

Policy implications

Idaho's public libraries are among the most heavily used in the nation, especially among children and young adults. Offering state-of-the-art services to as many Idahoans as possible comes with challenges most appropriately addressed through collaborations between library administrators, librarians, and policy makers at the city, district, and state level. These challenges include:

- ◆ purchasing and maintaining technological tools. Rapid technological advances require libraries to be in a continuous cycle of purchasing and maintaining the hardware and software necessary to meet patron needs. Adequate funding can help close gaps in access to education and workforce development resources between those Idahoans with their own resources and devices and those without.
- ◆ slow Internet speeds. Idaho's access to broadband Internet is not keeping up with the demand, especially in rural communities. Nationally, some 40% of public libraries have subscribed speeds of 10 megabits per second or less, which falls short of speeds necessary for multi-user spaces including libraries. Forty-one percent of the nation's rural libraries cannot offer faster broadband because they already subscribe to the maximum speed available in their area and more broadband is cost-prohibitive.^e
- ◆ maintaining patron privacy and data security. Meeting these high patron and library staff priorities means constant vigilance in the library's physical spaces and, increasingly online. From encrypting a job applicant's social security number to a shopper's credit card information, providing the most up-to-date computer security presents libraries with ever-evolving challenges.

Conclusion

Idaho libraries play a critical role in supporting the state's education and workforce development priorities. Ever-increasing use levels suggest patrons appreciate and support this system. With state-of-the-art online resources rapidly joining traditional library buildings and book collections, Idaho public libraries now receive more than 8 million visits per year. Collaborations between library administrators, librarians, and policy makers at the local and state level are increasingly important to maintaining and expanding library services to all 1.6 million residents of Idaho.

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SOURCES:

- a—Public Libraries Survey Data, 2014, Institute of Museum and Library Services.
- b—Idaho Public Library Statistics, 2015, Idaho Commission for Libraries.
- c—Summer Reading Report, 2016, Idaho Commission for Libraries.
- d—LiLI Databases Annual Report, 2017, Idaho Commission for Libraries.
- e—America's Libraries: Powering Broadband Adoption, Access, and Use, 2016, American Library Association.

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Introduction

In an increasingly online world, Idaho's 103 library jurisdictions might have met the same fate as other "brick and mortar" entities facing lower patronage and greater competition from Internet-based services, but in fact, Idaho library use has never been higher. In fiscal year 2015, there were more than 8.6 million visits to public libraries in Idaho. In fiscal year 2014, Idaho libraries had the 5th highest per capita

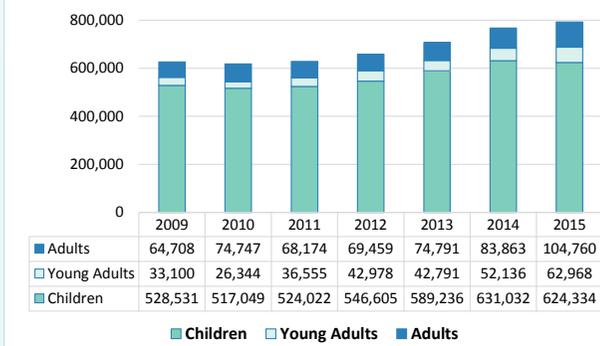
circulation of children's materials and attendance at children's programs in the nation. Attendance at young adult programs ranked 7th per capita and has increased 139% over the past five years. While attendance at adult programs was 39th in the nation, per capita, turnout at adult programs has increased by 40% in Idaho during the past five years.^a

This issue of Idaho at a Glance offers an overview of Idaho's library community, describes the roles it plays in education and workforce development, and outlines implications for policy.

Overview

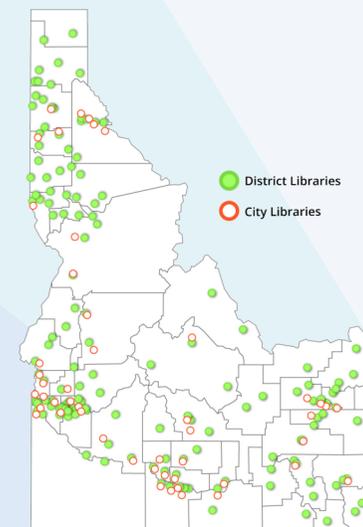
Idaho's 103 legally-established public library jurisdictions are about evenly split between city and district libraries. Counting branch facilities in all city and district libraries, there are 147 public libraries statewide. Approximately seven in ten public libraries serve populations of 10,000 or fewer. In addition to public libraries, Idaho's library community includes ten bookmobiles, more than 700 school libraries, 12 public and private academic libraries, the Idaho State Archives, the Air Force Base Library, and several hospital, prison, and corporate libraries. About one in six Idahoans lives outside of a legally-established public library jurisdiction, primarily in Canyon, Twin Falls, and Cassia counties.^b

Attendance at Idaho public library programs, 2009-2015



SOURCE: Idaho Public Library Statistics

Idaho's public libraries, 2015



SOURCE: Idaho Public Library Statistics

The University of Idaho's **James A. and Louise McClure Center for Public Policy Research** was founded in 2007. The Center's approach to addressing society's complex issues sustains Senator McClure's legacy of thoughtfully pursuing bipartisan collaboration and sound public policy.

