



INTERNATIONAL CITY/COUNTY  
MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

International City/County Management Association | Aspen Institute | Public Library Association  
Local Libraries Advancing Community Goals, 2016  
Summary of Survey Results

**Introduction**

The International City/County Management Association (ICMA), in partnership with the Aspen Institute and the Public Libraries Association, conducted a nationwide survey in the spring of 2016 focused on the evolving role of public libraries in advancing community goals. The goal of this research was to understand how public libraries can be leveraged to advance community goals and how government agencies can partner with library leaders to better engage, inform, and empower residents. The survey was conducted as part of the [Aspen Institute's Dialogue on Public Libraries](#), and in follow-up to ICMA's 2010 Public Library Initiative Survey.

**Methodology**

The survey was sent on paper via postal mail to the chief administrative officers of 9,675 local governments, and an online submission option was also made available. The sampling frame for the survey included all local governments with a public library or a library branch within their boundaries as represented in data collected by the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Responses were received from 1,927 of the governments surveyed, for a response rate of 19.9%. The survey results are representative within a +/- 2.0% margin of error at the 95% confidence level. Response rates by government type, population cohort, and geographic division are outlined in the table to the right.

**Survey response by government type, population cohort, and geographic division**

	Jurisdictions surveyed	Jurisdictions responding	Response rate
<b>Overall</b>	<b>9,675</b>	<b>1,927</b>	<b>19.9%</b>
<b>Type</b>			
Municipalities	6,644	1,508	22.7%
Counties	3,031	419	13.8%
<b>Population cohort</b>			
Over 1,000,000	42	11	26.2%
500,000 - 1,000,000	96	18	18.8%
250,000 - 499,999	164	37	22.6%
100,000 - 249,999	494	103	20.9%
50,000 - 99,999	819	163	19.9%
25,000 - 49,999	1,307	205	15.7%
10,000 - 24,999	2,214	432	19.5%
5,000 - 9,999	1,771	364	20.6%
2,500 - 4,999	1,675	340	20.3%
Under 2,500	1,093	254	23.2%
<b>Geographic division</b>			
New England	183	25	13.7%
Mid-Atlantic	865	116	13.4%
East North-Central	1,858	377	20.3%
West North-Central	1,487	344	23.1%
South Atlantic	1,529	322	21.1%
East South-Central	836	95	11.4%
West South-Central	1,270	237	18.7%
Mountain	713	149	20.9%
Pacific Coast	934	262	28.1%

**Survey Highlights**

- Nationally, half of survey respondents reported that there is a governing relationship between the public library and the local government, with notable variation by population cohort. Among jurisdictions with populations of 250,000 or higher, 84.1% had a governing relationship with their local library.
- Survey respondents envision public libraries as a key resource to support their communities' education and digital inclusion goals. There is less certainty among respondents around the library's role in workforce development, economic development, and civic engagement.
- More than half of respondents indicated that their libraries receive funding from non-governmental entities, and a number of jurisdictions cited foundations and non-profit organizations as part of their strategy to ensure the financial sustainability of the library system.

## Full Survey Results

**1. Is there a governing relationship between the public library system in your community and the local government that you represent (i.e. the chief librarian/library director reports directly or indirectly to the governing body of the local government)?** *If yes, please answer questions 1a and 1b below; If no, skip to question 2.*

n = 1,892

Yes	50.0%
No	50.0%

**1a. Is the chief librarian/library director a member of the local government management team, e.g., a team of department heads or similar executive structure?**

n = 946

Yes	72.6%
No	27.5%

**1b. Which position in your local government does the chief librarian/library director report to? (Check all applicable.)**

n = 946

City or county manager or chief administrative officer	44.9%
Assistant city or county manager or assistant chief administrative officer	12.1%
Library board/library trustees	42.8%
Chief elected official, e.g., mayor, elected executive	8.9%
Other (Please describe)	11.3%

**2. Please rate the frequency of your engagement with local library leadership using the scale below.**

	n	Never	Rarely	Some-times	Often	Very Often
a. Library representatives are invited to discussions about relevant local issues (e.g., strategic planning meeting for the community).	1,855	14.7%	21.3%	25.9%	24.3%	13.8%
b. Library representatives are kept informed about local government decision-making processes and timing (e.g., a city council member contacts the library director to inform her/him about potential budget shortfalls).	1,849	17.1%	17.1%	17.6%	28.8%	19.3%
c. Library representatives are in contact with representatives of the local government through open channels of communication (e.g., phone calls are returned).	1,849	7.8%	8.8%	16.1%	33.7%	33.6%
d. Library representatives are invited to present information to representatives of the local government (e.g., a trustee is invited to make a presentation to the city council about the library's technology needs).	1,843	14.0%	17.0%	26.3%	25.7%	17.0%
e. Local government representatives go to library staff as a resource to inform their decision-making (e.g., city council members go to the library director to find out about computer usage/demand).	1,799	20.8%	30.1%	25.1%	15.7%	8.3%

**3. What factors affect the frequency and quality of your engagement with library leadership?**

See full dataset for open-ended responses.

