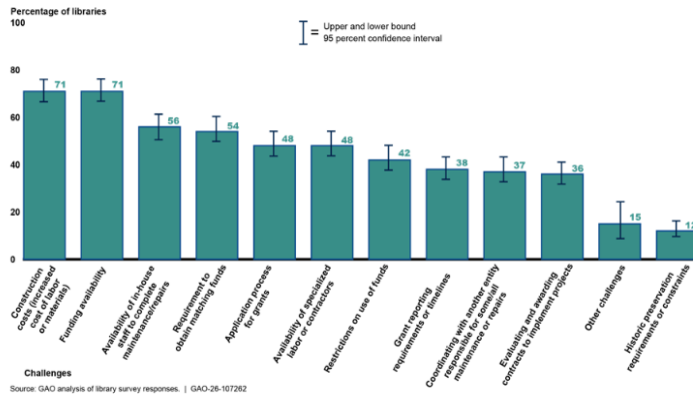


Figure 5: Estimated Percentage of Libraries Rating a Challenge to Addressing Maintenance and Repair Needs as "Major" or "Moderate" (Source: GAO Report)

through tax revenue and private donations – which disproportionately hurts small and rural communities, as well as some under-funded urban districts.

Legislative efforts to address the funding gap have been introduced, with little success to date. The Build America’s Library Act was introduced in the Senate and the House in 2021 with bipartisan support.<sup>48</sup> The Act would have provided \$5 billion in funding to repair and modernize library

infrastructure nationwide, with a particular focus on underserved communities. The bill recognized the need to modernize library infrastructure in response to multiple stressors from climate disasters, the COVID-19 pandemic, broadband capacity and accessibility issues. The funding was designed to be distributed through IMLS to SLAAs who would then award sub-grants to library districts. The bill was endorsed by ALA, ARSL, ULC and other prominent library associations. While the Build America’s Library Act did not pass, and the future of IMLS funding remains uncertain, it underscores the important role advocacy efforts can play to enact long-term policy change at the federal funding level.

*“When you get talking about civic engagement and [libraries] being that third place, it's really hard to do that when you're trying to hold meetings and programs in the middle of an actual working library versus in a meeting space. So, I would underscore infrastructure as the greatest need out there.” – Kate Laughlin, ARSL*

## Impact

Sound infrastructure is the precursor to the programming, services and physical meeting space that libraries provide. When the library’s physical infrastructure is at risk, it is unable to serve as a vital community hub and provide access to programming, technology and other essential services. Vulnerable populations – such as those with physical disabilities and experiencing homelessness – are particularly impacted by library infrastructure underinvestment.

**Accessibility for Vulnerable Populations:** The GAO report found that 43 percent of libraries have at least one physical barrier to accessibility, such as inaccessible entry ways, bathrooms, or parking lots.<sup>49</sup> According to the most recent PLA survey, accessibility is among the top three areas that

librarians plan to address in the future, along with climate/sustainability and workforce development.<sup>50</sup>

In addition to physical accessibility barriers, libraries serve as a critical space for people experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity. Libraries provide a temperature regulated indoor space, access to technology, and social support services,

often serving as “de facto daytime shelters” for unhoused populations.<sup>51</sup> With climate change increasing the frequency and intensity of extreme temperatures, libraries' role as a heating and cooling center for vulnerable populations is becoming increasingly important.

**Disaster Response and Preparedness:** Climate change and sustainability are an emerging issue in the library field. Libraries must consider how to protect their physical library plant, their collections, and the community they serve from climate risks. The literature review and national survey data suggest that since the COVID-19 pandemic, libraries are increasingly taking on a new role as “resilience hubs”: serving as safe spaces for people to go in times of public emergencies, climate-related disasters and extreme weather events.<sup>52</sup> The most recent PLA survey found that **half of all libraries have a special emergency designation:** acting as heating and cooling centers, distribution sites, or spaces for first responders during public health emergencies and natural disasters.<sup>53</sup>

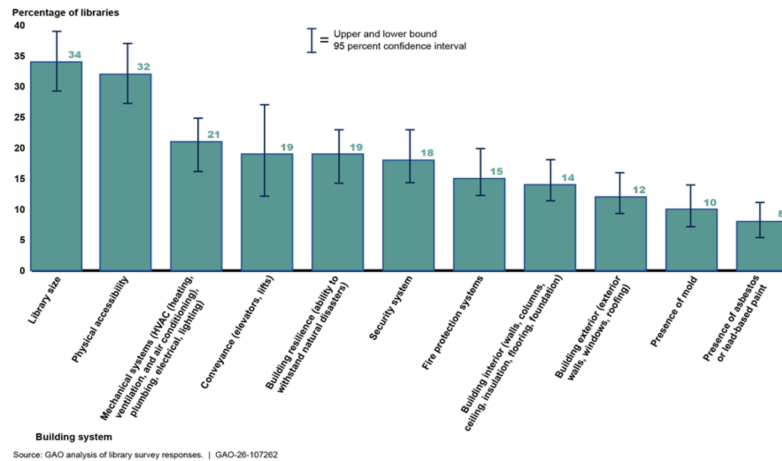


Figure 6: Estimated Percentage of Libraries with Potential Health or Safety Concerns Related to Building Issues (Source: GAO Report)



Figure 7: Libraries Respond to Hurricanes Graphic (Source: Florida Division of Library and Information Services)

Under the Stafford Act of 2011, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) officially designated libraries as essential community organizations.<sup>54</sup> As such, libraries act as designated spaces to distribute emergency services and can be eligible for FEMA’s relocation funding. The Division of Library and Information Services in Florida, for example, is equipping libraries for hurricane season, positioning libraries to play a key role in disaster preparation, response and recovery.<sup>55</sup>

---

In 2025, the Sustainable Libraries Initiative co-authored a journal article based on findings from a national survey on libraries' role in disaster response and preparedness. According to their findings, the top resources libraries currently provide in weather-related emergencies are WiFi, internet and computer access, emergency information, electronic charging equipment and day shelters.<sup>56</sup> **The survey revealed that while there is a growing recognition of the important role libraries play in emergency response and preparedness, there is a gap in the resources and knowledge needed to take on this role.** Specifically, key findings from the report include<sup>57</sup>:

- **Eighty-four percent** agreed that libraries play a crucial role in weather-related disaster response
- **Seventy-five percent** responded that their library's infrastructure is not disaster-resistant
- **Fifty-one percent** of respondents reported they have an emergency plan in place, however very few have more comprehensive operations and resiliency plans.

**Case Study:** To meet the growing threat posed by climate change, the Mellon Foundation announced a recent grant of \$175,000 to the Sustainable Libraries Initiative.<sup>58</sup> The project will pilot a training program to equip staff from forty small and rural libraries to plan and implement climate resiliency projects in partnership with community-based programs. The 15-month project will also assist libraries in integrating the National Climate Action Strategy for Libraries into their day-to-day operations.

**Public Spaces and Social Cohesion:** In addition to the need to modernize library infrastructure to increase accessibility and protect against climate-related threats, the quality of the physical library plant is also linked to social cohesion. When interviewed, Shamichael Hallman, Director of Civic Health and Economic Opportunity at the Urban Libraries Council, emphasized the importance of investing in public spaces, like libraries, to reduce political polarization and foster community cohesion. According to Hallman, libraries should incorporate civic design principles into their renovation plans to create high-quality, inviting public spaces that can compete with private-sector alternatives.<sup>59</sup> Attracting a diverse user base is essential to fostering diverse social interaction and mitigating polarization.

*“When you look at some of the resources about civic engagement and socioeconomic mixing, they make a very compelling case as to why you have to invest in these places and why they have to beautiful places as a way of attracting a diverse audience.”*  
– Shamichael Hallman, Urban Libraries Council

While capital improvement projects require significant public funding, philanthropy can be effective in smaller scale projects that make library spaces more inviting. Hallman says small upgrades to outdoor landscaping, seating, lighting, and community gathering spaces can have a large impact. For his work on the Cossitt Library renovation project in Memphis, Hallman led community engagement efforts, such as volunteer gardening and flower planting around the library building.<sup>60</sup> According to Hallman, these kinds of activities can “engender civic pride in a place.”



Figure 8: Cossitt Library Renovation in Memphis, TN (Source: ULC)

The Cossitt Library renovation was part of a larger initiative called Reimagining the Civic Commons, led by a consortium of funders including the Kresge Foundation and the Knight Foundation.<sup>61</sup> This project sought to measure whether investing in public spaces across a select group of cities can build trust and foster civic engagement across diverse backgrounds. Public space improvements included renovations to libraries, parks, walking trails and public squares in cities like Detroit, Memphis and Akron. Participating cities launched public space activities that fostered socioeconomic mixing and measured outcomes through local data collection, interviews and surveys. **The project findings demonstrate that there is a strong correlation between investing in public spaces and reducing polarization.**<sup>62</sup> Specific project outcomes included: increased attendance to public spaces and greater participation in community events; more interactions among people from different socioeconomic or racial backgrounds; and greater trust in local institutions and local government. This project underscores the important way that investing in physical space can be a conduit to civic engagement and reducing polarization. Rather than focusing on democracy and civic engagement in the abstract, building physical places that people of all backgrounds can benefit from is a concrete step towards enhancing social trust.

**Case Study:** In 2025, the Knight Foundation made a transformative investment into the Saint Paul Public Library System.<sup>63</sup> The \$2 million gift to the Friends of the Saint Paul Library will support renovations at two branches and technology, play and learning space upgrades across all of its libraries. The gift will complement the City of Saint Paul’s \$25 million investment in library capital improvement projects. This is an innovative example of using private philanthropic capital to bolster local funding initiatives and support large scale capital projects. The Knight Foundation’s unique approach to large scale investments in select cities allows it to make significant impact in specific locations in partnership with local agencies.

## Recommendations

<b>Modernize Library Infrastructure</b>				
<b>Recommendation Overview</b>	<b>Estimated Price Tag</b>	<b>Key Partners</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Relevant Case Studies</b>
Invest in a single library system's capital improvement project through a transformative city-level partnership with local stakeholders	\$1 million - \$5 million	Friends of the Library, local government agencies	Philanthropic capital complements local public funding to catalyze a large-scale capital improvement project (like a branch renovation)  Investing in public spaces increases socioeconomic mixing and builds trust in local institutions	Knight Foundation & the Saint Paul Public Library  Reimagining the Civic Commons (Cossitt Library Renovation in Memphis)
Support a cohort of libraries implementing small-scale infrastructure and civic design improvement projects at a national scale through a sub-granting model	\$500,000 - \$1 million (with individual sub-grants of up to \$50,000 per library)	ALA, local library branches	Make tangible improvements to the quality and design of the library space, particularly for small and under-resourced libraries  Encourages community participation and increases usership of library space	T-Mobile's HomeTown Grants Program  Mellon / ALA's Building Library Capacity Grants
Equip library buildings and staff for disaster response and climate emergency preparedness through planning and programming	\$500,000 or less	ALA, Sustainable Libraries Initiative	Libraries are better prepared to respond to climate change and extreme weather events through disaster planning, preparation and cross-agency partnerships with local stakeholders	ALA's Disaster Relief Fund  Mellon & Sustainable Library Initiative's Community Resilience Program

---

## B. Libraries and Civic Engagement

### Background

The American public library occupies a unique and increasingly precarious position within the national civic infrastructure. While historically conceived as quiet repositories of information and spaces for self-directed learning, public libraries have evolved into vital third spaces. As traditional third spaces have disappeared or become commercialized, the library's democratic role has expanded from "providing books" to "providing access to rights."<sup>64</sup> Libraries serve as the last remaining indoor public spaces in the US where individuals are not expected to spend money to justify their presence.

While public libraries are increasingly serving as community hubs, Americans trust each other less than they used to. In a 2023-2024 Pew Research Center poll, only around one third of respondents said "most people can be trusted," a 10 percent decrease over the past decade.<sup>65</sup> In an era defined by deep political polarization and fractured communities, the necessity of the library's physical, nonpartisan space cannot be overstated. As CCNY's President Dame Louise Richardson notes, without physical spaces for shared interaction, "there is less empathy, less appreciation of the other's point of view, and less understanding of their motives."<sup>66</sup>

For democratic institutions to function, citizens require neutral grounds to practice social cohesion. Civic engagement, therefore, must be understood not just as electoral participation, but as an ongoing educational process of putting civic knowledge into the practice of citizenship and civic participation.<sup>67</sup> Only through localized, daily practice of building civic literacy, critically evaluating shared information, and collaboratively bridging differences can we reduce polarization. Public libraries are one of the few places to do so.

*"We need opportunities to be able to come and have conversations together, do things together. And the library, as a trusted space, is one of the few places in some communities, sometimes the only place where that's actually possible." – Shamichael Hallman, ULC*

### Issues

While an overwhelming majority of public libraries actively operationalize their democratic mandate—with 68 percent offering direct election services like registration, ballot drop-off, and polling services—this vital civic infrastructure is under threat.<sup>68</sup> As municipalities across the country face budgetary constraints, traditional social safety nets including mental health and homeless services, civil legal aid, disaster relief, and adult education, have frayed.<sup>69</sup> In the absence of specialized municipal support, vulnerable populations naturally gravitate toward the public library, transforming the institution into an unofficial community crisis center.

---

This transformation has triggered an acute operational crisis: **a severe capacity gap** within the library workforce. Librarians are increasingly tasked with handling complex social issues yet lack time and training to provide social work, legal aid, or other specialized assistance.<sup>70</sup> The foundational education for library staff focuses on information science, cataloging, and reference services, rather than clinical social work or legal jurisprudence. Because libraries adhere to an ethos of radical inclusivity, staff are frequently placed in the position of managing behavioral crises, administering life-saving interventions such as Naloxone for opioid overdoses, and navigating the profound trauma of their patron base.<sup>71</sup>

According to the ULC's 2025 Library Insights Report, while community room reservations jumped 25 percent in 2024, total Full-Time Equivalent staffing actually declined by 3.6 percent, remaining 8.2 percent below pre-pandemic levels.<sup>72</sup> Because librarians believe it is their moral duty to serve the underserved, they frequently sacrifice their own well-being to absorb the failures of the state's broader social safety net, accelerating the rate of burnout and institutional decay.<sup>73</sup> As documented by the 2022 PLA Survey, **73 percent of libraries now explicitly cite "staffing"** as the primary constraint preventing them from expanding their programming and services.<sup>74</sup>

To launch new civic engagement initiatives and close the capacity gap, libraries are caught in a dual funding trap. First, municipal funding is stagnant or declining; local governments are not expanding operating budgets to cover library's new mandates as civic hubs. Consequently, libraries must look to competitive federal grants and philanthropic foundations.

