

COLORADO'S PUBLIC LIBRARIES: MIXED SUCCESS IN THE NATIONAL RANKINGS, 2001 to 2008

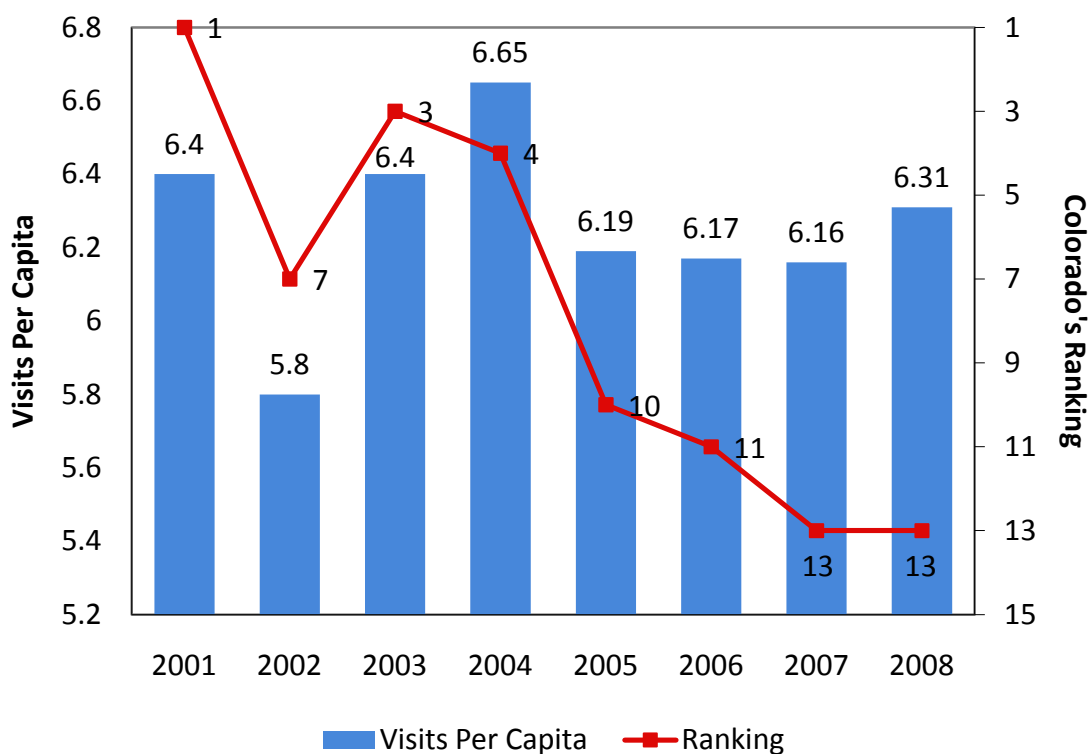
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In a November 2005 Fast Facts¹, the Library Research Service (LRS) posed the question, "One has to wonder: how long will Colorado remain one of the top 10 states for public libraries?" Each year, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) calculates states' public library summary data for a variety of outputs, and ranks every state according to its performance on each output. Colorado's per capita measures generally have been on the rise since 2001, but does this mean their national rankings have followed suit? The statistics reported here provide insight about the performance of all Colorado public libraries—from the smallest to the largest—in relation to public libraries across the country.

IMLS reports national and state library summary data for all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Findings are published on their website: www.IMLS.gov

**Chart 1:
Colorado's Public Library Visits per Capita and National Ranking***



* IMLS calculates statistics using imputed data for missing data, and an unduplicated population calculation that is distributed proportionally based on legal service area population. Therefore the IMLS per capita measures are slightly different than the same per capita ratios calculated by individual states.

