

## Trends in Library Paraprofessional Employment

The outlook for paraprofessionals in the library field is favorable in Colorado and most of the region. While employment opportunities are expected to grow faster than average for technical assistants and library assistants, wages remain low. (See page 3 for occupation definitions.)

In 1994, average wages for Colorado library technicians and assistants were \$10.75 and \$9.20 per hour, respectively. By 1998, a technical assistant in Colorado earned an average wage of \$11.24 for an increase of only 4.6 percent in a four-year period. A library assistant's mean wage in 1998 was \$8.71 for a LOSS of 5.3 percent! The average annual wage for technical and library assistants in 1998 was \$23,390 and \$18,110, respectively.

### Highlights

- While wages remain low, the average paraprofessional in Colorado earns more than staff in the surrounding states.
- Demand for technical assistants is high in Colorado.
- A significant undersupply of library assistants is estimated to occur through 2006.

It is not surprising then that demand for these occupations outstrips supply. The Colorado Department of Labor and Employment reports on occupations with significant or high undersupply relative to estimated demand. For the period July 1998 to June 1999, the title "library assistant" is one of only 32 jobs shown on the table.

Three library occupations with their ten-year employment projections for Colorado appear in Table 1 below.

**Table 1:  
Occupational Employment Outlook 1996-2006**

| <b>Colorado</b>                   | 1996 No.<br>Employed | 2006 No.<br>Employed | Percent<br>Change |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Library Technical Assistants      | 934                  | 1219                 | 30.5%             |
| Library Assistants/<br>Bookmobile | 2132                 | 2801                 | 31.4%             |
| Professional Librarians           | 1217                 | 1361                 | 11.8%             |

Source: Colorado Department of Labor and Employment

## Regional States

A snapshot of the surrounding states' trends in library employment shows Wyoming losing eight percent of library assistants and remaining unchanged in the number of technical assistants employed. That is the worst record for the region. The states with the most promising trends are Utah and New Mexico. See Table 2 for detailed percent changes for the four surrounding states.

The good news for Colorado paraprofessionals is they have higher average hourly wages than library staff in the surrounding states. A library assistant in Wyoming can expect to earn \$7.66 per hour; in Utah--\$8.31. Technical assistants in New Mexico average \$8.86 per hour; in Kansas--\$10.80. As stated previously, Colorado library technicians and assistants earn \$11.24 and \$8.71 respectively. Table 3 shows a breakdown of all wage estimates.

**Table 2:**  
**Other States in the Region**  
Percent change from 1996 to 2006

| State:<br>Position            | Percent<br>Change |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Kansas:</b>                |                   |
| Technical Assistants          | 7%                |
| Library Assistants/Bookmobile | 14%               |
| Librarians, Professional      | 5%                |
| <b>New Mexico:</b>            |                   |
| Technical Assistants          | 43%               |
| Library Assistants/Bookmobile | 22%               |
| Librarians, Professional      | 19%               |
| <b>Utah:</b>                  |                   |
| Technical Assistants          | 46%               |
| Library Assistants/Bookmobile | 23%               |
| Librarians, Professional      | 25%               |
| <b>Wyoming:</b>               |                   |
| Technical Assistants          | 1%                |
| Library Assistants/Bookmobile | -8%               |
| Librarians, Professional      | -16%              |

Source: Utah Dept. of Workforce Services,  
State Occupational Projections

**Table 3:**  
**Five State Region: Mean Hourly Wage Estimates**

|                      |         |
|----------------------|---------|
| <b>Colorado</b>      |         |
| Technical Assistants | \$11.24 |
| Library Assistants   | \$8.71  |
| <b>Kansas</b>        |         |
| Technical Assistants | \$10.80 |
| Library Assistants   | \$7.71  |
| <b>New Mexico</b>    |         |
| Technical Assistants | \$8.86  |
| Library Assistants   | \$8.09  |
| <b>Utah</b>          |         |
| Technical Assistants | \$9.86  |
| Library Assistants   | \$8.31  |
| <b>Wyoming</b>       |         |
| Technical Assistants | \$7.99  |
| Library Assistants   | \$7.66  |

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

## National Trends

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports the job outlook for library technicians in the United States to be better than average through 2006. The increasing use of library automation is expected to stimulate job growth in the field. Technicians with the help of automated systems, now often perform tasks such as descriptive cataloging, once accomplished by professional librarians. Budget constraints in some public and school libraries may mean more technicians are hired in place of MLS librarians. Fast employment growth is also observed in special libraries across the country. As in other fields, willingness to relocate will enhance job prospects.

About 78,000 people held library technician jobs in the country in 1996. Most of these positions were in public, academic and school libraries. Some worked in special libraries such as hospitals, government, and religious organizations.

Library assistants and bookmobile drivers can expect growth about as fast as average for all occupations for the country. Because turnover is quite high for these positions, many jobs come open every year. Lack of training and subsequent weak attachment to the job drives this trend. Some positions come available when assistants are promoted to technician positions within the organization. Retirees, students and others looking for part-time jobs are attracted to this work.

Of the 125,000 people employed in library assistant positions in the U.S., over one-half work in public libraries. Most of the remaining work in school libraries.

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### Definitions (Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics):

Library Technicians: Commonly called "paraprofessionals," help librarians acquire, prepare, and organize material, and assist users in finding materials and information. Library technicians direct library users to standard references, organize and maintain periodicals, prepare volumes for binding, handle interlibrary loan requests, prepare invoices, perform routine cataloging and coding of library materials, retrieve information from computer databases, and supervise other support staff.

Library Assistants and Bookmobile Drivers: Keep library resources in order and make them readily available to a variety of users. They work under the direction of librarians, and in some cases, library technicians. At the circulation desk, assistants lend and collect materials. Throughout the library, they sort returned books and other materials and return them to designated shelves. Bookmobile drivers drive trucks stocked with books and perform many of the same functions as an assistant in a main or branch library.

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