However, philanthropic funding frequently traps libraries in the "Nonprofit Starvation Cycle."<sup>75</sup> Philanthropic funders heavily favor innovative and time-bound deliverables, such as a 12-month community dialogue series or a one-year literacy pilot. Operating under the assumption that local municipalities will absorb the long-term overhead, these grants rarely cover long-term operational sustainability, routine maintenance, or permanent staff salaries beyond the pilot phase. This reliance on short-term funding diverts finite administrative capacity away from actual service delivery and causes "mission creep" as priorities shift to match funder interests rather than community needs.

## Impact

**Social Isolation and Polarization:** The United States is currently experiencing a social isolation and polarization crisis. According to the American Perspectives Survey, the percentage of US adults who report having no close friends has quadrupled to 12 percent since 1990, while the percentage of those with ten or more close friends has fallen by nearly threefold.<sup>76</sup> The 2025 American Psychological Association survey notes that over 60 percent of US adults cite societal division as a significant source of stress in their lives.<sup>77</sup>

Political identity now outweighs all other social identities in informing citizen's attitudes and behaviors towards other.<sup>78</sup> Additionally, divisions are not only ideological but are also apparent in the continuing erosion of interpersonal trust.<sup>79</sup> Consequently, many Americans live in places with

little opportunity to interact meaningfully with someone from the opposite party.<sup>80</sup> The Pew Research Center reports that roughly four-in-ten registered voters have zero or very few friends who support the opposing political party.<sup>81</sup> Compounded by a steep decline in basic civic literacy, with 25 percent of Americans receiving little to no formal civic education, these statistics indicate a critical democratic deficit.<sup>82</sup> Citizens are socially distanced from one another and lack the civic literacy required to navigate these divisions.

**Case Study:** To address the civic knowledge gap, targeted philanthropic interventions are successfully equipping libraries to serve as active forums for democratic discourse. Recently, ULC partnered with Everyday Democracy to launch a civic discourse initiative, funded by a multi-year \$182,000 grant from the AAA-ICDR Foundation.<sup>83</sup> Because modern library staff rarely possess specialized training in conflict resolution, this grant directly closes the "capacity gap" by training up to 50 librarians in "multipartial facilitation," a technique specifically designed to address power imbalances, challenge dominant narratives, and encourage inclusive dialogue across partisan divides. By providing the seed capital needed to train staff and host community conversations across 12 cities, this model proves that strategic grants can actively transform libraries into engines of local civic participation and mutual understanding.

**Local Resilience:** While polarization appears insurmountable at the national level, local infrastructure provides a highly effective countermeasure. A survey of more than 1,400 local officials found that local governments are "largely insulated from the harshest effects of polarization" with communities under 50,000 residents proving the most resilient.<sup>84</sup> Building upon CCNY's historic legacy of seeding libraries in small-town America, public libraries serve as the ultimate neutral ground for communities to practice social cohesion.

Within these neutral spaces, the theory of social cohesion is put into practice. As one of the few remaining accessible, non-commercial community hubs, libraries function as open classrooms for children and adults to learn how civic engagement works. Libraries vital role as nonpartisan hubs for voter education, inclusive dialogues, and media literacy is recognized by municipal leadership. According to the 2025 Polarization in America survey, 64 percent of local officials affirmed that public libraries foster civic participation.<sup>85</sup>

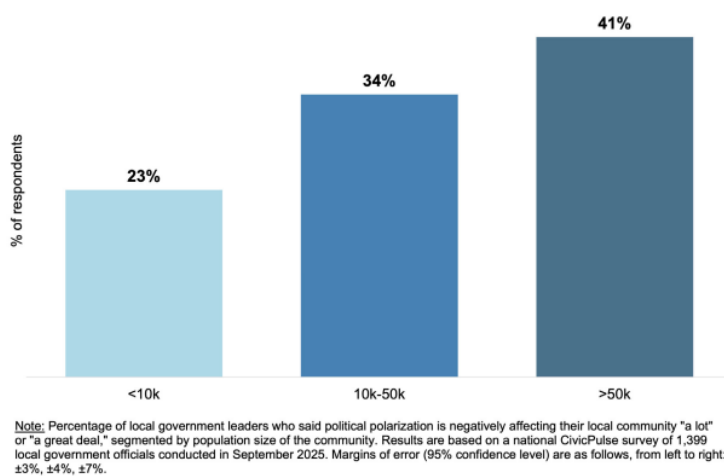


Figure 9: Perceived Negative Effects of Polarization, by Population Size (Source: Polarization in America Survey)

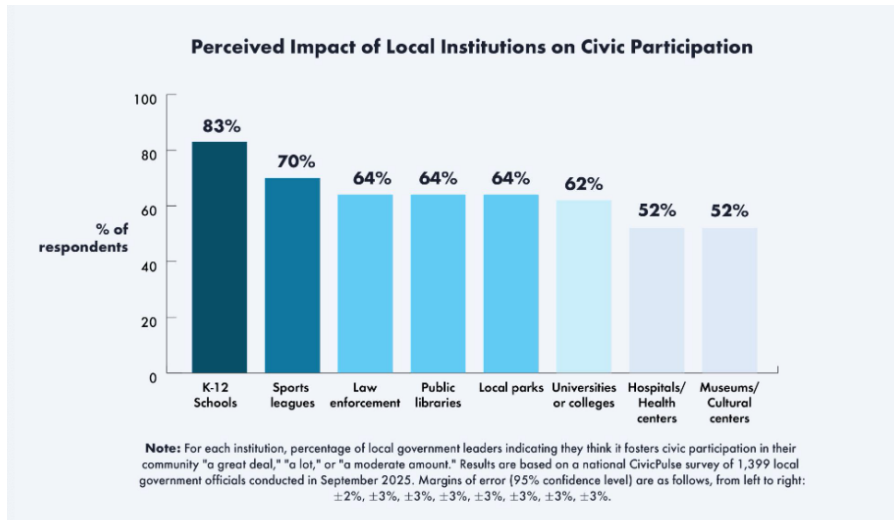


Figure 10: Perceived Impact of Local Institutions on Civic Participation (Source: Polarization in America Survey)

Yet, civic recognition alone cannot sustain these operations. **To execute their mandate as civic hubs, libraries need to host inclusive dialogues, run media literacy workshops, and provide voter education, all of which require specialized staff and consistent programming support.**

This local resilience is threatened by current funding gaps. Small and rural libraries suffer disproportionately from severe capacity constraints and lack of public funding. Without sustainable investments to scale these local efforts, libraries are unable to harness their community's civic potential.

**Case Study:** Targeted philanthropic interventions like the Trust for Civic Life have pioneered funding models that directly resource community anchors to foster connection.<sup>86</sup> Recognizing that rural and economically transitioning communities often lack the baseline infrastructure for civic engagement, the Trust distributes flexible "Civic Hub" grants ranging from \$250,000 to \$500,000. These multi-year, unrestricted investments are explicitly designed to empower locally led organizations, including public libraries, to act as "trusted coordinators" that bring unlikely allies together, increase a sense of belonging, and solve local problems. By equipping these organizations with sustainable funding rather than restrictive project-based grants, the Trust model ensures that libraries can move beyond basic service provision to actively build social cohesion, giving communities the sustained capacity and shared spaces needed to reverse the tide of isolation and polarization.

Physical infrastructure and civic engagement are deeply interdependent: an inviting, accessible space lays the foundation for community trust, but also requires intentional civic programming to actively bring that space to life.



Figure 11: Memphis Public Library Cossitt Branch's Innovator in Residence Program (Source: ULC)

**Case Study:** The Memphis Public Library's Cossitt branch, introduced in the Infrastructure section of this report, exemplifies how to successfully pair infrastructure innovations with civic engagement. As part of the "Reimagining the Civic Commons" initiative, the library paired its physical transformation with programs specifically designed to bridge deep socioeconomic divides.<sup>87</sup> Recognizing the need to connect affluent downtown professionals with the area's unhoused population, the library utilizes its modernized space to host "Community Dinner Conversations" that facilitate direct dialogue and cultivate mutual understanding.

To further drive local opportunity, the Cossitt Library introduced an "Innovator-in-Residence" program and equipped the renovated space with a \$30,000 audio-video podcasting studio and collaborative co-working workshops.<sup>88</sup> The program serves as an alternative library staffing model that expands the library's programmatic impact without exacerbating existing staff

capacity constraints. By intentionally combining local entrepreneurial resources with inclusive civic programming, this model demonstrates how revitalized public spaces can actively break down economic barriers, support local talent, and strengthen the social fabric of a city. Furthermore, this program highlights the power of sustainable funding models. The Memphis Libraries successfully leveraged the initial residency to secure \$300,500 in state grant funding from the state of Tennessee to expand the program to multiple branches.

## Recommendations

Bolster Civic Engagement				
Recommendation Overview	Estimated Price Tag	Key Partners	Outcomes	Relevant Case Studies
Invest in national networks and major professional associations to scale civic	\$1 million - \$5.5 million	ULC, ALA and major urban library systems	Establish replicable national models for civic participation while addressing the staff capacity gap. Equips librarians with multipartial	CCNY's grant to the Urban Libraries Council for "Youth Civic Labs" <sup>89</sup>

education models, train staff in facilitation, and defend the library sector against legislative threats			facilitation training to manage community dialogues, while providing the high-level legal and political defense necessary to keep libraries functioning as nonpartisan democratic spaces	ULC and Everyday Democracy's multipartial facilitation training grant <sup>90</sup> Mellon Foundation's landmark grant to ALA for intellectual freedom advocacy <sup>91</sup>
Catalyze regional civic health and community trust-building by funding local community foundations and library systems to act as regional "Civic Hubs"	\$250,000 - \$500,000 per regional hub	Local community foundations, regional library districts, and local civic non-profits	Foster deep, localized civic renewal by giving communities flexible funding to solve problems across partisan divides, support local journalism, and connect residents directly with local government decision-makers	Trust for Civic Life's Civic Hub grants (e.g., Community Foundation of the Ozarks) <sup>92</sup> Knight Foundation's partnership with CivicLex <sup>93</sup> and the Richland Library
Expand a cohort of libraries implementing small-scale, grassroots civic engagement and advocacy programs through a micro-granting model	Under \$50,000 per program	ALA, United for Libraries, other philanthropies, and local Friends groups	Serve as an agile, low-capital innovation tool to seed grassroots civic programming For small and rural libraries, this provides accessible funding to host local dialogues without heavy administrative burdens. For urban systems, as seen in the Memphis Cossitt model, these low-cost micro-investments provide the crucial programmatic "glue" needed to activate newly renovated, high-capital infrastructure spaces	Rural and Small Libraries: ALA's Libraries Transform Communities Engagement Grant <sup>94</sup> United for Libraries Micro-Grants  Urban Systems: Innovator in Residence Program at the Memphis Public Libraries

---

## C. Libraries Address the Digital Divide

### Background

Libraries in the US act as an important hub for digital inclusion, information access, and economic opportunity in their communities.<sup>95</sup> In rural areas, there are few locations where community members can access the internet or use digital devices at no charge. These basic resources which are commonplace in urban settings are otherwise unavailable to rural communities.<sup>96</sup> Lack of access to the internet and digital devices has been shown to disproportionately harm poor and marginalized groups.<sup>97</sup> Digital literacy and digital device access translate to better educational outcomes and improved civic engagement.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, access to the internet and digital devices has also been shown to play an important role in economic development and small businesses growth.<sup>99</sup> However, lack of physical infrastructure, small budgets, and cuts to federal funding severely limit the ability of small town and rural libraries to provide these essential services.<sup>100</sup>

The digital age has brought much change to libraries across the United States. Libraries have shifted from principally maintaining and storing information, in the form of books, magazines and periodicals, to becoming important centers of digital services and information.<sup>101</sup> The 1996 Telecommunications Act propelled libraries into the telecommunications era by ensuring all consumers, regardless of location had access to advanced telecommunication service at reasonable rates.<sup>102</sup> Now, across the US, thousands of libraries offer access to high speed internet, computers and other devices, one-on-one assistance with digital needs, and digital literacy programming.<sup>103</sup> However, rural and small town libraries are falling behind compared to their urban counterparts.<sup>104</sup> Limited funding and staffing shortages restrict the resources and programming that small town and rural libraries can provide.

### Issues

ALA has noted that libraries serving populations below 25,000 face significant financial constraints, as stagnant funding levels are frequently accompanied by budget reductions.<sup>105</sup> Constrained budgets require rural and small-town libraries to do more with less. ALA noted in its 2023 Public Library Technology Survey that approximately 40 percent of city and 30 percent of suburban libraries have laptop computers available for offsite use, but only 20 percent of small town and rural libraries have them.<sup>106</sup> Similarly, **approximately 70 percent of city and 65 percent of suburban libraries have internet hotspots available for offsite use, compared with only 40 percent of small town and rural libraries.** The data and literature indicate there is clear evidence of a widening divide between rural communities and urban centers.

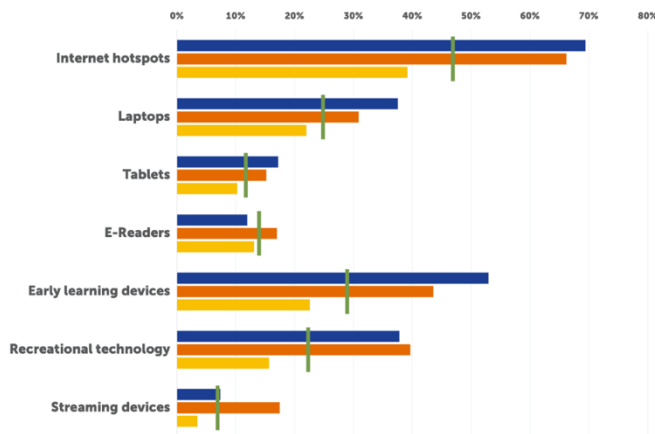


Figure 12: Off-Site Technology (Source: 2023 Public Library Technology Survey)

This disparity is commonly referred to as the digital divide, defined as the gap between people who have access to and can use digital resources and those who do not.<sup>107</sup> This gap puts residents of rural communities at a huge disadvantage.<sup>108</sup> Small towns and rural communities often lack the physical infrastructure needed to support reliable high speed internet or are unable to allocate funds for the purchase of digital devices. The impact is seen in educational outcomes as well as economic

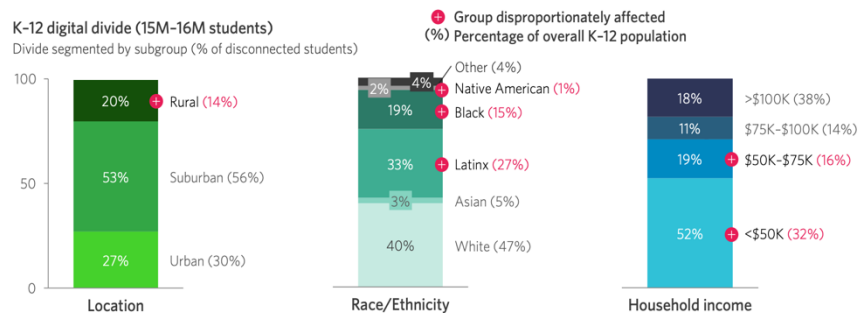
development. Most prominent is the digital divide suffered by school age children in small towns and rural communities. The Southern Education Foundation reports<sup>109</sup>:

- **Approximately sixteen million K-12 students** are caught in the digital divide
- **Approximately six million students** do not have reliable broadband service
- **Approximately nine million students** are unable to afford digital access
- **Between 40-50 percent of students** in Arkansas, Oklahoma and Mississippi are affected

These figures indicate millions of students across the country, particularly in rural America, lack the necessary digital services and resources to succeed in school.