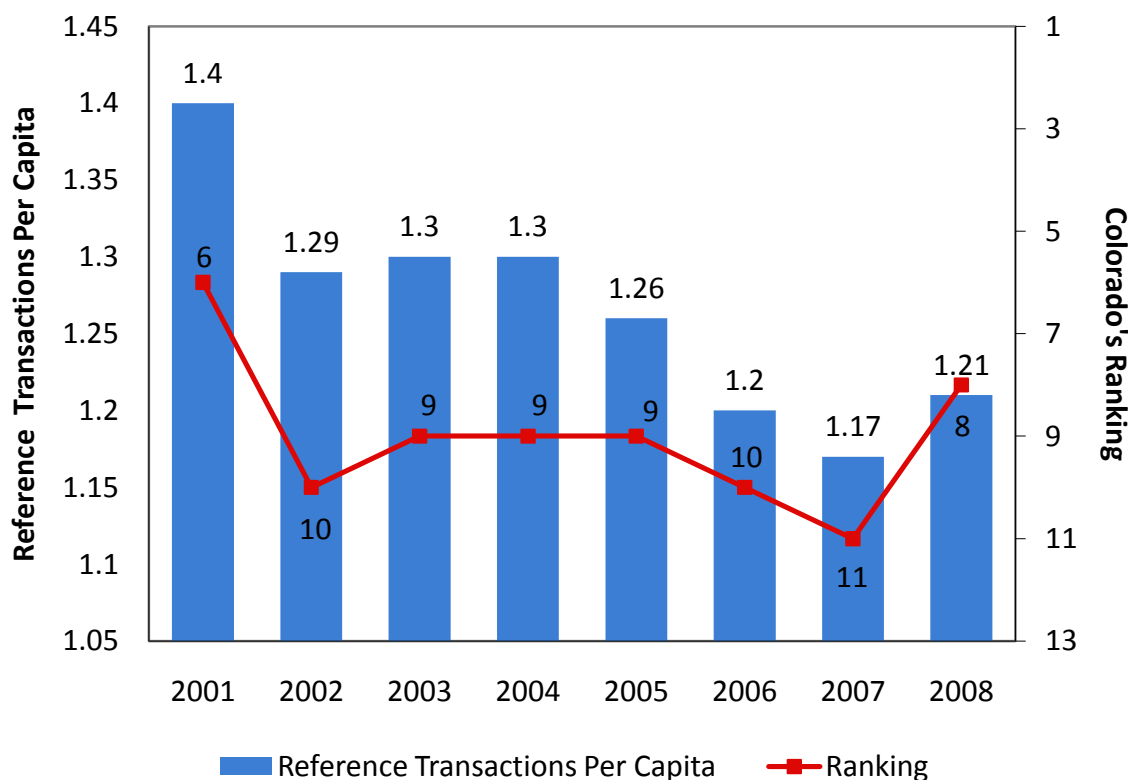
¹ LRS November 2005 Fast Facts: State's Public Libraries Still Place Colorado in Top 10, But Rankings Slipping After 2002-03 Cuts
http://www.lrs.org/documents/fastfacts/230_State_Output_Rankings.pdf



Visits, Reference, and Circulation

According to IMLS data, total library visits per capita have decreased by 1.4 percent between 2001 and 2008 for Colorado public libraries. This loss caused Colorado to fall out of the top ten in national rankings in 2006, only five years after claiming the number one spot (Chart 1). Even though Colorado's total number of library visitors reached an all-time high in 2008 (30.7 million)², the per capita measure rose only slightly and Colorado was ranked 13th in the nation. In 2001, Colorado ranked sixth in the nation for reference transactions per capita; however, the state fell in the rankings in subsequent years (Chart 2). After slipping to eleventh place in 2007, Colorado climbed back into the top ten (8th place) in 2008, while the per capita measure held fairly steady.

Chart 2:
Colorado's Public Library Reference Transactions per Capita and National Ranking*



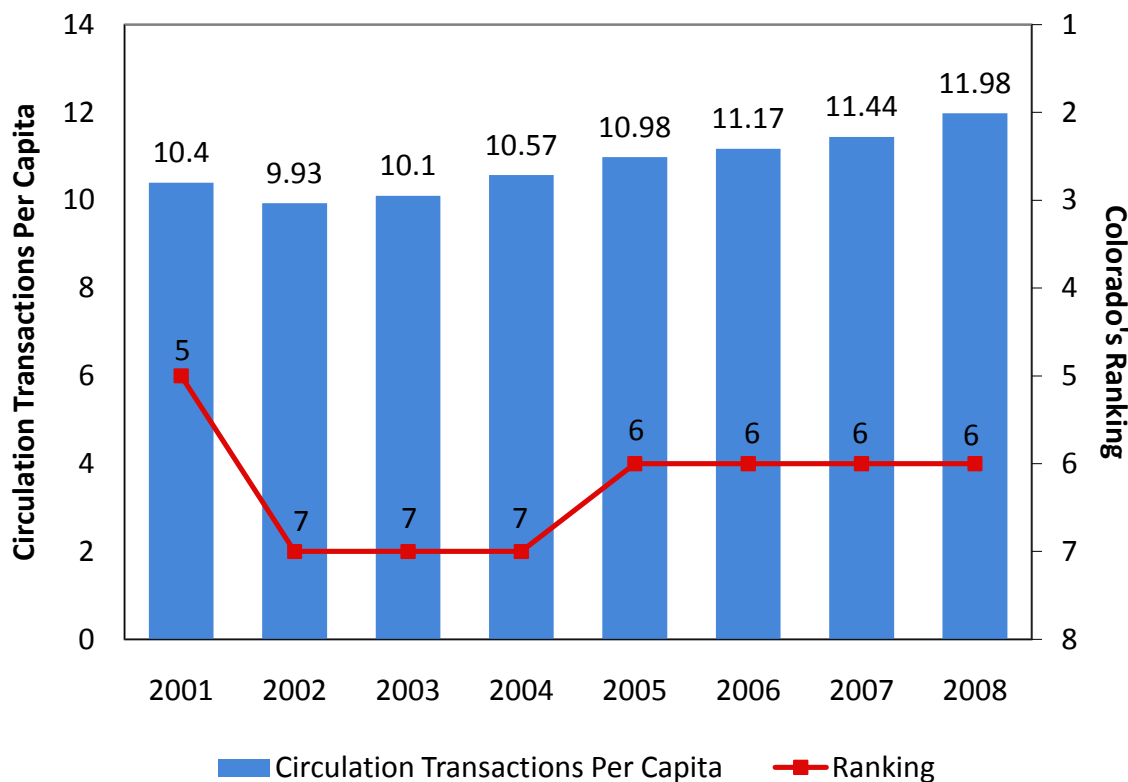
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² LRS March 2011 Fast Facts: Colorado's Public Library Service Trends from 2003 to 2009