**4. How often do you have contact with the chief librarian/library director? (Check only one.)**

n = 1,874

At least weekly	30.4%
At least monthly	27.4%
At least every six months	16.0%
Very rarely or never	22.4%
Other (Please describe.)	3.8%

5. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements using the scale provided.

	n	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
a. Libraries in my community are adequately funded.	1,845	4.0%	19.6%	23.8%	41.0%	11.7%
b. The library budget is often more vulnerable to cuts than other budgets.	1,841	8.2%	28.7%	35.7%	22.8%	4.6%
c. More funding is needed to support the library's role in my community.	1,824	3.8%	12.1%	39.2%	34.0%	10.9%

6. Does the public library system in your community receive government funding through any of the following funding mechanisms?

	n	Yes	No	Don't know
a. Allocation from General Fund	1,801	60.2%	31.4%	8.3%
b. Revenues earmarked by council or voters	1,708	19.7%	67.7%	12.6%
c. Separate property tax	1,742	32.1%	56.8%	11.1%
d. Special tax approved by voters	1,700	18.4%	67.6%	14.0%
e. Parcel tax within specified zones	1,662	2.5%	80.6%	16.8%
f. Other (Please describe.)	761	38.1%	38.6%	23.3%

7. Is the local public library system funded at least partially by financial support from non-governmental entities (i.e., foundations, non-profits, etc.)?

n = 1,866

Yes	53.9%
No	17.8%
I don't know	28.3%

8. Are you aware that the Federal E-Rate funding program can be used to support libraries?

n = 1,846

Yes	31.5%
No	68.5%

9. Are Federal E-Rate funds currently being used to support libraries in your community?

n = 1,864

Yes	17.2%
No	20.2%
I don't know	62.6%

10. What steps has your community taken to ensure adequate funding for long-term sustainability of the library system?

See full dataset for open-ended responses.

11. How would you rate the level of public interest in library services in the community that you represent? (Indicators of public interest might include levels of utilization or public advocacy, among other factors.)

n = 1,684

Very low	0.7%
Low	4.3%
Moderate	34.9%
High	43.2%
Very high	16.9%

12. Please describe the role of libraries in your community as a resource for each of the following groups.

	n	None	Minimal	Moderate	Important	Highly important	Don't know
a. Families	1,828	0.1%	2.2%	14.6%	34.7%	42.3%	6.0%
b. Students	1,829	0.2%	3.0%	15.4%	34.7%	41.0%	5.8%
c. Job seekers	1,824	0.6%	7.3%	22.3%	34.9%	25.3%	9.6%
d. Small businesses	1,826	2.0%	24.3%	35.0%	18.7%	6.7%	13.4%
e. Immigrants	1,820	4.1%	19.7%	19.8%	19.5%	15.3%	21.6%
f. Senior citizens	1,826	0.3%	3.0%	14.4%	37.0%	37.1%	8.3%
g. Charitable or civic organizations	1,814	1.2%	14.5%	29.7%	26.0%	11.0%	17.5%

13. Please rate the extent to which each of the following areas represents a current priority of your community.

	n	Not a current priority	Low priority	Medium priority	High priority	Very high priority
a. Access to high-speed Internet service	1,788	2.1%	3.5%	18.0%	51.3%	25.1%
b. Digital literacy	1,781	3.5%	8.4%	36.2%	41.7%	10.3%
c. Neighborhood/community development	1,786	1.6%	10.0%	29.7%	43.5%	15.2%
d. Civic engagement	1,782	1.3%	9.6%	36.5%	41.5%	11.2%
e. Early childhood education	1,780	1.7%	4.8%	26.4%	47.2%	19.9%
f. Primary/secondary educational attainment	1,783	2.1%	4.2%	25.9%	51.0%	16.9%
g. Post-secondary educational attainment	1,778	2.5%	8.7%	35.0%	40.7%	13.0%
h. Job training and workforce development	1,782	2.3%	9.1%	31.9%	40.6%	16.0%
i. Small business development	1,776	2.6%	13.9%	35.5%	36.3%	11.7%
j. Online learning/virtual learning	1,773	3.7%	14.3%	39.6%	34.5%	8.0%
k. Immigrant integration/citizenship services	1,773	14.4%	27.0%	34.9%	17.8%	6.0%
l. Arts and culture	1,782	2.9%	13.7%	40.7%	33.1%	9.6%