Although some efforts to address the digital divide have been successful, adequate connectivity and access to devices continues to be an issue for rural and small-town libraries. Moreover, the digital divide has a negative impact on business and workforce development.<sup>110</sup> While not traditionally associated with libraries, research on the subject indicates libraries are providing essential business and

workforce development services to their communities. The federal government has acknowledged libraries' roles by developing special programming which aligned libraries with federal workforce development.<sup>111</sup> Thus, in addition to being hubs for



Note: Figures represent the structural divide, the size of the divide that all permanent, long-term solutions must address. Numbers are rounded. Sources: ACS one-year survey compiled by U.S. Census Bureau-aggregated at household level, NCEES, BCG analysis.

Figure 13: Demographic Breakdown of the Digital Divide (Source: Common Sense Media)

---

civic engagement, rural libraries are also being sought by community members for workforce and business-related services. However, as economic disparity continues to widen in the United States, rural and small-town libraries will play an important role in promoting economic development and social mobility.

## Impact

Access to reliable internet is fundamental for academic and financial success. However, Census Bureau Data from 2024 indicates that 6.7 percent of households in the United States do not have an internet subscription.<sup>112</sup> Of the total households that do have an internet connection, 12.6 percent rely on a cellular data plan. Strikingly, 19.3 percent of households with a household income under \$20,000 are without an internet subscription, compared to 8.9 percent of families with a household income between \$20,000 and \$74,999, and 2.6 percent of families with a household income over \$75,000.

The problem becomes more pronounced for adults living in small towns and rural areas. A 2021 Pew Research Center report found that roughly 72 percent of rural adults reported having a broadband internet connection at home compared to approximately 80 percent of adults in urban settings.<sup>113</sup> Only 30 percent of rural adults reported owning or having access to a desktop computer, laptop, smartphone or tablet, compared to 44 percent and 43 percent of urban and suburban adults, respectively. Moreover, a 2018 Pew Research Center survey found that 24 percent of rural adults identified high-speed internet as a major problem, as opposed to 13% of urban adults and 9% of suburban adults.<sup>114</sup> The disparity in the internet access landscape disadvantages rural and small town communities.

**Hotspot Lending Increases Internet Connectivity in Rural Communities:** There are few affordable internet service options in rural communities.<sup>115</sup> Even when service is available, it is often unreliable and limited. As a result, hotspot lending at libraries has emerged as a method to provide reliable internet access in rural communities. At the onset of COVID-19, during which schools and libraries were forced to shift to remote learning and services, rural community members were newly confronted with a lack of reliable internet access. To address this, many small town and rural libraries implemented hotspot lending programs.

In Montana for example, where only 63.6 percent of residents have broadband access, and the average cost of the Internet is \$91.54 per month, a hotspot pilot program was launched by Montana State.<sup>116</sup> Through the program, librarians procured seventeen hotspots which were provided for mid-to-long-term checkouts. Students who checked out the hotspots were able to attend classes remotely and watch lectures from home. Those who entered the program attributed increases in their grades to this initiative. Other states have created similar programs with success. Rural libraries in Kentucky and South Dakota have leveraged federal dollars to purchase hotspots and establish lending programs.<sup>117,118</sup> However, recent actions by the federal government have made the future of these programs uncertain by eliminating discounts for library WiFi hotspot

---

lending and school bus connectivity programs, a valuable source of funding for rural communities.<sup>119</sup>

*“In rural communities all across the country, people do not have wi-fi at home, either because they can't afford it or because they're so rural that it's completely unavailable.” – Kate Laughlin, ARSL*

Moreover, COVID-19 also highlighted the need for digital literacy. Public libraries support digital literacy by providing computer access, one-on-one assistance, and specialized workshops.<sup>120</sup> Beyond these traditional services, libraries have expanded their programming to incorporate digital navigation and coding club to increase the scope of their digital initiatives.

**Case Study:** Increasing Digital Literacy Through Library Coding Clubs: In Manitoba, Canada, librarians adopted low-cost, low-maintenance coding clubs to bridge the digital gap experienced by youth in their communities.<sup>121</sup> Western Manitoba, a sparsely populated agricultural community, offered few opportunities for residents to build tech skills or engage in digital technology exploration. Librarians, recognizing the value and difficulty of offering digital literacy programming in a remote location like Manitoba, established Code Clubs. Through partnerships with local governments, non-profits and local business, laptops and other basic digital devices were procured.

During the 14-month period researchers analyzed, the Western Manitoba Regional Library system held forty-five coding sessions with fifty-three children and youth (aged seven to fourteen years). The youth who participated exhibited progress in complex mathematical programming. Participants were also introduced to a new computer language and developed their programming skills through exploration and experimentation, creating programs that used different coding functions. Manitoba's coding clubs are just one success story. In the US, organizations like the Raspberry Pi Foundation and Girls Who Code operate coding clubs in numerous locations. Philanthropic grants could play an outsized role in procuring the digital assets, like laptops, desktops computers and other hardware, that are prerequisites to establishing these clubs.

**Digital Navigators Help Address the Digital Divide:** Closing the digital divide requires not only acquiring digital assets but also training and programming that increases digital literacy.<sup>122</sup> However, most small town and rural libraries are unable to support this type of training due to lack of funding and insufficient staffing. Federal funding cuts have further exacerbated this issue.<sup>123</sup> Philanthropic grants are now more relevant than ever and may prove instrumental in narrowing the digital divide in small towns and rural America.

Faced with an increased demand for services and resources which often outpaces their budgets, small town and rural libraries have had to innovate to help their communities. In Texas, for example, digital navigators are helping rural community members with their digital needs.<sup>124</sup> These

---

digital navigators address the complete digital inclusion process—home connectivity, devices, and digital skills. Started in 2021, The Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC) created grants for library digital navigators. In its initial round of funding, TSLAC awarded ten one-year grants to libraries throughout Texas. The grants ranged between \$70,000 and \$250,000, diverted to medium and small sized libraries.

The TSLAC digital navigator grantees sought to address the numerous digital issues experienced by their communities including access to reliable internet, digital devices and digital literacy. For example, navigators in Dublin, Texas gave out devices, a mix of iPads, Chromebooks and MacBooks, to needy patrons. The navigators in Pottsboro, Texas, made frequent trips to homes and senior living centers, where they helped residents with their digital needs, from setting up a phone hotspot to installing software on a computer. In Mercedes, Texas, navigators created a 10-week course that taught basic computer skills, safe internet exploration, and email creation, among other skills.

Similarly, in 2022 IMLS awarded the Connecticut State Library approximately \$240,000 to design and implement a replicable model for regional sharing of digital navigation services to underserved residents.<sup>125</sup> The program sought to engage with 2,000 residents in need, distribute 400 computers, and create a toolkit for replication of such regional library collaboration. The Connecticut digital navigator program had a widespread impact. In total, 310 laptops and 139 tablets were distributed, twenty-six programs were created, 1,659 navigation appointments were registered, 92,309 minutes with clients were logged, and 737 residents were reached.<sup>126</sup>

*“When you look at these smaller numbers [from rural communities] you don’t realize how incredibly impactful that funding can be” – Kate Laughlin, ARSL*

The case studies shared highlight the need for funding to address the digital divide, particularly in small and rural communities. Programs like the digital navigators in Texas and hotspot lending in Montana narrow the digital divide. Yet, with federal funding being either eliminated or restricted in the last few years, there is a real danger that the divide in small towns and rural communities will widen. Through its philanthropic grants, CCNY could play a critical role to lessen the impact the digital divide has on millions of Americans. Small to medium sized grants could help millions access reliable internet, build digital literacy and access digital devices other Americans in larger library systems have. Beyond digital access, these programs have the potential to help disadvantaged Americans engage meaningfully in their communities and develop the necessary skills for social and economic mobility.

## Recommendations

Close the Digital Divide				
Overview	Estimated Price Tag	Key Partners	Outcomes	Relevant Case Studies
Establish full-time digital navigator programs at small town and rural libraries to address the digital divide and increase digital literacy	\$1 million- \$5 million (with sub-grants to libraries)	IMLS, COSLA, AmeriCorps, colleges and universities	Digital navigators in rural communities increase digital literacy, economic output, internet access, and healthcare access; impoverished and marginalized groups benefit the most from digital navigator programs	Texas Digital Navigator Program  Connecticut Digital Navigator Pilot Program  Asotin County Workforce Development <sup>127</sup>
Invest in coding clubs to provide digital devices and increase digital literacy in children, young adults and senior citizens	Fund via partnership with an established national network which would cost no more than \$1,000 per library, or fund an entire library system at an estimated cost of \$200,000 - \$300,000	IMLS, ARSL, Girls Who Code, Raspberry Pi Foundation	There is strong documented evidence that coding clubs help children increase their confidence and digital literacy, improve communication, and promote gender inclusivity	Coding at Every Library  Manitoba Canada Coding Clubs
Launch a digital assets grant program for small town and rural libraries to purchase IT equipment, reliable internet service, and digital devices	\$5,000 - \$10,000	Corporate Partnerships with T-Mobile, BestBuy, Walmart, etc.	Small town and rural libraries would be able to acquire equipment and services their budgets are not able to support. Helping libraries gain access to IT equipment and hardware is the first step in addressing the digital divide in rural areas	T-Mobile's HomeTown Grants Program

---

## VI. Conclusion

Public libraries continue to play an essential role in the day-to-day lives of Americans. Whether through providing internet access to job seekers in rural areas, hosting inclusive dialogues in a community, or a safe place to weather the storm for unhoused populations, libraries are trusted spaces for people to turn to meet their needs. Despite their demonstrated value, libraries exist in a precarious financial position. As our analysis has shown, public libraries rely on a patchwork of unpredictable funding from diverse sources. Federal cuts to state and local government funding threaten to further jeopardize their financial position. Furthermore, libraries are continuously evolving their scope to meet emerging needs posed by the arrival of AI, the threat of climate change, and an American public that is increasingly divided along political lines. The need for resources grows as access to funding diminishes.

This report has identified three key areas where CCNY can leverage its resources to address major gaps in the public library system: modernize and invest in physical infrastructure, bolster civic engagement programming, and expand technological access to close the digital divide. In addition to these core needs, our expert interviews and secondary research indicated other ways in which philanthropy can contribute to positive change in the library field.

Supporting national advocacy efforts is essential to securing more long-term and sustainable funding for public libraries and demonstrating their value to communities. Organizations like ALA and EveryLibrary have built the networks, resources, and champions to effectively advocate for increased library funding, intellectual freedom, and other challenges libraries face. Bolstering the work of these national organizations can help libraries secure more permanent and predictable funding streams for their districts. Organizations like ALA can reduce capacity burdens on smaller library systems by providing training, messaging, and community relations support. While tactics may vary based on need, philanthropy can support programs like ALA's Policy Corps or PLA's Outcome Measurement resources.<sup>128,129</sup> Furthermore, EveryLibrary provides workshops on advocacy, fundraising and other critical skills needed to build support for libraries.<sup>130</sup>

*“I think the place to intervene is to help libraries with their advocacy, to be able to tell their story, to be able to infuse resources that can help them tell better stories, to do smarter organizing, to be able to leverage existing patrons and supporters in a way where you could actually advance legislation” – Shamichael Hallman, ULC*

In addition to supporting advocacy efforts, philanthropies should consider adopting a trust-based approach by transitioning philanthropic investments from restrictive, short-term project grants to multi-year, general operating support.<sup>131</sup> As libraries face hyper-local challenges, library directors are better equipped than external funders to allocate resources where need is highest. By adopting a trust-based model, philanthropies can structure library grants as “capacity-building” grants and empower local library systems to strengthen their core operations, while minimizing

---

the administrative burden of grant reporting. This approach will especially benefit small, rural and under-resourced libraries that otherwise lack the capacity to apply for and manage grants.

Lastly, our research has underscored the importance of demonstrating measurable outcomes and impact. As philanthropy tries to tackle systemic challenges like political polarization and democratic erosion, focusing on material improvements to people's lives at the local scale can reap larger benefits. As the Reimagining the Civic Commons project demonstrated, investing in high-quality public spaces and public goods that everyone can benefit from fosters community across diverse backgrounds and strengthens trust in public institutions and government. Investing in the physical library plant and its digital assets is the necessary precursor to civic engagement programming. By focusing not only on programs, but also on the place and patrons' needs, CCNY can deliver meaningful change to libraries and the broader community they serve.

---

## VII. Acknowledgements

We appreciate the opportunity to develop this report for the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Many thanks to Jeanne D'Onofrio, Ambika Kapur, Maya Ward, James Marsden, Daniel Vallone, Ashley Arana, and Constanza Lafuente at CCNY for their guidance and feedback. Our team would like to extend our gratitude to Capstone Advisor Emily Drabinski for her invaluable support and expertise. Our report benefited greatly from the insights of our interviewees: John Chrastka, Shamichael Hallman, Jeremy Johannesen, Kate Laughlin, Jonna Ward, and Melanie Welch. We thank them for their time and contributions.

---

## VIII. Appendix

### A. National Funding Breakdown and Fiscal Stress Indicators

This section outlines the operational definitions and mathematical formulations of the funding breakdown analysis and engineered variables utilized within our multi-dimensional fiscal assessment model. The foundational financial parameters are synthesized from a matrix of sources, cross-referencing administrative reporting with demographic distributions to isolate the structural frictions within library funding architectures.