Circulation statistics are a different story. Colorado's per capita circulation has remained in the top ten, holding steady in sixth place since 2005 (Chart 3). According to IMLS, total circulation has increased by 34 percent (from 43.5 million to 58.2 million) between 2001 and 2008. The fact that Colorado's ranking remains fairly steady, yet per capita circulation has increased from 10.40 to 11.98, indicates that circulation has been on the rise in other states as well.

**Chart 3:
Colorado's Public Library Circulation Transactions
per Capita and National Ranking***



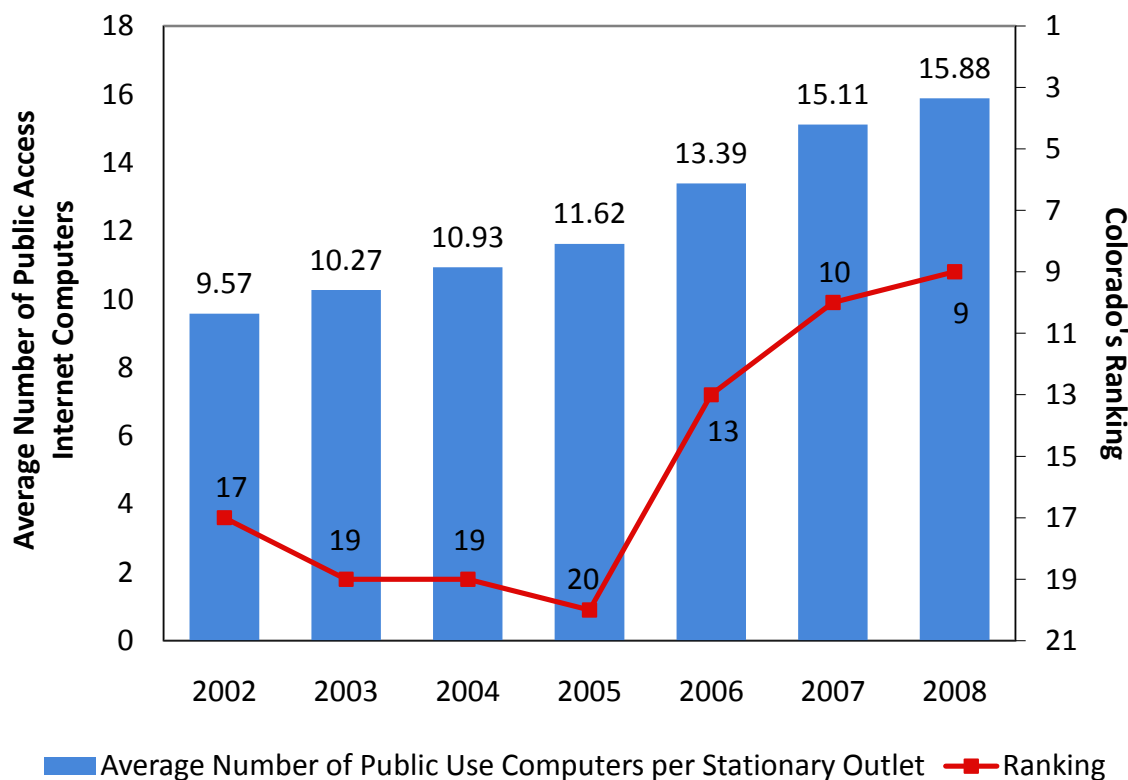
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Public Access Internet Computers

In 2002, reporting began on the number of public access Internet computers in public libraries. Since then, Colorado libraries have moved up in the national rankings for the average number of public access Internet computers per outlet (Chart 4). Colorado broke into the top ten for the first time in 2007 for the average number of public access Internet computers per outlet, and rose to ninth place in 2008.