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Library characteristics

Size

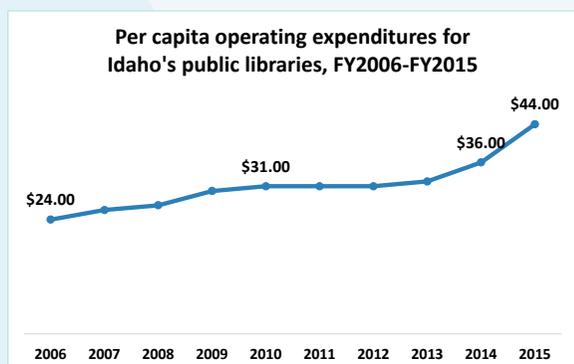
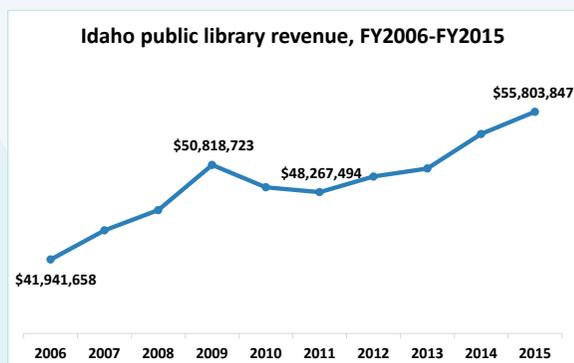
City library jurisdictions range in size from Salmon River Public Library in Riggins (population of 418) to Boise (220,866). District library jurisdictions range from Clarkia (88) to the two-county Prairie River District (18,318), to the Community Library Network (108,419) based in Post Falls. Jurisdictional boundaries are set by petitions and elections.

Governance

City library jurisdictions each have a five-member board appointed by their mayor and city council. They also appoint a city council member as liaison to the board, without voting rights. District library jurisdictions have a five-member board, elected in May of odd-numbered years.

Funding

City library jurisdictions are funded mainly from the city budget – either the general fund or a dedicated library fund. Funding for district libraries comes mainly from property tax levies in independent taxing districts. Nearly 90% of city and district library funding is local. When possible, public libraries also operate with grant funds, state funding, and support from the federal E-rate program, which provides discounted telecommunications, Internet access, and internal connections to eligible schools and libraries through the FCC’s Universal Service Fund. Two libraries in the state receive contract funds to extend services beyond city limits.



SOURCE FOR BOTH FIGURES: Idaho Public Library Statistics

The Idaho Commission for Libraries provides access to more than 30,000 state documents through the Idaho Digital Repository (<http://libraries.idaho.gov/landing/stacks>). It is a searchable centralized collection of digital publications that are created by state agencies for the purpose of public information.

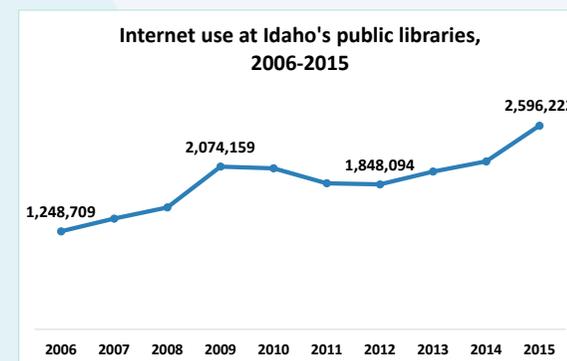
The University of Idaho Library has served for more than a century as an official regional depository of U.S. federal government publications, making almost two million government documents available to the public (<http://www.lib.uidaho.edu/>).

The Commission’s Libraries Linking Idaho (LiLI) program provides additional digital content to Idahoans for research, homework, college preparation, readers advisory, and skill building (<http://www.LiLI.org>).

Role in education

Top priorities for Idaho’s library community are supporting the state’s efforts to improve educational attainment among its K-12 and postsecondary student population and supporting the learning of all Idahoans. Libraries play an important educational role by:

- ◆ preparing young children to enter school ready to learn through research-based early literacy and “Read to Me” programs. Once children are in school, the priority of school libraries is to meet students’ educational needs from kindergarten through graduate school.
- ◆ minimizing the summer learning slide for children and teens with reading and outreach programs. In 2016, more than 52,000 Idaho students participated in library summer reading programs; another 55,400 were served through library outreach programs.^c
- ◆ optimizing out-of-school time with access to resources and programs like “Make It at the Library.” Given that Idaho students only spend 20% of their waking time in the classroom, libraries focus on offering educational programming for the rest of students’ time.
- ◆ supporting lifelong learning and creative activities of all Idahoans. Library special collections provide access to historical photographs, state documents, university historical materials, rare books, digital collections, and other primary source materials. Many Idaho libraries are reconfiguring their spaces and resources to provide room for Makerspaces in response to patrons’ desire to create original content. These spaces are increasingly incorporating technological advances such as coding resources, 3D printing, video editing, and other STEM-related tools and activities.



SOURCE: Idaho Public Library Statistics

Role in workforce development

Idaho libraries act in partnership with other state agencies in building Idaho’s workforce talent pool by providing:

- ◆ broadband access for job seeking, skills training, job certification, and business development. Ninety-six percent of all Idaho public libraries have free wireless Internet access and libraries statewide provide a total of 1,862 public terminals. Libraries reported 2,596,222 uses of library computers to access the Internet in fiscal year 2015.^b
- ◆ online resources for boosting job skills through the Libraries Linking Idaho (LiLI.org) program. In fiscal year 2016, Idahoans accessed Learning Express Library, a collection of test preparation tools, skill-building materials, and career resources, approximately 12,350 times through LiLI.org, using 16,089 tests, ebooks, and software tools and tutorials for small businesses. Other LiLI business databases had 223,224 full text article downloads (FY2016).^d
- ◆ books and media to assist entrepreneurs and business owners in writing business plans, finding financing, and filing taxes. In fiscal year 2015, Idaho public libraries had 902,884 registered borrowers, with 8,378,802 adult-level materials loaned.^b