Part 1: National Funding Breakdown Analysis

Local Funding Share (85.7%) Formula:  $LOCGVT / TOTINCM$  Official Variable Definitions: [LOCGVT \(Local Government Revenue\)](#) and [TOTINCM \(Total Operating Revenue\)](#)

State Funding Share (10.2%) Formula:  $STGVT / TOTINCM$  Official Variable Definition: [STGVT \(State Government Revenue\)](#)

Federal Funding Share (0.6%) Formula:  $FEDGVT / TOTINCM$  Official Variable Definition: [FEDGVT \(Federal Government Revenue\)](#)

Philanthropic and Miscellaneous Private Share (3.5%) Formula:  $OTHINCM / TOTINCM$  Official Variable Definition: [OTHINCM \(Other Operating Revenue\)](#)

### B. Detailed Methodology

#### Literature Review

The literature review relied on and prioritized several key sources to ground the initial exploratory phase, including:

- Peer-reviewed academic journals in the library services field such as Library Journal, Public Library Quarterly, Journal of Electronic Resources Librarianship, and American Libraries Magazine
- Peer-reviewed relevant academic articles and reports published within the last decade, identified through keyword searches
- Recent surveys and reports published by library associations such as ALA, ULC, and EveryLibrary
- Government sources, reports, and surveys from IMLS, US Government Accountability Office (GAO), Congressional Budget Office, and The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)

- 
- Philanthropy-specific publications, databases, and websites including Inside Philanthropy, Candid, NonProfit Pro, Chronicle of Philanthropy, and Stanford Social Innovation Review
  - Major public library funder websites including CCNY, Mellon Foundation, and Knight Foundation for detailed information on relevant grantmaking

**The literature revealed rebounding library use by various communities across localities and groups.** The IMLS' Public Libraries Survey, which produces the most comprehensive national data on public libraries, found library usage and in-person engagements increased post-pandemic. The 2023 survey also found library staffing returned to pre-pandemic levels and electronic use at libraries grew. Gaps were noted in early learning, digital and financial literacy, workforce development, and public health. **The importance of digital assets and access to information appeared in other surveys,** such as the Public Library Association's (PLA) Public Library Technology Survey of the same year. The PLA survey reflected an increase in check outs of hotspots, e-books and audiobooks as well as more public library offerings of digital equipment lending and digital literacy training. The survey found that almost 30 percent of public libraries offer a digital navigator program, reflecting an increased need to address a community's digital inclusion needs. Finally, grants were overall the largest source of funding for technology for city, suburban, and town/rural public libraries.

The PLA's 2022 Public Library Services for Strong Communities survey found that 78 percent of libraries offer career services and 24 percent include workforce development programs. **Despite this reliance on physical space to offer programs and services, deteriorating physical infrastructure has been a barrier.** Still, libraries have renovated their public spaces in recent years, carving out age-specific programming space, community areas, and meeting rooms. Physical assets are also crucial to serve the public during emergencies. The survey also found half of libraries have special designations related to emergency services and disaster relief, positioning public libraries as first responders.

The Strong Communities survey also highlighted the role of libraries as civic players. **Civic engagement was ranked as the third most pressing community need that libraries are actively addressing,** just behind literacy and educational achievement and digital equity. The survey also found libraries play a central role in nonpartisan civic participation. The majority of libraries (68 percent) offer voter services like registration and ballot drop-off, and serve as polling places.

## Expert Interviews

Our team conducted six semi-structured interviews as part of our discovery phase to supplement quantitative and research findings. These interviews, conducted remotely over Zoom, helped to provide additional insight on the landscape of US public libraries, research avenues and gaps, existing and emerging advocacy efforts and coordination tactics, and the funding landscape. The selection of experts was informed by expertise in the field as well as discussions with Capstone Advisor Emily Drabinski and the CCNY team. Following the interviews, the team synthesized the

---

conversations to identify overlapping themes and cross-reference expert perspectives with our literature review and quantitative findings.

We interviewed the following experts and thought leaders in the field:

- John Chrastka, Executive Director, EveryLibrary
- Shamichael Hallman, Director, Civic Health and Economic Opportunity, Urban Libraries Council (ULC)
- Jeremy Johannesen, Executive Director, Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA)
- Kate Laughlin, Executive Director, Association of Rural & Small Libraries (ARSL)
- Jonna Ward, Founder, Library Support Network
- Melanie Welch, Director, Public Programs Office, American Library Association (ALA)

## Quantitative Methods

This section details the normalization procedures and cross-sectoral datasets utilized to establish an equitable baseline for the fiscal assessment model.

This study integrated federal administrative reporting with demographic variables from the US Census Bureau to create per capita standardizations, allowing us to evaluate library systems of vastly different sizes on an equitable statistical baseline. We also incorporated the National Center for Education Statistics locale classifications to establish demographic and geographic denominators:

- **IMLS Public Libraries Survey (PLS) FY2023:** The primary source for all financial raw data, including local government revenue (LOGVT), state government revenue (STGVT), and federal government revenue (FEDGVT).
- **US Census Bureau (ACS 5-Year Estimates):** These demographic datasets are utilized as the **foundational denominators** for per-capita normalization. By anchoring total revenue to service area populations, the model generates equitable metrics that isolate financial disparities otherwise masked by aggregate totals.
- **NCES Locale Classifications:** These classifications are used to categorize library systems into Urban, Suburban, Town, and Rural ecosystems. This stratification allows for the identification of locale-specific fiscal frictions, such as the disproportionate operational overhead found in low-density rural systems compared to high-density urban nodes.

---

## C. Mathematical Formulations for Fiscal Stress Indicators

The following indicators are engineered variables calculated based on the IMLS [Financial Accounting Framework](#).

**1. External Dependency Index (EDI) Formula:**  $EDI = (\text{State Revenue} + \text{Federal Revenue} + \text{Philanthropic Revenue}) / \text{Total Operating Revenue}$

**Detailed Application and Theory:** This index assesses a jurisdiction's financial vulnerability to non-local funding fluctuations. It serves as a measure of fiscal volatility. It was critical in mapping geographic funding disparities, isolating the severe external dependency gap between urban and rural library ecosystems.

**Analytical Impact:** A high EDI identifies systems where local control over long-term strategic planning is diminished, as core operations remain susceptible to funding shifts beyond municipal authority.

**2. Capital Autonomy Index (CAI) Formula:**  $CAI = (\text{Local Government Revenue} + \text{Independent Taxing Revenue}) / \text{Total Operating Revenue}$

**Application:** Measures the degree of self-sustaining financial independence. Systems with independent taxing authority consistently demonstrate a higher CAI, correlating with enhanced operational resilience.

**3. Digital Innovation Efficiency (DIE) Formula:**  $DIE = \text{Total Technology and Digital Materials Expenditures} / \text{Total Operating Revenue}$

**Application:** Measures the actual share of the budget effectively deployed toward digital innovation after bypassing fixed operational frictions. Used to benchmark the 3.99% baseline and identify outlier systems.

## D. Governance Models Fiscal Dataset

This section outlines the logic used to categorize library systems by administrative structure and calculate their respective funding benchmarks.

### Data Scope and Categorization

This analysis utilizes the **complete national dataset** from the IMLS Public Libraries Survey (FY2023). Libraries are categorized into six primary governance models (e.g., School District, Municipal, Non-profit) to assess how administrative authority impacts financial resilience.

### Governance Revenue Benchmark (GRB)

To identify typical funding levels for each category, the study utilizes the GRB:

- **Formula:**  $GRB = \text{Median} [\text{Total Operating Revenue} / \text{Service Area Population}]$

- **Calculation Logic and Median Selection**

1. **Normalization:** The total revenue of each system in the national dataset is divided by its specific population to reach a per-capita figure.

2. **Median Selection:** The median value is selected for each category to represent the "typical" financial reality. Using the median instead of the mean prevents extreme fiscal outliers (high-wealth or low-wealth districts) from distorting the results.

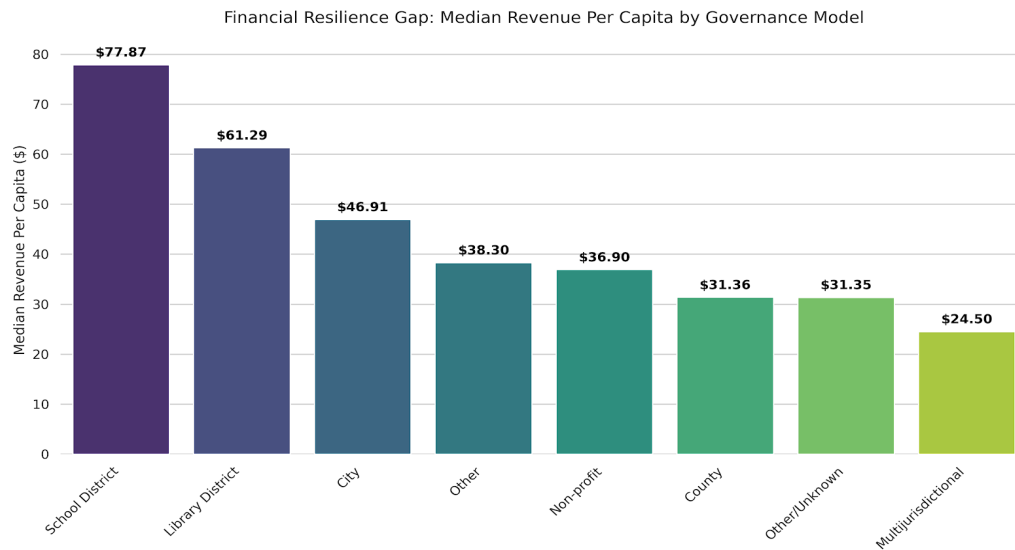


Figure 14: Median Revenue per Capital by Governance Model

## E. Case Study Matrix

Infrastructure					
Project Name	Grantmaker	Grantee(s)	Cost	Duration	Summary
<a href="#">Transforming Saint Paul's Public Libraries</a>	Knight Foundation	Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library  <u>Implementing Partners:</u> Saint Paul Public Library, City of Saint Paul	\$2 million	2025 - (end date not yet specified)	This grant will strengthen the Saint Paul Public Library System, including large-scale renovations at two branches and technology, play and learning space upgrades across all 13 branches. It will complement funding from the City of Saint Paul which has made a multi-year \$25 million investment in libraries. This case is an effective use of private philanthropic capital to catalyze local initiatives and help the city reach its funding goals.
<a href="#">Building Library Capacity Grants</a>	ALA and Mellon Foundation	Public library branches across the country, particularly those serving marginalized or under-represented communities	Grants of up to \$10,000 to 17 libraries	2023 - 2025 (with three annual application cycles)	Grants to support library operations and services to under-resourced libraries. Each year will focus on a different issue or demographic. 2023 grants focused on increasing technology and digital access, including improvements to physical space such as creating and furnishing individual study pods, collaborative spaces, and technology centers.
<a href="#">Hometown Grants Program</a>	T-Mobile	500 small towns and rural communities across all 50 states (new cohort selected each funding cycle)	Grants of up to \$50,000 per town (\$25M total commitment)	Launched in 2021, will continue through 2026	Grants to revitalize small towns across the US including projects to remodel library spaces with lighting, furniture, technology and resource upgrades to increase engagement and usership of public spaces.
<a href="#">ALA Disaster Relief Fund</a>	ALA	Recipients include libraries affected by the 2025 Southern California wildfires, Hurricane Helene in the Southeast, and flooding in Central Texas	Individual grants of up to \$10,000	Annual since 2022	The disaster relief fund provides grants to libraries in the US that have been damaged by natural disasters and extreme weather events. The grants help restore library services and rebuild damaged infrastructure.

<a href="#">Operationalizing Community Resilience: Creating a Training and Partnership Model for Libraries</a>	Mellon Foundation	Sustainable Libraries Initiative  Serving 40 small and rural public libraries	\$175k	2026 (15 month project)	This grant will pilot a training program to equip small and rural library staff to integrate the National Climate Action Strategy for Libraries (NCASL) into their day-to-day operations and plan and implement climate resiliency projects with community-based partners.
<a href="#">Reimagining the Civic Commons</a>	Knight Foundation, Kresge Foundation, JPB Foundation, William Penn Foundation	Local partners across 10 cities: Akron, Camden, Cincinnati, Detroit, Lexington, Macon, Memphis, Philadelphia, San Jose and the Twin Cities	\$20M initial investment with an additional \$10 million announced to expand to more cities	2016 - present	This project is supporting improvements to parks, libraries and other shared spaces across American cities, using public spaces to build civic engagement, trust and foster social cohesion among diverse groups.
Civic Engagement					
Project Name	Grantmaker	Grantee(s)	Cost	Duration	Summary
<a href="#">Civic Labs for Youth</a>	Carnegie Corporation of New York	Urban Libraries Council (ULC), which will pass through the funding to a coordinated network of 10–12 public library systems featuring Carnegie-built branches.	\$1M	2024 - 2026	CCNY awarded this \$1 million grant to establish a network of public libraries acting as "Civic Labs" designed to empower 15- to 18-year-olds to actively practice democracy. By utilizing the \$1M to partner with national experts to train librarians as civic facilitators and leverage trusted library spaces outside of school hours, the initiative will effectively engage young people in hands-on civic learning, local problem-solving, and community-led change.
<a href="#">CivicLex Expansion (Part of Columbia Arts and Civic Engagement Initiative)</a>	Knight Foundation	CivicLex (a non-profit), in direct partnership with Richland Library (South Carolina)	Part of a \$280,512 funding pool distributed among six Columbia-area organizations.	Multi-year, starting in 2026	As part of a larger \$280K community investment pool in the Columbia region, the Knight Foundation funded a partnership between CivicLex and the Richland Library to expand CivicLex's successful civic health model into South Carolina. Though the specific dollar allocation for this single partnership within the pool is not public, the grant's purpose is to provide essential tools and training that strengthen local civic participation. By leveraging the library as a trusted community anchor, the funds will effectively foster localized civic engagement, making local government more transparent

					and accessible to residents.
<a href="#">Libraries Transform Communities (LTC)</a>	ALA	Two selected school, public, academic, tribal, or special libraries per grant cycle	\$2K per selected library	1 to 2 years per cycle, started in 2019	ALA awards these micro-grants to specific libraries to spearhead collaborative, library-led projects that address hyper-local community issues and build a sense of community belonging. Despite the small \$2,000 amount, the grant acts as highly effective, flexible funding for direct project-related expenses—such as program materials, tech equipment, or community partner reimbursements—empowering libraries to host moderated conversations, micro-skill sessions, or neighborhood connection events tailored directly to the demographics they serve.
<a href="#">New Americans Library Project</a>	The JPB Foundation	ALA's Public Programs Office	Not publicly disclosed	6-month initial exploratory project and subsequent ongoing resource distribution (Start Year: 2018)	The JPB Foundation provided funding to ALA to explore and expand public library programs serving new Americans. The grant effectively supported the convening of expert advisors, field research, and site visits to identify current service gaps for immigrant and refugee populations. This research culminated in a comprehensive national service agenda and white paper, empowering local libraries with the professional development and best practices needed to adapt literacy, financial, and civic engagement programs to their community's specific context.
<a href="#">ALA Core Mission and Intellectual Freedom Advocacy Support</a>	Mellon Foundation	ALA	\$5.5M	Multi-year, started in 2023	The purpose of this transformational grant is to empower ALA to counter rising censorship and book bans while significantly expanding national advocacy for intellectual freedom. The \$5.5 million in funding effectively boosts the association's staffing and technological infrastructure to support libraries facing immense public scrutiny, enabling them to safely expand anti-censorship resources, fund scholarships for BIPOC librarians, foster adult literacy instruction, and bridge the digital divide.
<a href="#">Trust for Civic Life</a>	Founding Funders: Rockefeller Brothers Fund,	26 localized organizations, including the Community Foundation of the	\$8M total across the 2025 program cycle	Multi-year initiative (Started in 2024,	The Trust for Civic Life distributed an \$8 million grant pool to establish local "Civic Hubs" that foster trust, belonging, and civic participation in rural America. Using the CFO's \$250,000 grant as an example, these