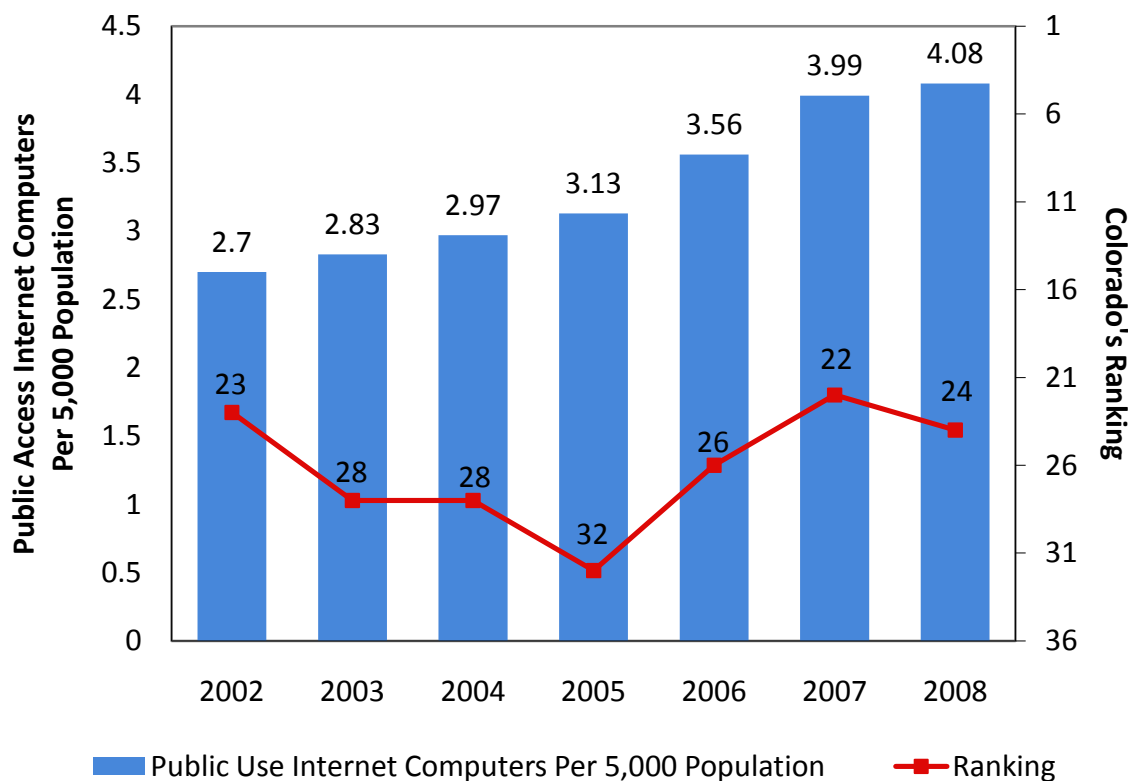
Chart 4:
Colorado's Public Library Public Access Internet Computers per Stationary Outlet and National Ranking



Although Colorado's national ranking for computers per outlet is on the rise, the number of computers per 5,000 population in Colorado has remained in the middle of the national rankings, never rising above 22nd place across the time period reported (Chart 5). This is despite the fact that the per 5,000 figure has risen steadily from 2002 to 2008, indicating that other states' per 5,000 figures have also continued to increase.



**Chart 5:
Colorado's Public Library Public Use Computers
per 5,000 Population and National Ranking***



* IMLS calculates statistics using imputed data for missing data, and an unduplicated population calculation that is distributed proportionally based on legal service area population. Therefore the IMLS per capita measures are slightly different than the same per capita ratios calculated by individual states.

Conclusion

It is unclear what is to blame for the declines in Colorado's national rankings in library visits and reference transactions per capita, as well as for its relatively low ranking for public access Internet computers per 5,000 served. Such factors as budget cuts and reduction in hours may be somewhat responsible. However, Colorado's high circulation and number of computers per outlet rankings demonstrate that its public libraries are among some of the best in the country in providing residents with these sought after services.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

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