

The Humanities in Our Lives

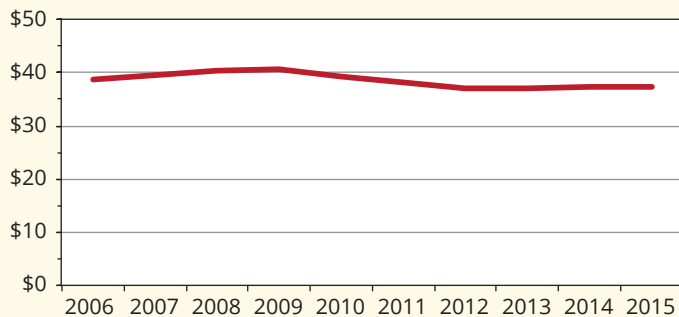
LIBRARIES AS A COMMUNITY ANCHOR

With a primary focus on reading, libraries are often local centers of the humanities. Despite funding cuts over the past decade, public libraries had 1.39 billion visits in 2015 (almost 4.5 visits per person per year on average).

KEY FACTS

- In 2015, 9,068 active public libraries provided services through 16,560 locations and 647 bookmobiles.
- The majority of libraries served suburbs, towns, and rural areas. Almost 77% of public libraries served a region with a population of 25,000 people or fewer.

Per Capita Operating Expenses at Public Libraries (in Constant 2015 Dollars)



THE VALUE OF LIBRARIES

Libraries are considered pillars of their communities by many residents. A study on Wisconsin Public Libraries found 90% of respondents “strongly agreed” that the public library contributed in a meaningful way to the quality of life in the community, and 87% agreed it enhanced the quality of their life. Conversely, a PEW study found that 65% of people believed the closure of their local library would have a negative impact on the community, with low-income Americans the most likely to believe it would negatively impact their lives.

INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS

The Lexington Public Library in Kentucky received an award in 2017 for its innovative program “On the Table Lex” in which it partnered with local organizations to host discussions on the future direction of the community and the development of the city’s new comprehensive plan.

“We made civic engagement fun and attainable by providing the tools for conversation, feedback mechanisms and publicity for the initiative. The library was a planning partner, hosted eight public sessions and provided free spaces for more than 200 individuals to discuss Lexington’s future.”

The library connected diverse groups such as religious and local neighborhood organizations. More important, the library proactively sought out community participation. Its innovative outreach program led to a dramatic increase in civic participation, with 11,000 residents commenting on Lexington’s comprehensive plan.

The Humanities in Our Lives series (#HumInOurLives) highlights the many and diverse forms of humanities activities in the nation, and key facts about the health of the field.

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For more on the broad trends that mark American engagement with various forms of the humanities, visit humanitiesindicators.org or email humanitiesindicators@amacad.org.

 **HUMANITIES INDICATORS**
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