	Omidyar Network, and Stand Together; Philanthropic Partners: Ford Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, Packard Foundation, Knight Foundation, and CCNY	Ozarks (CFO) and its regional affiliate foundations	(individual grants ranged from \$150K to \$500K, with the CFO specifically receiving \$250K)	the Trust aims to invest a total of \$50M by 2028)	funds are effectively utilized to support rural youth empowerment projects, host regional convenings, and develop civic engagement playbooks, ensuring that philanthropic investments strengthen everyday civic culture by empowering the ground-level organizations that best understand their region's unique needs.
--	---	---	--	--	--

**Digital Divide**

Project Name	Grantmaker	Grantee(s)	Cost	Duration	Summary
<a href="#">Coding at Every Library</a>	IMLS	North Dakota State Library	\$249K	2018 - 2020	The North Dakota State Library and their partners established weekly, informal coding programs at 50 small and rural public libraries across the US. The "Coding at Every Library Project" reached over 10,000 youth ages 8-14 and enabled libraries to better support youth in learning to code and generated resources and a practitioner community that will enable more libraries to offer coding programs.
<a href="#">Manitoba Canada Coding Clubs</a>	N/A	N/A	Unknown but case study indicates the program was low cost	14 months	a 14-month community-based collaborative research project with public libraries engaged in a process of developing coding clubs for children and youth in rural Manitoba, Canada.
<a href="#">Connecticut Digital Navigator Pilot Program</a>	IMLS	Connecticut Libraries in Hamden, New Haven, Bridgeport, West Haven, Derby, Naugatuck and Woodbridge	\$250K	Approx. 6 months (2024 - 2025)	Program backed by the Connecticut State Library and a national grant program will work to extend digital skills to residents in Hamden, New Haven, Bridgeport, West Haven, Derby, Naugatuck and Woodbridge.
<a href="#">Texas Digital</a>	TSLAC	10 Texas libraries	Range:	2021 -	The Texas State Library and Archives

---

<a href="#">Navigator Program</a>		ranging from small rural to large metropolitan institutions	\$50K - \$240K	2022	Commission (TSLAC) awarded one-year American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) grants to 10 Texas public libraries to support Digital Navigator programs.
-----------------------------------	--	---	----------------	------	--

## F. Recommendations

<b>Modernize Library Infrastructure</b>				
<b>Recommendation Overview</b>	<b>Estimated Price Tag</b>	<b>Key Partners</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Relevant Case Studies</b>
Invest in a single library system's capital improvement project through a transformative city-level partnership with local stakeholders	\$1 million - \$5 million	Friends of the library association, local government agencies	Philanthropic capital compliments local public funding to catalyze a large-scale capital improvement project (like a branch renovation).  Investing in public spaces increases socioeconomic mixing and builds trust in local institutions	Knight Foundation & the Saint Paul Public Library, Reimagining the Civic Commons (Cossitt Library Renovation in Memphis)
Support a cohort of libraries implementing small-scale infrastructure and civic design improvement projects at a national scale through a sub-granting model	\$500,000 - \$1 million (with individual sub-grants of up to \$50,000 per library)	ALA, local library branches	Make tangible improvements to the quality and design of the library space, particularly for small and under-resourced libraries.  Encourages community participation and increases usership of library space	T-Mobile's HomeTown Grants Program  Mellon/ALA's Building Library Capacity Grants
Equip library buildings and staff for disaster response and climate emergency preparedness through planning and programming	\$500,000 or less	ALA, Sustainable Libraries Initiative	Libraries are better prepared to respond to climate change and extreme weather events through disaster planning, preparation and cross-agency partnerships with local stakeholders	ALA's Disaster Relief Fund  Mellon & SLI's Community Resilience Program

### *Bolster Civic Engagement*

Recommendation Overview	Estimated Price Tag	Key Partners	Outcomes	Relevant Case Studies
Invest in national networks and major professional associations to scale civic education models and defend the library sector against legislative threats	\$1 million - \$5.5 million	Urban Libraries Council (ULC), American Library Association (ALA), and major urban library systems	Establish replicable national models for civic participation (like empowering youth to debate community solutions) while providing the high-level legal, political, and capacity-building defense necessary to keep libraries functioning as nonpartisan democratic spaces	Carnegie Corporation's grant to the Urban Libraries Council for "Youth Civic Labs" and the Mellon Foundation's landmark grant to the ALA for intellectual freedom advocacy
Catalyze regional civic health, government transparency, and trust-building by funding local community foundations and library systems to act as regional "Civic Hubs"	\$250,000 - \$500,000 per regional hub	Local community foundations, regional library districts, and local civic non-profits	Foster deep, localized civic renewal by giving communities flexible funding to solve problems across partisan divides, support local journalism, and connect residents directly with local government decision-makers	Trust for Civic Life's Civic Hub grants (e.g., Community Foundation of the Ozarks) and the Knight Foundation's partnership with CivicLex and the Richland Library
Expand a cohort of libraries implementing small-scale, grassroots civic engagement and advocacy programs through a micro-granting model	Under \$25,000 total (with individual sub-grants ranging from \$500 to \$2,000 per library).	ALA, United for Libraries, and local Friends groups	Reach small and rural libraries that lack the capacity to apply for larger grants, providing them with the seed funding necessary to host local dialogues, build neighborhood connections, and empower local advocates to resist censorship	ALA's Libraries Transform Communities Engagement Grant and the Penguin Random House/United for Libraries Micro-Grants.

### Close the Digital Divide

Overview	Estimated Price Tag	Key Partners	Outcomes	Relevant Case Studies
Establish full-time digital navigator programs at small town and rural libraries to address the digital divide and increase digital literacy	\$1million- \$5 million (sub-grants for smaller or individual libraries)	Institute of Museum and Library Services, Chief Officers of State Library Agencies, AmeriCorps, Colleges and Universities	Digital navigators in rural communities increase digital literacy, economic output, internet access, and healthcare access; impoverished and marginalized groups benefit the most from digital navigator programs	Texas Digital Navigator Program, Connecticut Digital Navigator Pilot Program, Asotin County Workforce Development
Invest in coding clubs to provide digital devices and increase digital literacy in children, young adults and senior citizens	Fund via partnership with an established national network which would cost no more than \$1,000 per library, or fund an entire library system at an estimated cost of \$200,000 - \$300,000	Institute of Museum and Library Services, Association for Rural and Small Libraries, Girls Who Code, Raspberry Pi Foundation	There is strong documented evidence that code clubs help children increase their confidence and digital literacy, improve communication, and promote gender inclusivity	Coding at Every Library and Manitoba Canada Coding Clubs
Launch a digital assets grant program for small town and rural libraries to purchase IT equipment, reliable internet service and digital devices	\$5,000 - \$10,000	Corporate Partnerships with T-Mobile, BestBuy, Walmart, etc.	Small town and rural libraries would be able to acquire equipment and services their budgets are not able to support; helping libraries gain access to IT equipment and hardware is the first step in addressing the digital divide in rural areas	T-Mobile's HomeTown Grants Program

---

## IX. Endnotes

---

<sup>1</sup> Institute of Museum and Library Services, "Increased Public Library Usage Shown by IMLS Survey Data," September 2, 2025, <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USIMLS/bulletins/3f09e4a>.

<sup>2</sup> IMLS, "Increased Public Library Usage," 2025.

<sup>3</sup> American Library Association, White House FY27 Budget Proposal Repeats Threats to Eliminate IMLS, April 3, 2026, <https://www.ala.org/news/2026/04/white-house-fy27-budget-proposal-repeats-threats-eliminate-impls>.

<sup>4</sup> EveryLibrary Institute, "Funding Our Priorities: Comparisons of Public Library Funding and Services

with Other Sectors in Post-COVID America," accessed April 20, 2026,

[www.everylibraryinstitute.org/funding\\_priorities\\_2023](http://www.everylibraryinstitute.org/funding_priorities_2023).

<sup>5</sup> Patrick Sweeney, "The Funding Crisis Facing America's Public Libraries," *Candid*, September 4, 2025,

<https://candid.org/blogs/todays-funding-crisis-facing-us-public-libraries/>.

<sup>6</sup> Institute of Museum and Library Services, *Access to Public Library Services and Materials During the*

*First Nine Months of the COVID-19 Pandemic* (Washington, DC, 2023), [https://www.ims.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/pls\\_fy20\\_research\\_brief.pdf](https://www.ims.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/pls_fy20_research_brief.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Lisa Peet, "A Complex Landscape: Budgets and Funding 2024," *Library Journal*, accessed April 20, 2026, <https://www.libraryjournal.com/story/a-complex-landscape-budgets-and-funding-2024>.

<sup>8</sup> Sarina Dayal and Grace Sato, *Foundation Giving and Payout in 2022: What Changed and What's next?*, June 29, 2023, <https://candid.org/blogs/foundation-giving-and-payout-in-2022-what-changed-whats-next/>.

<sup>9</sup> Justin McCarthy, "In U.S., Library Visits Outpaced Trips to Movies in 2019," *Gallup.com*, January 24, 2020, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/284009/library-visits-outpaced-trips-movies-2019.aspx>.

<sup>10</sup> Rachel Noorda and Kathi Inman Berens, *Gen Z and Millennials: How They Use Public Libraries and Identify Through Media Use* (American Library Association, 2023),

<https://www.ala.org/sites/default/files/advocacy/content/tools/Gen-Z-and-Millennials-Report%20%281%29.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Corissa Goodrich and Femi Adelakun, *2025 Urban Libraries Council Library Insights Report* (Urban Libraries Council, 2025), <https://www.urbanlibraries.org/files/2025-Library-Insights-Report.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Limbong, "Small and Rural Libraries Are Feeling the Cuts from President Trump's Executive

Order," *NPR*, April 22, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/04/22/nx-s1-5364825/small-and-rural-libraries-are-feeling-the-cuts-from-president-trumps-executive-order/>.

<sup>13</sup> Kamolika Das, *Local Governments Are Increasingly Strapped: 2026 Will Bring New Challenges and New Opportunities*, January 21, 2026, <https://itep.org/local-governments-are-increasingly-strapped-2026-will-bring-new-challenges-and-new-opportunities/>.

<sup>14</sup> Institute of Museum and Library Services, "Public Libraries Survey (PLS)," accessed April 20, 2026, <http://www.ims.gov/research-evaluation/surveys/public-libraries-survey-pls>.

<sup>15</sup> Sara S. Goek, *2023 Public Library Technology Survey: Summary Report* (Public Library Association, 2024), [https://www.ala.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/PLA\\_Tech\\_Survey\\_Report\\_2024.pdf](https://www.ala.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/PLA_Tech_Survey_Report_2024.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> IMLS, "Increased Public Library Usage," 2025.

<sup>17</sup> Jose-Marie Griffiths et al., *Taxpayer Return-on-Investment (ROI) in Pennsylvania Public Libraries* (Office of Commonwealth Libraries, 2007), [https://growthzonecmsprodeastus.azureedge.net/sites/2270/2025/09/roi\\_fullreport.pdf](https://growthzonecmsprodeastus.azureedge.net/sites/2270/2025/09/roi_fullreport.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> Anton Bekkerman and Gregory Gilpin, "High-Speed Internet Growth and the Demand for Locally

Accessible Information Content," *Journal of Urban Economics* 77 (September 2013): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jue.2013.03.009>.

