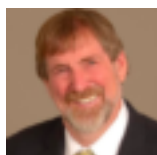


- [Home](#)
- [About Fox&Hounds](#)
- [Advertise](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Blogroll](#)

ADVERTISE ON FOX & HOUNDS

[California public libraries show resiliency](#)



By [Steve Coffman](#)

Vice President of Library Systems & Services, which operates nearly 50 libraries in California

Thursday, April 27th, 2017

When Governor Brown added \$4.8 million to the budget to enhance the California Library Services Act in the last budget, he took a bold step toward re-energizing the state's public libraries that have experienced a tough post-recession environment. The state's property values and associated taxes that fund many libraries have not bounced back, and library data in some areas reflects that.

A few statistics underscore this:

- The budget for books is \$2.94 per capita, below the national average of \$4.16
- Most recent circulation per capita is 5.82, down from 6.35 four years earlier and below the national figure of 7.5
- Most recent visits per capita are 4.29, down from 4.63 four years earlier while the national figure is 4.6
- Funding per capita stands at \$33.56, below the national average of \$36.96

Budget increases will help reverse the direction of these numbers, but there also must be an underlying commitment by government leaders to support the broader needs of communities. As the [California State Library put it in its most recent strategic plan](#), "Key external forces affecting the CSL are the state's budget crisis, the rapidly changing nature of information, a perceived disconnect of decision-makers from the library community, and a growing reluctance to fund public institutions without confidence in the value of these entities."

Our public libraries provide enormous value to communities that goes far beyond access to books and even movies and music. They incorporate new ways of learning with computer access and courses, offer patrons a place to engage in gaming and other recreation, and they present an environment where everyone can partake in social activities that are so important for community building. A few more numbers about California libraries illustrate how:

- Attendance at programs is 248 per 1,000 population, up from 211 four years before
- 73 percent of visitors come for a book, 21% for a computer, and 6% for a program
- Average computer use is .9 per capita
- Library open hours average 41 per week

What's more, libraries fulfill their mission with resources that get stretched widely: 65.8 cents of every dollar goes to staff costs, 8.8 cents is spent on books, and 25.4 goes to other needs.

Pulled from the [Library Vitality Index](#), this data shows the demand for what libraries offer: a tangible place to learn, have fun, improve workplace skills, and build community. Any declining numbers mask the many positive activities happening in libraries.

For instance, libraries have embraced concepts such as "maker spaces" where people can learn and create using technology tools such as 3D printers, virtual reality and video studios. Digital books, magazines and research has allowed libraries to expand their offerings exponentially, and open their physical footprint to uses other than books.

Another example is the Student Library Card Program implemented by the Shasta Public Libraries system in Shasta County. It has grown to include 36 schools in over ten districts, and it's still growing. More than 5,000 student library cards were issued in 2016, reflecting a substantial increase from 1,953 cards issued the previous year. Shasta County also developed a marketing campaign that embraced social media and local TV, as well as a smartphone app for kids to track their reading progress.

At both the state and local level, budget cuts threaten discretionary spending that can include library funding. In Kern County, another round of budget reductions started when oil prices dropped, with five percent cuts projected for the next two years. The library director is leaving, and cited the lack of funding as a factor in her decision. Many of the system's 24 library branches only have one person working at the location.

Large pension obligations across many local governments are an even more onerous problem: California's 130 state and local government pension liabilities stood at \$241.3 billion as of 2014.

In the coming years, library advocates and community leaders must continue the discussion with elected leadership to keep libraries well funded and strongly supported in public forums. A capable workforce that is attractive to employers, economic development, community – in short, quality of life – depend on it.

Steve Coffman is vice president of Library Systems & Services, which operates nearly 50 libraries in California. Contact him at steve.coffman@lsslibraries.com

Share this article:



Comment on this article

Please note, statements and opinions expressed on the Fox&Hounds Blog are solely those of their respective authors and may not represent the views of Fox&Hounds Daily or its employees thereof. Fox&Hounds Daily is not responsible for the accuracy of any of the information supplied by the site's bloggers.

News Updates

Sign up for our free Fox & Hounds daily newsletter.

email address



[Expand](#)
[next](#) [previous](#)
[Close](#)

[Previous](#)

0/0

[Next](#)

