

FAST FACTS

Recent Statistics from the
Library Research Service

Colorado Has a Variety of Legal Bases for Public Libraries

**STATE SHOWS MORE DIVERSITY THAN REGIONAL AND
NATIONAL AVERAGES**

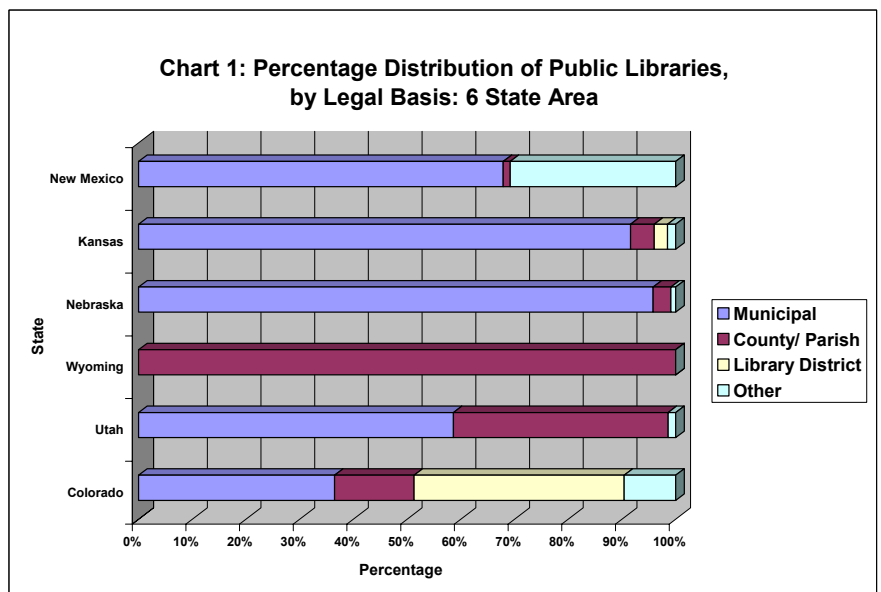
The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) provides definitions for seven specific types of legal bases for public libraries: municipal, county/parish, city/county, multi-jurisdictional, association, school district, and library district. 98.5% of public libraries in the United States can be classified under one of these headings. With the exception of association libraries, each type is represented in Colorado. In fact, Colorado has a relatively even distribution of the specific types of libraries, with two categories – municipal and library district – each comprising slightly over one-third of the state’s public libraries. County libraries also make up a significant portion, weighing in at over 16%. By contrast, in every state that shares a significant border with Colorado, more than 50% of the public libraries fall under one specific legal type, primarily municipal (see Table 1). The exception is Wyoming, where all of the libraries in the state fall under the jurisdiction of its 23 counties.

Table 1: Percentage distribution of public libraries, by legal basis and state

State	Municipal	County	Library District	Other	Total
Colorado	35.3%	16.4%	37.1%	9.6%	100%
Utah	58.6%	40.0%	0.0%	1.4%	100%
Wyoming	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
Nebraska	95.6%	3.3%	0.0%	0.9%	100%
Kansas	91.6%	4.4%	2.5%	1.5%	100%
New Mexico	66.3%	2.5%	1.3%	30.8%	100%

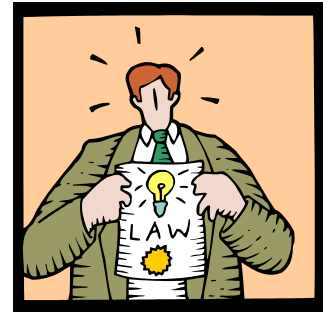
Source: E.D. TAB: Public Libraries in the United States: Fiscal Year 2001, National Center for Education Statistics. Available at: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2003399>.

Chart 1 (right) graphically displays the same information. Here it’s easy to see the diversity of Colorado’s public library makeup, and the tendency for neighboring states to be dominated by one type of public library.