- 
- <sup>19</sup> Gregory Gilpin et al., *The Returns to Public Library Investment (REVISED July 2021)* (Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.21033/wp-2021-06>.
- <sup>20</sup> EveryLibrary Institute, "Library Funding Map," accessed April 20, 2026, [https://www.everylibraryinstitute.org/library\\_funding\\_map](https://www.everylibraryinstitute.org/library_funding_map).
- <sup>21</sup> American Library Association, "Library Value Calculator," accessed April 20, 2026, <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/tools/library-value-calculator>.
- <sup>22</sup> Libraries in Community Systems, "Social Wellbeing Calculator: Libraries in Community Systems," accessed April 20, 2026, <https://lincs.nnyln.org/calculator/>.
- <sup>23</sup> Institute of Museum and Library Services, "FY 2016–FY 2025 Budget Appropriations," May 2024, <https://www.ims.gov/sites/default/files/2024-05/ims-appropriations-history-2016-2025.pdf>.
- <sup>24</sup> Andrew Limbong, "IMLS Reinstates Federal Grants Cut by Trump Administration," *NPR*, December 4, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/12/04/nx-s1-5633347/libraries-museums-federal-funding-ims-trump-cuts>.
- <sup>25</sup> Delaware Library Champions, "DLA and FODL Endorse State Funding Increase for Public Libraries in FY2026," March 2, 2025, [https://www.delawarelibrarychampions.org/dla\\_fodl\\_endorse\\_funding\\_increase\\_fy2026](https://www.delawarelibrarychampions.org/dla_fodl_endorse_funding_increase_fy2026).
- <sup>26</sup> Meredith Schwartz, "Update: Louisiana Eliminates State Aid to Public Libraries," *Library Journal*, June 29, 2012, <https://www.libraryjournal.com/story/louisiana-eliminates-state-library-funding>.
- <sup>27</sup> Indiana State Library, "LSTA Matching & MOE Requirements," accessed April 20, 2026, <https://www.in.gov/library/services-for-libraries/lsta/lsta-matching-and-moe-requirements/>.
- <sup>28</sup> OCLC and American Library Association, *From Awareness to Funding: Voter Perceptions and Support of Public Libraries in 2018* (OCLC, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.25333/C3M92X>.
- <sup>29</sup> EveryLibrary, *The Coming Revenue Crisis for Public Libraries*, April 27, 2020, [https://www.everylibrary.org/coming\\_revenue\\_crisis](https://www.everylibrary.org/coming_revenue_crisis).
- <sup>30</sup> Katie Klingsporn, "Cuts, Closures and More to Come: Wyoming's Property Tax Policy Ripples into Libraries," *WyoFile*, November 6, 2025, <https://wyofile.com/cuts-closures-and-more-to-come-wyomings-property-tax-policy-ripples-into-libraries>.
- <sup>31</sup> EBSCO, "Libraries and Philanthropy," in *Research Starters*, 2025, <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/business-and-management/libraries-and-philanthropy/>.
- <sup>32</sup> Mellon Foundation, "Public Knowledge Grant Programs," accessed April 20, 2026, <https://www.mellon.org/grant-programs/public-knowledge>.
- <sup>33</sup> Knight Foundation, "Libraries," accessed April 20, 2026, <https://legacy.knightfoundation.org/topics/libraries/>.
- <sup>34</sup> EBSCO, "Libraries and Philanthropy," 2025.
- <sup>35</sup> American Library Association, "Digital Pathways: Online Health Literacy Programming for Adults Guidelines," accessed April 20, 2026, <https://www.ala.org/tools/programming/digitalpathways/guidelines>.
- <sup>36</sup> Brooklyn Public Library, *Google Announces \$1 Million in Funding To Support Job-Relevant Digital Skills and AI Education in the Borough At Brooklyn Public Library's Fundraising Gala*, Press Release, June 11, 2025, <https://www.bklynlibrary.org/media/press/google-announces-1>.
- <sup>37</sup> American Library Association, "What Is United for Libraries?," accessed April 20, 2026, <https://www.ala.org/united/about/organization>.
- <sup>38</sup> Rebecca Tauber, "Referred Question 2I: The One about More Library Funding," *Denverite*, October 19, 2022, <https://denverite.com/2022/10/19/vg-2022-referred-question-2i-denver-public-library-funding>.
- <sup>39</sup> Urban Libraries Council, *Sustainable Funding for Denver Public Library*, 2023, <https://www.urbanlibraries.org/innovations/sustainable-funding-for-denver-public-library>.
- <sup>40</sup> Wayne A. Wiegand, *Part of Our Lives: A People's History of the American Public Library* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

- 
- <sup>41</sup> Wayne A. Wiegand, *Part of Our Lives: A People's History of the American Public Library*, 2015.
- <sup>42</sup> American Library Association, *America's Aging Public Library Infrastructure Requires Billions for Construction, Renovation: New Data Analysis*, May 20, 2021, <https://www.ala.org/news/2021/05/americas-aging-public-library-infrastructure-requires-billions-construction-renovation>.
- <sup>43</sup> Goek, *2023 Public Library Technology Survey*, 2024.
- <sup>44</sup> United States Government Accountability Office, *Public Libraries: Many Buildings Are Reported to Be in Poor Condition, with Increasing Deferred Maintenance*, GAO-26-107262 (2025), <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-26-107262>.
- <sup>45</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Public Libraries: Many Buildings Are Reported to Be in Poor Condition*.
- <sup>46</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Public Libraries: Many Buildings Are Reported to Be in Poor Condition*.
- <sup>47</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Public Libraries: Many Buildings Are Reported to Be in Poor Condition*.
- <sup>48</sup> American Library Association, "Build America's Libraries Act," accessed April 20, 2026, <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/buildlibraries>.
- <sup>49</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Public Libraries: Many Buildings Are Reported to Be in Poor Condition*.
- <sup>50</sup> Goek, *2023 Public Library Technology Survey*, 2024.
- <sup>51</sup> American Planning Association, "How Libraries Became Community Resilience Hubs," accessed April 20, 2026, <https://www.planning.org/blog/9305577/how-libraries-became-community-resilience-hubs/>.
- <sup>52</sup> Lucie Laurian et al., "Libraries Are Resilience Hubs: Evidence From the Midwest," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 91, no. 1 (2025): 58–71, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944363.2024.2343670>.
- <sup>53</sup> Goek, *2023 Public Library Technology Survey*, 2024.
- <sup>54</sup> Beth Patin, "What Is Essential?: Understanding Community Resilience and Public Libraries in the United States during Disasters," *Proceedings of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 57, no. 1 (2020): e269, <https://doi.org/10.1002/pr2.269>.
- <sup>55</sup> Florida Department of State, Division of Library and Information Services, "Disaster Preparedness and Response," accessed April 24, 2026, <https://dos.fl.gov/library-archives/library-development/programs/community/prepare/>.
- <sup>56</sup> Monika Antonelli et al., "The Storm Is Here: Public Libraries' Role in Disaster Preparedness and Community Recovery," *Electronic Green Journal* 1, no. 51 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.5070/G3.39629>.
- <sup>57</sup> Antonelli et al., "The Storm Is Here."
- <sup>58</sup> Sustainable Libraries Initiative, *Sustainable Libraries Initiative Awarded \$175,000 for Operationalizing Community Resilience: Creating a Training and Partnership Model for Libraries*, March 26, 2026, <https://www.sustainablelibrariesinitiative.org/news/sustainable-libraries-initiative-awarded-175000-operationalizing-community-resilience-creating>.
- <sup>59</sup> Reimagining the Civic Commons, *Case Studies: A New Way of Working*, n.d., accessed April 20, 2026, <https://civiccommons.us/category/case-studies/>.
- <sup>60</sup> Urban Libraries Council, "Reimagining Historic Cossitt Library," accessed April 20, 2026, <https://www.urbanlibraries.org/innovations/reimagining-historic-cossitt-library>.
- <sup>61</sup> Alexa Bush and Kyle Kutuchief, "Want to Support a Healthy Democracy? Start Here," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Spring 2026, <https://doi.org/10.48558/OSEM-WC66>.
- <sup>62</sup> Urban Libraries Council, "Reimagining Historic Cossitt Library."
- <sup>63</sup> The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library et al., "Knight Foundation Makes Transformative Investment in Saint Paul Libraries," December 21, 2025, <https://sppl.org/news/knight-foundation->

---

[makes-transformative-investment-in-saint-paul-libraries/](#).

<sup>64</sup> Jennifer Howard, "The Complicated Role of the Modern Public Library," *National Endowment for the Humanities*, n.d., accessed April 20, 2026, <https://www.neh.gov/article/complicated-role-modern-public-library>.

<sup>65</sup> Laura Silver et al., "Americans' Trust in One Another," Political & Civic Engagement, Pew Research Center, May 8, 2025, <https://www.pewresearch.org/2025/05/08/americans-trust-in-one-another/>.

<sup>66</sup> Louise Richardson, "Why Polarization Is a Problem," *Carnegie Corporation of New York*, February 19, 2025, <https://www.carnegie.org/our-work/article/why-polarization-is-a-problem/>.

<sup>67</sup> Danielle Allen et al., *Experiential Civic Learning for American Democracy: A Portrait of the Field* (Council on Civic Strength Task Force on Experiential Civic Learning, 2025), [https://civiced.org/pdfs/reports/Report\\_ExperientialCivicLearningForAmericanDemocracy\\_0525.pdf](https://civiced.org/pdfs/reports/Report_ExperientialCivicLearningForAmericanDemocracy_0525.pdf).

<sup>68</sup> Goek, 2023 *Public Library Technology Survey*, 2024.

<sup>69</sup> Mark Smith, "Top Ten Challenges Facing Public Libraries," *Public Library Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (2019): 241–47, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2019.1608617>.

<sup>70</sup> Elizabeth Wahler et al., "The Changing Role of Libraries: How Social Workers Can Help," *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services* 101, no. 1 (2019): 34–43, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1044389419850707>.

<sup>71</sup> Rachel Feuerstein-Simon et al., "Substance Use and Overdose in Public Libraries: Results from a Five-State Survey in the US," *Journal of Community Health* 47, no. 2 (2022): 344–50, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10900-021-01048-2>.

<sup>72</sup> Goodrich and Adalakun, 2025 *Urban Libraries Council Library Insights Report*.

<sup>73</sup> Anne Ford, "Other Duties as Assigned," *American Libraries Magazine*, January 2, 2019, <https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2019/01/02/mission-creep-other-duties-as-assigned/>.

<sup>74</sup> Goek, 2023 *Public Library Technology Survey*, 2024.

<sup>75</sup> Ann Goggins Gregory and Don Howard, "The Nonprofit Starvation Cycle," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Fall 2009, <https://doi.org/10.48558/6K3V-0Q70>.

<sup>76</sup> Daniel A. Cox, "The State of American Friendship: Change, Challenges, and Loss," *Survey Center on American Life*, June 8, 2021, <https://www.americansurveycenter.org/research/the-state-of-american-friendship-change-challenges-and-loss/>.

<sup>77</sup> American Psychological Association, "APA Poll Reveals a Nation Suffering from Stress of Societal Division, Loneliness," press release, November 6, 2025, <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2025/11/nation-suffering-division-loneliness>.

<sup>78</sup> Julie M. Norman and Beniamino Green, "Why Can't We Be Friends? Untangling Conjoined Polarization in America," *Political Psychology* 46, no. 5 (2025): 1364–85, <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.13084>.

<sup>79</sup> Eli J. Finkel, "Political Sectarianism in America," *Science* 370 (2020): 533–36, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abe1715>.

<sup>80</sup> Jacob R. Brown and Ryan D. Enos, "The Measurement of Partisan Sorting for 180 Million Voters," *Nature Human Behaviour* 5, no. 8 (2021): 998–1008, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-021-01066-z>.

<sup>81</sup> Amina Dunn, "Few Trump Supporters Have Close Friends Who Back Biden, and Vice Versa," *Pew Research Center*, September 18, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/09/18/few-trump-or-biden-supporters-have-close-friends-who-back-the-opposing-candidate/>.

<sup>82</sup> Kettering Foundation, *Most Americans Say the People's Role in Democracy Is Failing, But Civic Education and Community Ties Offer a Way Forward, Kettering-Gallup Study Finds*, March 31, 2026,

---

<https://kettering.org/most-americans-say-the-peoples-role-in-democracy-is-failing-but-civic-education-and-community-ties-offer-a-way-forward-kettering-gallup-study-finds/>

<sup>83</sup> Urban Libraries Council, "Libraries Leading Civic Dialogue," accessed April 20, 2026, <https://www.urbanlibraries.org/initiatives/democracy/libraries-leading-civic-dialogue>.

<sup>84</sup> Carnegie Corporation of New York, *Local Government Navigates Negative Impact of Political Polarization Better than Federal Government According to New CivicPulse/Carnegie Survey*, October 23, 2024, <https://www.carnegie.org/news/articles/local-government-navigates-negative-impact-of-political-polarization-better-than-federal-government-according-to-new-civicpulsecarnegie-survey/>.

<sup>85</sup> Carnegie Corporation of New York, "Polarization in America: How Polarized Are We?" accessed April 20, 2026, <https://www.carnegie.org/our-work/article/polarization-in-america-how-polarized-are-we/#group-section-Survey-III-0PqfjG4vGk>.

<sup>86</sup> Trust for Civic Life, "Grants," accessed April 20, 2026, <https://trustforcivicliflife.org/grants/>.

<sup>87</sup> Reimagining the Civic Commons, *Case Studies*.

<sup>88</sup> Urban Libraries Council, "Innovator-In-Residence Program," accessed April 20, 2026, <https://www.urbanlibraries.org/innovations/innovator-in-residence-program>.

<sup>89</sup> Urban Libraries Council, "Urban Libraries Council Announces \$1M Grant for Civic Labs for Youth from Carnegie Corporation of New York," press release, March 18, 2026, <https://www.urbanlibraries.org/newsroom/urban-libraries-council-announces-1m-grant-for-civic-labs-for-youth-from-carnegie-corporation-of-new-york>.

<sup>90</sup> Urban Libraries Council, "Promoting Civic Discourse in North American Library Systems," accessed April 24, 2026, <https://www.urbanlibraries.org/initiatives/democracy/libraries-leading-civic-dialogue>.

<sup>91</sup> American Library Association, *American Library Association Announces New Transformational Grant*

from Mellon Foundation, January 24, 2023, <https://www.ala.org/news/2023/01/american-library-association-announces-new-transformational-grant-mellon-foundation>.

<sup>92</sup> Community Foundation of the Ozarks, "CFO Receives \$250,000 National Grant to Grow Rural Civic Engagement," September 18, 2025, <https://www.cfozarks.org/resources/cfo-receives-250-000-national-grant-to-grow-rural-civic-engagement>

<sup>93</sup> Knight Foundation, "Knight Foundation Fund at Central Carolina Community Foundation Awards \$280,512 in Grants to Advance Cultural Vibrancy and Civic Engagement in Columbia," March 16, 2026, <https://www.yourfoundation.org/knight-foundation-awards-280512-in-grants-to-advance-cultural-vibrancy-and-civic-engagement-in-columbia/>.

<sup>94</sup> American Library Association, "Libraries Transform Communities Engagement Grant," February 3, 2026, <https://www.ala.org/grants/libraries-transform-communities-engagement-grant>.

<sup>95</sup> Brian Real, "Public Libraries in the Wake of COVID-19, Part 1: Public Programming, Circulating Materials, and Digital Shifts," *Libri* 76, no. 1 (2026): 29–41, <https://doi.org/10.1515/libri-2025-0088>.

<sup>96</sup> Tawfiq Ammari, Priya Kumar, Cliff Lampe, and Sarita Schoenebeck, "'It's Like Another World': Intra-Rural Digital Divides and Public Libraries as Rural Assets," *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction* 9, no. 7 (2025): Article CSCW260, <https://doi.org/10.1145/3757441>.

<sup>97</sup> Vikki Katz and Victoria Rideout, *Learning at Home While Under-Connected: Lower-Income Families During the COVID-19 Pandemic* (New America, 2021), <https://www.newamerica.org/insights/learning-at-home-while-underconnected/>.

<sup>98</sup> Elizabeth DeYoung et al., *Understanding the Social Wellbeing Impacts of the Nation's Libraries and Museums* (Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2021), <https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/2021-10/swi-report-accessible.pdf>.

