

The Who, What, When, Where, and Why of Public Library Surveys

Public Library Annual Report (PLAR) - REQUIRED

WHO

The Public Library Annual Report is administered by the State Data Coordinator at the Library Research Service, a unit of the Colorado State Library. All Colorado public libraries participate in this survey. Similar surveys are also conducted in all 50 states and the District of Columbia and are always administered by the State Data Coordinator.

WHAT

The PLAR collects a wide range of information about Colorado's public libraries, including expenditures, staffing information, total circulation, total reference questions, and information about the collection.

Colorado's data is made available on the Library Research Service website (www.LRS.org). Data can be viewed in a variety of ways using the LRS-interactive tool. Data from a single library can be viewed, or multiple libraries can be compared (selected by library name, service population, or legal basis). Historical data can also be accessed and compared to the current year's data.

In addition to being used in Colorado, the data collected also contributes to the Public Library Survey (PLS), which is collected by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). Data from the PLAR is submitted to the Public Library Survey (PLS) by the State Data Coordinators. PLS is a collection of data from more than 9,000 public libraries (from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the outlying areas). The data set is available on the IMLS website (<http://harvester.census.gov/imls/publib.asp>). The IMLS also publishes a report based on the data collected, which is available on this website under the link "Publications" (<http://harvester.census.gov/imls/pubs/pls/index.asp>).

WHEN

The Public Library Annual Report is administered January through March 15 annually. Data is published late spring or early summer, depending on response rate and the edit check schedule.

WHERE

The PLAR is collected online using Bibliostat Collect software. A link is provided on the Library Research Service's website (www.LRS.org) each year.

WHY

There are several reasons to participate in the Public Library Annual Report. First, the PLAR is required by Colorado law, CRS 24-90-109.4. Second, the data is needed to contribute to the Public Library Survey (PLS) mentioned above. Finally, the data is important to public libraries individually and collectively. The data collected can be shared with decision makers, stakeholders, and the public, as well as be used by administrators to inform decision making.

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Public Library Funding and Technology Access Study - RECOMMENDED

WHO

This study, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and ALA, continues work begun by John Carlo Bertot and Charles R. McClure in 1994. The survey is managed by the Information Policy & Access Center at the University of Maryland.

WHAT

The Public Library Funding and Technology Access Study collects valuable information about public libraries, technology, and funding throughout the United States. This study “assesses public access to computers, the Internet and Internet-related services in U.S. public libraries, as well as the impact of library funding changes on connectivity, technology deployment and sustainability.”

The final report from the ALA Office of Research and Statistics can be found here:

<http://www.ala.org/ala/research/initiatives/plftas/index.cfm>. Previous reports and data are also available here. Print versions of the study are available for purchase from the ALA Store at: <http://www.alastore.ala.org/detail.aspx?ID=2793>.

WHEN

The Public Library Funding and Technology Access Study is conducted annually, typically in the fall.

WHERE

The Public Library Funding and Technology Access Study is a web-based survey. Libraries selected in the sample receive a letter indicating where and how to access the survey. Any library or library branch may participate.

WHY

The Public Library Funding and Technology Access Study is the only survey to collect national data on technology in public libraries. The data collected can “help you to plan or improve technology and service deployment, assess your library’s broadband needs, report progress and challenges to your funders regarding the library’s public access technology, and identify the impacts of your library’s public computer and Internet access on the community your library serves.” The information collected has proven to be valuable to administrators, stakeholders, and the public.

Public Library Data Service Statistical Report (PLDS) - OPTIONAL

WHO

The Public Library Association (PLA) conducts the Public Library Data Service Statistical Report (PLDS). Public libraries in the United States and Canada voluntarily participate in the survey.

WHAT

The PLDS began in 2006 and collects information from public libraries on “finances, library resources, annual use figures and technology.” Each year, the PLDS also includes a survey specific to an area of

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service or public library topic. In the past this survey has covered these topics: children's services, public library facilities, and young adult services.

The data collected is compiled in print form and available for purchase from the ALA Store (<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/pla/publications/plds/index.cfm>). A subscription database is also available, which includes historical data, interactive features, comparison tables, and export options for data (Excel or CSV).

WHEN

The PLDS is conducted annually, typically at the beginning of the calendar year.

WHERE

The PLDS has been conducted entirely online since 2009. For more information, see the PLA website (<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/pla/index.cfm>).

WHY

Of these three surveys, this is the only one to collect public library data from both Canada and the United States. Additionally, the special survey included each year contains an in-depth look on specific library services or issues.

U.S. IMPACT Study - OPTIONAL

WHO

The Information School of the University of Washington (UW), with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, administers this survey that allows public libraries to conduct their own local IMPACT Study, at their convenience, using the online IMPACT Survey.

WHAT

The survey collects information about how the community is using the library's public access computers and Internet connection, and how this resource has helped them. The questions cover general use, as well as use in the following areas: employment, education, eBusiness, civic engagement, eCommerce, eGovernment, health and wellness, and social inclusion. The survey also collects information about use of specific library resources, help and training at the library, satisfaction, and patron perceptions of the importance of offering public access technology.

WHEN

UW recruited approximately 400 library systems nationwide to participate in a pilot of the IMPACT Survey. Pilot libraries will be asked to provide feedback via survey. The pilot libraries will be asked to participate in a follow-up interview. Libraries participating in the pilot must started their flexible 2 to 4 week survey fielding period by September 26, 2011.

Following the pilot period in fall 2011, the survey may be used by any public library annually or biannually per their reporting needs and to monitor change.

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WHERE

The survey, instructions, and reports are online (<http://impactsurvey.org/>).

WHY

Conducted in 2009, the U.S. IMPACT Study was the first large-scale investigation of the ways U.S. library patrons use computers and the Internet at public libraries, why they use it, and how it affects their lives. The study consisted of 4 case studies, a national telephone survey, and an online survey designed to supplement the telephone survey and ensure that public access technology users from all walks of life were represented. Over 400 libraries participated in the online survey, which yielded 45,000 responses.

The study was instrumental in providing evidence that access to the Internet at U.S. public libraries has a profound and measurable impact on individuals and communities. The study findings have helped public libraries throughout the United States advocate for funding and support of public access computing. The study's first report, *Opportunity for All: How the American Public Benefits from Internet Access at U.S. Libraries* was published in March of 2010. The study's second report, *Opportunity for All: How Library Policies and Practices Impact Public Internet Access* was released in June of 2011.

Because the patron web survey proved to be such a successful tool, the University of Washington, with generous support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, has extended the benefits of the U.S. IMPACT patron web survey by making it available to all public libraries to use in their own data collection, evaluation, and advocacy efforts.