**Fast Facts – No. 195 – July 10, 2003
Public Library Legal Bases**

A primary explanation for the differences revolves around state laws that dictate how a library jurisdiction may be created. Colorado’s library law allows for diversity in types of libraries. It tends to encourage the formation of rather broad areas of library service, recently increasing this opportunity with legislation allowing the creation of regional library authorities. Not all states are this flexible with their rules. Iowa’s legislation, for example, makes it nearly impossible to create a public library jurisdiction that is anything but a Municipal library. Therefore, all but three of Iowa’s 537 public libraries are of the municipal variety.



Charts 2-4 below further accentuate this trend, showing percentages for Colorado, the nation, and the six-state region. Both the national and regional pie charts show a propensity toward smaller units of service, specifically Municipal libraries, which comprise over 50% of public libraries for both the nation and the region. Colorado’s relatively high number of library districts illustrates its inclination to form wider units of service compared with the rest of the nation.

Colorado’s library law is more flexible than the majority of states in America; this has resulted in a wide variety of types of public library service. Whether seen as positive diversity or negative inconsistency, it demonstrates a willingness to be creative in the creation of library jurisdictions. Let’s hope this creativity continues to serve the people of Colorado in these difficult times.

Chart 2: Percentage Distribution of Public Libraries, by Legal Basis: Colorado

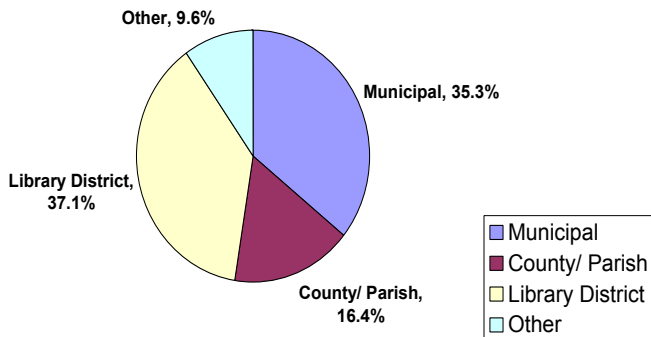


Chart 3: Percentage Distribution of Public Libraries, by Legal Basis: 6 State Area

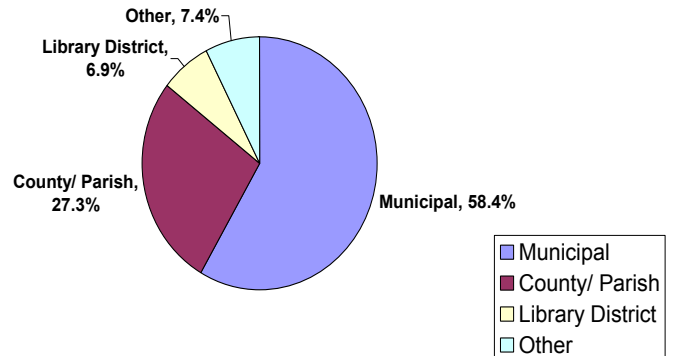
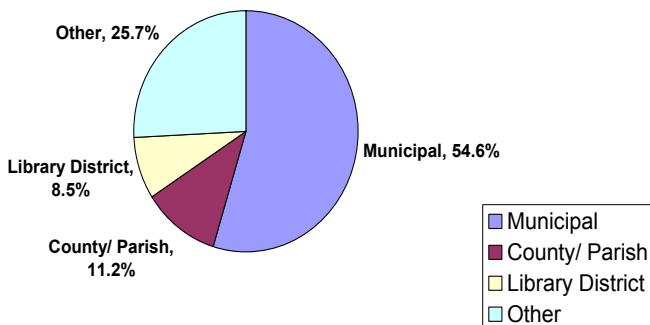


Chart 4: Percentage Distribution of Public Libraries, by Legal Basis: United States



CONTACT ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Zeth Lietzau, Research Analyst - Library Research Service
201 East Colfax Ave., Suite 309 - Denver, CO 80203-1799
Tel.: 303.866-6904 - Fax: 303.866-6940
E-mail: lietzau_z@cde.state.co.us - Web site: www.lrs.org