<sup>99</sup> Elizabeth DeYoung et al., *Understanding the Social Wellbeing Impacts of the Nation's Libraries and Museums*.

- 
- <sup>100</sup> Joanna Sei-Ching, “Disparities in Public Libraries’ Service Levels Based on Neighborhood Income and Urbanization Levels: A Nationwide Study,” *Proceedings of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 45, no. 1 (2008): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.1002/meet.2008.1450450263>.
- <sup>101</sup> Vikki Katz, *Learning at Home While Under-Connected: Lower-Income Families During the COVID-19 Pandemic*.
- <sup>102</sup> Ryan Claringbole and Karlton McIntosh, “Getting Libraries Online: 30 Years of E-Rate Advocacy,” *Library Journal*, January 2026, <https://www.libraryjournal.com/story/getting-libraries-online-30-years-of-e-rate-advocacy>.
- <sup>103</sup> Public Library Association, “DigitalLead: Rural Libraries Creating New Possibilities,” accessed April 20, 2026, <https://www.ala.org/pla/initiatives/digitallead>.
- <sup>104</sup> Denise M. Davis, *Funding Issues in U.S. Public Libraries, Fiscal Years 2003–2006* (American Library Association, 2006), <https://www.ala.org/sites/default/files/tools/content/librystats/public/fundingissuesinuspls.pdf>.
- <sup>105</sup> Denise M. Davis, *Funding Issues in U.S. Public Libraries*.
- <sup>106</sup> Goek, *2023 Public Library Technology Survey, 2024*.
- <sup>107</sup> National Digital Inclusion Alliance, “Definitions,” accessed April 24, 2026, <https://www.digitalinclusion.org/definitions/>.
- <sup>108</sup> Joanna Sei-Ching, “Disparities in Public Libraries’ Service Levels.”
- <sup>109</sup> Titilayo Tinubu Ali et al., *Looking Back, Looking Forward: What It Will Take to Permanently Close the K–12 Digital Divide* (Common Sense Media, 2021), <https://southerneducation.org/wp-content/uploads/documents/looking-back-looking-forward-report-01272021.pdf>.
- <sup>110</sup> Brian Whitacre et al., “Broadband’s Contribution to Economic Growth in Rural Areas: Moving towards a Causal Relationship,” *Telecommunications Policy* 38, no. 11 (2014): 1011–23, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.telpol.2014.05.005>.
- <sup>111</sup> Institute of Museum and Library Services, “Public Libraries’ Role in Workforce and Small Business Development: A Look Across Ten Public Library Systems,” accessed April 20, 2026, <http://www.ims.gov/publications/public-libraries-role-workforce-and-small-business-development-look-across-ten-public>.
- <sup>112</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, “S2801: Types of Computers and Internet Subscriptions,” American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, 2024, <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSSPP1Y2024.S2801>.
- <sup>113</sup> Emily A. Vogels, “Some Digital Divides Persist Between Rural, Urban and Suburban America,” *Pew Research Center*, August 19, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/08/19/some-digital-divides-persist-between-rural-urban-and-suburban-america/>
- <sup>114</sup> Emily A. Vogels, “Some Digital Divides Persist Between Rural, Urban and Suburban America.”
- <sup>115</sup> Brian Whitacre et al., “Broadband’s Contribution to Economic Growth in Rural Areas: Moving towards a Causal Relationship.”
- <sup>116</sup> Meghan Salsbury and Mary Anne Hansen, “Bridging the Digital Divide: Wi-Fi Hot Spots as a Means of Digital Equity,” *Portal: Libraries and the Academy* 22, no. 1 (2022): 199–219, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/pla.2022.0000>.
- <sup>117</sup> Liam Niemeyer, “Hotspot Lending Programs at Rural Libraries Finding Success, High Demand Through First Year,” *WEKU*, September 2, 2022, <https://www.weku.org/education/2022-09-02/hotspot-lending-programs-at-rural-libraries-finding-success-high-demand-through-first-year>
- <sup>118</sup> South Dakota State University Extension, “Rural Library Hotspot Lending Program,” last modified January 30, 2026, <https://extension.sdstate.edu/rural-library-hotspot-lending-program>

---

<sup>119</sup> Barbara Ortutay, "FCC Moves to End Discounts for Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending and School Bus Connectivity," *AP News*, September 30, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/fcc-wifi-hotspots-schools-library-bus-rural-c8ecb6e0c60b6a686361f4a96d7b7be4>

<sup>120</sup> Institute of Museum and Library Services, "Public Libraries' Role in Workforce and Small Business Development."

<sup>121</sup> Wayne Kelly, Brian McGrath, and Danielle Hubbard, "Starting from 'Scratch': Building Young People's Digital Skills Through a Coding Club Collaboration with Rural Public Libraries," *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science* 55, no. 2 (2023): 487–499, <https://doi.org/10.1177/09610006221090953>

<sup>122</sup> Public Library Association, "DigitalLead."

<sup>123</sup> American Library Association, *ALA Disappointed by Senate Vote to Block Hotspot Funds*, May 8, 2025, <https://www.ala.org/news/2025/05/senate-vote-blocks-hotspot-funds>.

<sup>124</sup> Sharon Stover, Whitney Nelson, and Sheila Lalwani, "Framing Access: Digital Navigators and Libraries," *Journal of Information Policy* 14 (2024): 1–42, <https://doi.org/10.5325/jinfopoli.14.2024.0007>

<sup>125</sup> Institute of Museum and Library Services, "LG-254838-OLS-23," accessed April 24, 2026, <https://www.ims.gov/grants/awarded/lg-254838-ols-23>

<sup>126</sup> Connecticut State Library. "Digital Inclusion and Equity Resources." *LibGuides*. Accessed April 24, 2026. <https://libguides.ctstatelibrary.org/c.php?g=1499978&p=11233317>

<sup>127</sup> Mt. Auburn Associates, Inc., *Case Study: Asotin County Library* (Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA), 2022), [https://www.cosla.org/assets/MTM/Asotin%20Case%20Study\\_Final\\_9-12-2022.pdf](https://www.cosla.org/assets/MTM/Asotin%20Case%20Study_Final_9-12-2022.pdf).

<sup>128</sup> American Library Association, "ALA Policy Corps," accessed April 20, 2026, <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/federal-resources/ala-policy-corps>.

<sup>129</sup> American Library Association, "Outcome Measurement for Public Libraries," accessed April 20, 2026, <https://www.ala.org/pla/data/outcomemeasurement>.

<sup>130</sup> EveryLibrary, "Conference Speaking and Staff Training," accessed April 20, 2026, <https://www.everylibrary.org/conference-speaking-and-staff-training>.

<sup>131</sup> Trust-Based Philanthropy, "Trust-Based Philanthropy," accessed April 20, 2026, <https://www.trustbasedphilanthropy.org>.

---

## X. Bibliography

- Ammari, Tawfiq, Priya Kumar, Cliff Lampe, and Sarita Schoenebeck. "It's Like Another World': Intra-Rural Digital Divides and Public Libraries as Rural Assets." *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction* 9, no. 7 (2025): Article CSCW260. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3757441>.
- Allen, Danielle, Michael Blauw, Robert Burton, et al. *Experiential Civic Learning for American Democracy: A Portrait of the Field*. Council on Civic Strength Task Force on Experiential Civic Learning, 2025. [https://civiced.org/pdfs/reports/Report\\_ExperientialCivicLearningForAmericanDemocracy\\_0525.pdf](https://civiced.org/pdfs/reports/Report_ExperientialCivicLearningForAmericanDemocracy_0525.pdf).
- American Library Association. "ALA Building Library Capacity Grantees 2023." Accessed April 20, 2026. <https://www.ala.org/aboutala/Building-Library-Capacity-Fund-2023-Grantees>.
- American Library Association. "ALA Disaster Relief Fund." Accessed April 20, 2026. <https://www.ala.org/relief>.
- American Library Association. "ALA Policy Corps." Accessed April 20, 2026. <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/federal-resources/ala-policy-corps>.
- American Library Association. *ALA Disappointed by Senate Vote to Block Hotspot Funds*. May 8, 2025. <https://www.ala.org/news/2025/05/senate-vote-blocks-hotspot-funds>.
- American Library Association. *American Library Association Announces New Transformational Grant from Mellon Foundation*. January 24, 2023. <https://www.ala.org/news/2023/01/american-library-association-announces-new-transformational-grant-mellon-foundation>.
- American Library Association. *America's Aging Public Library Infrastructure Requires Billions for Construction, Renovation: New Data Analysis*. May 20, 2021. <https://www.ala.org/news/2021/05/americas-aging-public-library-infrastructure-requires-billions-construction-renovation>.
- American Library Association. "Build America's Libraries Act." Accessed April 20, 2026. <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/buildlibraries>.
- American Library Association. "Digital Pathways: Online Health Literacy Programming for Adults Guidelines." Accessed April 20, 2026. <https://www.ala.org/tools/programming/digitalpathways/guidelines>.
- American Library Association. *Introduction – New Americans Library Project*. Accessed April 20, 2026. <https://newamericans.ala.org/white-paper/introduction/>.
- American Library Association. "Libraries Transform Communities Engagement Grant." February 3, 2026. <https://www.ala.org/grants/libraries-transform-communities-engagement-grant>.
- American Library Association. "Library Value Calculator." Accessed April 20, 2026. <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/tools/library-value-calculator>.
- American Library Association. "Outcome Measurement for Public Libraries." Accessed April 20, 2026. <https://www.ala.org/pla/data/outcomemeasurement>.

- 
- American Library Association. "United for Libraries and Penguin Random House Grants to U.S. Rural and Small Libraries." Accessed April 20, 2026. [https://www.ala.org/united/grants\\_awards/friends/united-libraries-and-penguin-random-house-grant-rural-and-small-libraries](https://www.ala.org/united/grants_awards/friends/united-libraries-and-penguin-random-house-grant-rural-and-small-libraries).
- American Library Association. "What Is United for Libraries?" Accessed April 20, 2026. <https://www.ala.org/united/about/organization>.
- American Library Association. *White House FY27 Budget Proposal Repeats Threats to Eliminate IMLS*. April 3, 2026. <https://www.ala.org/news/2026/04/white-house-fy27-budget-proposal-repeats-threats-eliminate-impls>.
- American Planning Association. "How Libraries Became Community Resilience Hubs." Accessed April 20, 2026. <https://www.planning.org/blog/9305577/how-libraries-became-community-resilience-hubs/>.
- American Psychological Association. *APA Poll Reveals a Nation Suffering from Stress of Societal Division, Loneliness*. November 6, 2025. <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2025/11/nation-suffering-division-loneliness>.
- Antonelli, Monika, Rebekkah Aldrich, Rene Tanner, and Adrian Ho. "The Storm Is Here: Public Libraries' Role in Disaster Preparedness and Community Recovery." *Electronic Green Journal* 1, no. 51 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.5070/G3.39629>.
- Bekkerman, Anton, and Gregory Gilpin. "High-Speed Internet Growth and the Demand for Locally Accessible Information Content." *Journal of Urban Economics* 77 (2013): 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jue.2013.03.009>.
- Brooklyn Public Library. *Google Announces \$1 Million in Funding To Support Job-Relevant Digital Skills and AI Education in the Borough At Brooklyn Public Library's Fundraising Gala*. Press release, June 11, 2025. <https://www.bklynlibrary.org/media/press/google-announces-1>.
- Brown, Jacob R., and Ryan D. Enos. "The Measurement of Partisan Sorting for 180 Million Voters." *Nature Human Behaviour* 5, no. 8 (2021): 998–1008. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-021-01066-z>.
- Bush, Alexa, and Kyle Kutuchief. "Want to Support a Healthy Democracy? Start Here." *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Spring 2026. <https://doi.org/10.48558/0SEM-WC66>.
- Carnegie Corporation of New York. *Local Government Navigates Negative Impact of Political Polarization Better than Federal Government According to New CivicPulse/Carnegie Survey*. October 23, 2024. <https://www.carnegie.org/news/articles/local-government-navigates-negative-impact-of-political-polarization-better-than-federal-government-according-to-new-civicpulsecarnegie-survey/>.
- Carnegie Corporation of New York. "Polarization in America: How Polarized Are We?" Accessed April 20, 2026. <https://www.carnegie.org/our-work/article/polarization-in-america-how-polarized-are-we/>.
- Claringbole, Ryan, and Karlton McIntosh. "Getting Libraries Online: 30 Years of E-Rate Advocacy." *Library Journal*, January 2026. <https://www.libraryjournal.com/story/getting-libraries-online-30-years-of-e-rate-advocacy>.

- 
- Community Foundation of the Ozarks. *CFO Receives \$250,000 National Grant to Grow Rural Civic Engagement*. September 18, 2025. <https://www.cfozarks.org/resources/cfo-receives-250-000-national-grant-to-grow-rural-civic-engagement>.
- Connecticut State Library. "Digital Inclusion and Equity Resources." LibGuides. Accessed April 24, 2026. <https://libguides.ctstatelibrary.org/c.php?g=1499978&p=11233317>.
- Cox, Daniel A. *The State of American Friendship: Change, Challenges, and Loss*. Survey Center on American Life, June 8, 2021. <https://www.americansurveycenter.org/research/the-state-of-american-friendship-change-challenges-and-loss/>.
- Das, Kamolika. *Local Governments Are Increasingly Strapped: 2026 Will Bring New Challenges and New Opportunities*. January 21, 2026. <https://itep.org/local-governments-are-increasingly-strapped-2026-will-bring-new-challenges-and-new-opportunities/>.
- Davis, Denise M. *Funding Issues in U.S. Public Libraries, Fiscal Years 2003–2006*. American Library Association, 2006. <https://www.ala.org/sites/default/files/tools/content/librariystats/public/fundingissuesinuspls.pdf>.
- Dayal, Sarina, and Grace Sato. *Foundation Giving and Payout in 2022: What Changed and What's Next?* June 29, 2023. <https://candid.org/blogs/foundation-giving-and-payout-in-2022-what-changed-whats-next/>.
- Delaware Library Champions. "DLA and FODL Endorse State Funding Increase for Public Libraries in FY2026." March 2, 2025. [https://www.delawarelibrarychampions.org/dla\\_fodl\\_endorse\\_funding\\_increase\\_fy2026](https://www.delawarelibrarychampions.org/dla_fodl_endorse_funding_increase_fy2026).
- DeYoung, Elizabeth, Michael H. Norton, Jonathan Meyers, and Mark J. Stern. *Understanding the Social Wellbeing Impacts of the Nation's Libraries and Museums*. Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2021. <https://www.ims.gov/sites/default/files/2021-10/swi-report-accessible.pdf>.
- Dunn, Amina. "Few Trump Supporters Have Close Friends Who Back Biden, and Vice Versa." *Pew Research Center*, September 18, 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/09/18/few-trump-or-biden-supporters-have-close-friends-who-back-the-opposing-candidate/>.
- EBSCO. "Libraries and Philanthropy." *Research Starters*, 2025. <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/business-and-management/libraries-and-philanthropy>.
- Feuerstein-Simon, Rachel, et al. "Substance Use and Overdose in Public Libraries: Results from a Five-State Survey in the US." *Journal of Community Health* 47, no. 2 (2022): 344–50. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10900-021-01048-2>.
- Finkel, Eli J. "Political Sectarianism in America." *Science* 370 (2020): 533–36. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abe1715>.
- Florida Department of State, Division of Library and Information Services. "Disaster Preparedness and Response." Accessed April 24, 2026. <https://dos.fl.gov/library-archives/library-development/programs/community/prepare/>.

