

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

Colorado Public Library Annual Report (PLAR) – REQUIRED

WHO

The Public Library Annual Report (PLAR) is administered by the State Data Coordinator at the [Library Research Service](#), an office of the [Colorado State Library](#). All Colorado public libraries participate in this survey. Similar surveys are also conducted by State Data Coordinators in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and outlying areas.

WHAT

The PLAR collects a wide range of information about Colorado’s public libraries, including expenditures, staffing, circulation, reference transactions, and collection characteristics.

Colorado’s data is made available by Library Research Service via the [LRS-interactive](#) tool. Individual library data 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 national Public Library Survey (PLS), which is compiled and analyzed by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). The PLS includes data from more than 9,000 public libraries and is available from IMLS as a [data set](#) or a [statistical report](#).

WHEN

The PLAR is administered January through March annually. Data is published in late spring or early summer, depending on library response rate and the edit check schedule.

WHERE

The PLAR is collected online using Bibliostat Collect web-based software. A link is provided on the Library Research Service’s [website](#) during the reporting period each year.

WHY

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

Digital Inclusion Survey – RECOMMENDED

WHO

The [Digital Inclusion Survey](#) is funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and conducted by the American Library Association, the Information Policy & Access Center at the University of Maryland, and the International City/County Management Association.

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WHAT

The study is a national survey of public libraries and is focused on the role of public libraries in building digitally inclusive communities. According to the study's administrators, "Documenting the role of public libraries in digital inclusion is critical to communicating the value of public libraries in their communities as key providers of public access technologies, digital literacy, and services to support employment/workforce development, education, civic engagement, and health and wellness."

Reports and data products from each survey will be released on the [Digital Inclusion Survey](#) website the June following data collection. In addition, the study will release the survey data collected as part of a public release file for each survey cycle.

WHEN

The overall project spans three years, from October 2012 to September 2015. Building on the long-running [Public Library Funding & Technology Access Survey](#), the study includes 2 national surveys in the fall of 2013 and 2014.

WHERE

The Digital Inclusion Survey is a web-based survey. Libraries selected in the sample receive a postcard indicating where and how to access the survey. However, all U.S. public libraries are encouraged to participate at <http://digitalinclusion.pnmi.com/>.

WHY

The study will show how public libraries help build digitally inclusive communities through interactive mapping tools, issue briefs, infographics, visualizations, and more. The survey will provide national and state estimates and, more importantly, will show public libraries in context with community-level data (e.g., graduation and unemployment rates). Survey participants will be able to identify community impacts of library public computer and Internet access; identify gaps in technology services based on community needs and demographics; and demonstrate library contributions to community digital inclusion efforts (from <http://digitalinclusion.umd.edu/content/press-releases>).

Note: All information provided is from the [Digital Inclusion Survey](#) website.

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 service or public library topic. In the past this survey has covered such topics as children's services, public library facilities, and young adult services. The data is available for purchase through [PLAmetrics](#), the online portal to the PLDS.

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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](#).

WHY

This is the only survey to regularly collect public library data from both Canada and the United States. Additionally, the special survey included each year contains an in-depth look at specific library services or issues.

Note: All information provided is from the [PLA](#) website.

U.S. IMPACT Study – OPTIONAL

WHO

The University of Washington (UW) Information School, 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 [Impact Survey](#) is an online tool developed specifically for libraries that want to survey their community about public access technology services at the library and how to improve those services to enable better patron outcomes.

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

Anytime. According to UW researchers, "Libraries choose their survey start and stop, or fielding, dates. We recommend fielding the survey for at least 2 weeks. Smaller libraries and those with few public access computers or a limited web presence may wish to extend their fielding period to 4 weeks to encourage more responses. All libraries will have the option of extending their fielding dates to up to 6 weeks if the number of initial survey responses is unsatisfactory for your purposes."

WHERE

The survey, instructions, and reports are on the [Impact Survey website](#).

WHY

Conducted in 2009, the initial [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

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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. More than 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.

The [Impact Survey](#) is an online survey tool designed specifically for public libraries that want to better understand their communities and how people use their public technology resources and services.

Note: All information provided is from the [Impact Survey](#) and [U.S. IMPACT Study](#) websites.

Edge Benchmarks – OPTIONAL

WHO

Edge was created through a collaboration of organizations dedicated to the success of libraries, including library leaders from rural and urban systems and city and community officials. Funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and led by the Urban Libraries Council, the [Edge Coalition](#) includes: the American Library Association, the Office for Information Technology Policy, the International City/County Management Association, LYRASIS, OCLC, and many others.

WHAT

An online assessment tool, the Edge Benchmarks include 3 main categories of evaluation: (1) Community Value, (2) Engaging the Community and Decision Makers, and (3) Organizational Management. The Edge Toolkit includes a benchmarks assessment tool, resource guide, case studies, reporting and presentation tools, and training.

WHEN

According to the Edge Coalition [timeline](#), the Edge [Toolkit](#) will be available to public libraries nationwide in January 2014.

WHERE

The Edge Toolkit is a suite of online tools including an online [benchmarks assessment](#) and [training resources](#).

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WHY

Edge provides a snapshot of the library's current public technology services along with steps to make improvements and better serve communities. There are [4 key benefits](#) for participating:

- Assess the use of public access technology in your library.
- Identify specific areas for improvement and investment.
- Increase understanding of how public technology services help meet community goals.
- Present data useful for demonstrating outcomes to local leaders whose support of the library is critical.

Note: All information provided is from the [Edge](#) website.