- 
- Ford, Anne. "Other Duties as Assigned." *American Libraries Magazine*, January 2, 2019. <https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2019/01/02/mission-creep-other-duties-as-assigned/>.
- Gilpin, Gregory, Ezra Karger, and Peter Nencka. *The Returns to Public Library Investment*. Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.21033/wp-2021-06>.
- Goek, Sara S. *2023 Public Library Technology Survey: Summary Report*. Public Library Association, 2024. [https://www.ala.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/PLA\\_Tech\\_Survey\\_Report\\_2024.pdf](https://www.ala.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/PLA_Tech_Survey_Report_2024.pdf).
- Goggins Gregory, Ann, and Don Howard. "The Nonprofit Starvation Cycle." *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 2009. <https://doi.org/10.48558/6K3V-0Q70>.
- Goodrich, Corissa, and Femi Adedokun. *2025 Urban Libraries Council Library Insights Report*. Urban Libraries Council, 2025. <https://www.urbanlibraries.org/files/2025-Library-Insights-Report.pdf>.
- Griffiths, Jose-Marie, Sarah E. Aerni, and Donald W. King. *Taxpayer Return-on-Investment (ROI) in Pennsylvania Public Libraries*. 2007. [https://growthzonecmsprodeastus.azureedge.net/sites/2270/2025/09/roi\\_fullreport.pdf](https://growthzonecmsprodeastus.azureedge.net/sites/2270/2025/09/roi_fullreport.pdf).
- Hartford Public Library. "The American Place." Accessed April 20, 2026. <https://tap.hplct.org/>.
- Howard, Jennifer. "The Complicated Role of the Modern Public Library." *National Endowment for the Humanities*. Accessed April 20, 2026. <https://www.neh.gov/article/complicated-role-modern-public-library>.
- Indiana State Library. "LSTA Matching & MOE Requirements." Accessed April 20, 2026. <https://www.in.gov/library/services-for-libraries/lsta/lsta-matching-and-moe-requirements/>.
- Institute of Museum and Library Services. *Access to Public Library Services and Materials During the First Nine Months of the COVID-19 Pandemic*. 2023. [https://www.ims.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/pls\\_fy20\\_research\\_brief.pdf](https://www.ims.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/pls_fy20_research_brief.pdf).
- Institute of Museum and Library Services. "FY 2016–FY 2025 Budget Appropriations." May 2024. <https://www.ims.gov/sites/default/files/2024-05/ims-appropriations-history-2016-2025.pdf>.
- Institute of Museum and Library Services. "Increased Public Library Usage Shown by IMLS Survey Data." September 2, 2025. <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USIMLS/bulletins/3f09e4a>.
- Institute of Museum and Library Services. "Public Libraries' Role in Workforce and Small Business Development." Accessed April 20, 2026. <http://www.ims.gov/publications/public-libraries-role-workforce-and-small-business-development-look-across-ten-public>.
- Institute of Museum and Library Services. "Public Libraries Survey (PLS)." Accessed April 20, 2026. <http://www.ims.gov/research-evaluation/surveys/public-libraries-survey-pls>.
- Jonas, Rebecca M. "'It's like Another World': Intra-Rural Digital Divides and Public Libraries as Rural Assets." *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction* 9, no. 7 (2025): CSCW260:1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3757441>.

- 
- Katz, Vikki, and Victoria Rideout. *Learning at Home While Under-Connected: Lower-Income Families During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. New America, 2021. <https://www.newamerica.org/insights/learning-at-home-while-underconnected/>.
- Kettering Foundation. *Most Americans Say the People's Role in Democracy Is Failing*. March 31, 2026. <https://kettering.org/most-americans-say-the-peoples-role-in-democracy-is-failing-but-civic-education-and-community-ties-offer-a-way-forward-kettering-gallup-study-finds/>.
- Klingsporn, Katie. "Cuts, Closures and More to Come: Wyoming's Property Tax Policy Ripples into Libraries." *WyoFile*, November 6, 2025. <https://wyofile.com/cuts-closures-and-more-to-come-wyomings-property-tax-policy-ripples-into-libraries/>.
- Knight Foundation. "Libraries." Accessed April 20, 2026. <https://legacy.knightfoundation.org/topics/libraries/>.
- Knight Foundation. "Knight Foundation Fund Awards \$280,512 in Grants." March 16, 2026. <https://www.yourfoundation.org/knight-foundation-awards-280512-in-grants-to-advance-cultural-vibrancy-and-civic-engagement-in-columbia/>.
- Laurian, Lucie, Evan Doyle, Iulian Vamanu, and Kara Logsden. "Libraries Are Resilience Hubs: Evidence From the Midwest." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 91, no. 1 (2025): 58–71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944363.2024.2343670>.
- Libraries in Community Systems. "Social Wellbeing Calculator." Accessed April 20, 2026. <https://lincs.nnyln.org/calculator/>.
- Limbond, Andrew. "IMLS Reinstates Federal Grants Cut by Trump Administration." *NPR*, December 4, 2025. <https://www.npr.org/2025/12/04/nx-s1-5633347/libraries-museums-federal-funding-impls-trump-cuts/>.
- Limbond, Andrew. "Small and Rural Libraries Are Feeling the Cuts." *NPR*, April 22, 2025. <https://www.npr.org/2025/04/22/nx-s1-5364825/small-and-rural-libraries-are-feeling-the-cuts-from-president-trumps-executive-order/>.
- McCarthy, Justin. "In U.S., Library Visits Outpaced Trips to Movies in 2019." *Gallup*, January 24, 2020. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/284009/library-visits-outpaced-trips-movies-2019.aspx>.
- Mellon Foundation. "Public Knowledge Grant Programs." Accessed April 20, 2026. <https://www.mellon.org/grant-programs/public-knowledge>.
- Mt. Auburn Associates. *Case Study: Asotin County Library*. COSLA, 2022. [https://www.cosla.org/assets/MTM/Asotin%20Case%20Study\\_Final\\_9-12-2022.pdf](https://www.cosla.org/assets/MTM/Asotin%20Case%20Study_Final_9-12-2022.pdf).
- National Digital Inclusion Alliance. "Definitions." Accessed April 24, 2026. <https://www.digitalinclusion.org/definitions/>.
- Niemeyer, Liam. "Hotspot Lending Programs at Rural Libraries Finding Success." *WEKU*, September 2, 2022. <https://www.weku.org/education/2022-09-02/hotspot-lending-programs-at-rural-libraries-finding-success-high-demand-through-first-year>.

- 
- Noorda, Rachel, and Kathi Inman Berens. *Gen Z and Millennials: How They Use Public Libraries and Identify Through Media Use*. ALA, 2023.  
<https://www.ala.org/sites/default/files/advocacy/content/tools/Gen-Z-and-Millennials-Report%20%281%29.pdf>.
- Norman, Julie M., and Beniamino Green. "Why Can't We Be Friends?" *Political Psychology* 46, no. 5 (2025): 1364–85. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.13084>.
- OCLC and American Library Association. *From Awareness to Funding: Voter Perceptions and Support of Public Libraries in 2018*. 2018. <https://doi.org/10.25333/C3M92X>.
- Ortutay, Barbara. "FCC Moves to End Discounts for Wi-Fi Hotspots." *AP News*, September 30, 2025.  
<https://apnews.com/article/fcc-wifi-hotspots-schools-library-bus-rural-c8ecb6e0c60b6a686361f4a96d7b7be4>.
- Patin, Beth. "What Is Essential?" *Proceedings of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 57, no. 1 (2020): e269. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pra2.269>.
- Peet, Lisa. "A Complex Landscape | Budgets and Funding 2024." *Library Journal*. Accessed April 20, 2026.  
<https://www.libraryjournal.com/story/a-complex-landscape-budgets-and-funding-2024>.
- Public Library Association. "DigitalLead: Rural Libraries Creating New Possibilities." Accessed April 20, 2026.  
<https://www.ala.org/pla/initiatives/digitallead>.
- Real, Brian. "Public Libraries in the Wake of COVID-19." *Libri* 76, no. 1 (2026): 29–41.  
<https://doi.org/10.1515/libri-2025-0088>.
- Reimagining the Civic Commons. "Case Studies." Accessed April 20, 2026.  
<https://civiccommons.us/category/case-studies/>.
- Reimagining the Civic Commons. "Memphis." Accessed April 20, 2026. <https://civiccommons.us/memphis/>.
- Reimagining the Civic Commons. "Reimagining the Civic Commons." Accessed April 20, 2026.  
<https://civiccommons.us/>.
- Richardson, Louise. "Why Polarization Is a Problem." Carnegie Corporation of New York, February 19, 2025.  
<https://www.carnegie.org/our-work/article/why-polarization-is-a-problem/>.
- Salsbury, Meghan, and Mary Anne Hansen. "Bridging the Digital Divide." *Portal: Libraries and the Academy* 22, no. 1 (2022): 199–219. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/pla.2022.0000>.
- Schwartz, Meredith. "Update: Louisiana Eliminates State Aid to Public Libraries." *Library Journal*, 2012.  
<https://www.libraryjournal.com/story/louisiana-eliminates-state-library-funding>.
- Silver, Laura, et al. "Americans' Trust in One Another." *Pew Research Center*, May 8, 2025.  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/2025/05/08/americans-trust-in-one-another/>.
- Sin, Sei-Ching Joanna. "Disparities in Public Libraries' Service Levels." *Proceedings of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 45, no. 1 (2008): 1–15.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/meet.2008.1450450263>.

- 
- Smith, Mark. "Top Ten Challenges Facing Public Libraries." *Public Library Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (2019): 241–47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2019.1608617>.
- Strover, Sharon, Whitney Nelson, and Sheila Lalwani. "Framing Access: Digital Navigators and Libraries." *Journal of Information Policy* 14 (2024): 201–42. <https://doi.org/10.5325/jinfopoli.14.2024.0007>.
- Sustainable Libraries Initiative. *Sustainable Libraries Initiative Awarded \$175,000*. March 26, 2026. <https://www.sustainablelibrariesinitiative.org/news/sustainable-libraries-initiative-awarded-175000-operationalizing-community-resilience-creating>.
- Sweeney, Patrick. "The Funding Crisis Facing America's Public Libraries." *Candid*, September 4, 2025. <https://candid.org/blogs/todays-funding-crisis-facing-us-public-libraries/>.
- The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library, Knight Foundation, and Saint Paul Public Library. "Knight Foundation Makes Transformative Investment in Saint Paul Libraries." December 21, 2025. <https://sppl.org/news/knight-foundation-makes-transformative-investment-in-saint-paul-libraries/>.
- Tinubu Ali, Titilayo, et al. *Looking Back, Looking Forward: Closing the K–12 Digital Divide*. Common Sense Media, 2021. <https://southerneducation.org/wp-content/uploads/documents/looking-back-looking-forward-report-01272021.pdf>.
- T-Mobile Newsroom. "T-Mobile's Hometown Grants Top \$21.5M." March 26, 2026. <http://www.t-mobile.com/news/un-carrier/t-mobiles-hometown-grants-top-21-5m>.
- Trust for Civic Life. "Grants." Accessed April 20, 2026. <https://trustforciviclife.org/grants/>.
- Trust-Based Philanthropy. "Trust-Based Philanthropy." Accessed April 20, 2026. <https://www.trustbasedphilanthropy.org>.
- U.S. Census Bureau. "S2801: Types of Computers and Internet Subscriptions." 2024. <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSSPP1Y2024.S2801>.
- United States Government Accountability Office. *Public Libraries: Many Buildings Are Reported to Be in Poor Condition*. GAO-26-107262, December 18, 2025. <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-26-107262>.
- Urban Libraries Council. "Innovator-In-Residence Program." Accessed April 20, 2026. <https://www.urbanlibraries.org/innovations/innovator-in-residence-program>.
- Urban Libraries Council. "Libraries Leading Civic Dialogue." Accessed April 20, 2026. <https://www.urbanlibraries.org/initiatives/democracy/libraries-leading-civic-dialogue>.
- Urban Libraries Council. "Reimagining Historic Cossitt Library." Accessed April 20, 2026. <https://www.urbanlibraries.org/innovations/reimagining-historic-cossitt-library>.
- Urban Libraries Council. *Sustainable Funding for Denver Public Library*. 2023. <https://www.urbanlibraries.org/innovations/sustainable-funding-for-denver-public-library>.

- 
- Urban Libraries Council. "Urban Libraries Council Announces \$1M Grant for Civic Labs for Youth." March 18, 2026. <https://www.urbanlibraries.org/newsroom/urban-libraries-council-announces-1m-grant-for-civic-labs-for-youth-from-carnegie-corporation-of-new-york>.
- Vogels, Emily A. "Some Digital Divides Persist Between Rural, Urban and Suburban America." *Pew Research Center*, August 19, 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/08/19/some-digital-divides-persist-between-rural-urban-and-suburban-america/>.
- Wahler, Elizabeth, et al. "The Changing Role of Libraries: How Social Workers Can Help." *Families in Society* 101, no. 1 (2019): 34–43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/104438941985070>.
- Whitacre, Brian, Roberto Gallardo, and Sharon Strover. "Broadband's Contribution to Economic Growth in Rural Areas." *Telecommunications Policy* 38, no. 11 (2014): 1011–23. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.telpol.2014.05.005>.
- Wiegand, Wayne A. *Part of Our Lives: A People's History of the American Public Library*. Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Zaretsky, Mark. "Navigators at Conn. Libraries to Foster Digital Literacy." *GovTech*, October 10, 2024. <https://www.govtech.com/civic/navigators-at-conn-libraries-to-foster-digital-literacy>.