14. Please describe the role that your local library currently plays in advancing community goals in each of the following areas.

	n	None	Minimal	Moderate	Important	Highly important	Don't know
a. Access to high-speed Internet service	1,812	1.2%	4.9%	10.5%	26.7%	46.7%	10.1%
b. Digital literacy	1,804	0.8%	4.2%	15.9%	31.2%	34.2%	13.7%
c. Neighborhood/community development	1,802	3.4%	19.1%	26.1%	23.2%	15.5%	12.7%
d. Civic engagement	1,807	2.0%	12.9%	27.5%	28.1%	17.3%	12.3%
e. Early childhood education	1,804	1.2%	4.4%	17.4%	29.9%	34.8%	12.4%
f. Primary/secondary educational attainment	1,799	1.2%	6.4%	20.5%	33.9%	25.4%	12.6%
g. Post-secondary educational attainment	1,805	1.9%	11.6%	26.0%	28.8%	18.1%	13.5%
h. Job training and workforce development	1,805	2.0%	13.6%	24.9%	27.3%	18.1%	14.2%
i. Small business development	1,805	4.2%	25.5%	27.6%	18.2%	8.8%	15.6%
j. Online learning/virtual learning	1,803	1.9%	9.0%	22.6%	29.4%	23.0%	14.1%
k. Immigrant integration/citizenship services	1,797	8.8%	21.6%	21.5%	17.3%	11.6%	19.3%
l. Arts and culture	1,795	1.7%	9.8%	24.9%	28.3%	21.5%	13.8%

15. Please indicate whether each of the following is something you think your community's public libraries should DEFINITELY do, should MAYBE do, or should definitely NOT do.

15a. Broadband Internet Access and Digital Inclusion	n	Should definitely do	Should maybe do	Should definitely not do	No opinion either way	Don't know
a. Provide free access to high-speed broadband and Wi-Fi	1,812	84.2%	9.1%	0.7%	2.4%	3.5%
b. Offer programs to teach people how to use digital tools such as computers, tablets, smartphones, and apps	1,815	63.0%	29.4%	1.0%	2.8%	3.9%
c. Offer programs to teach people about protecting their privacy and security online	1,813	45.4%	42.8%	1.7%	5.7%	4.4%
d. Help low-income families to understand options for accessing broadband services	1,815	50.1%	35.6%	1.7%	7.3%	5.0%
e. Loan technology tools that allow home use of broadband services (mobile hot spots, laptops, tablets, etc.)	1,804	19.6%	39.0%	19.7%	13.3%	8.5%

15b. Public Services and Civic Engagement	n	Should definitely do	Should maybe do	Should definitely not do	No opinion either way	Don't know
a. Provide information concierge services to access government services	1,813	40.4%	41.5%	3.5%	8.0%	6.7%
b. Support provision of public health services	1,809	23.7%	43.1%	13.4%	12.4%	7.5%
c. Support provision of emergency management services	1,808	27.3%	41.5%	12.2%	11.7%	7.4%
d. Provide citizenship education services	1,807	36.2%	42.7%	4.3%	10.9%	5.9%
e. Provide English language classes	1,803	21.9%	43.5%	10.1%	17.5%	7.0%
f. Provide a forum for convening public discussions	1,802	38.8%	37.3%	5.8%	11.9%	6.1%

15c. Education	n	Should definitely do	Should maybe do	Should definitely not do	No opinion either way	Don't know
a. Offer multi-generational literacy programs to help children and their families succeed in school and work	1,815	53.4%	34.8%	1.7%	5.3%	4.8%
b. Coordinate more closely with local schools to provide resources to kids	1,815	72.6%	20.0%	0.8%	2.3%	4.3%
c. Offer a wide range of adult learning experiences	1,815	58.0%	32.0%	1.0%	4.6%	4.4%
d. Provide online learning experiences	1,816	56.8%	32.5%	0.9%	5.2%	4.5%
e. Provide creative space and materials for community members to create, learn, and share (makerspace)	1,808	49.8%	34.5%	2.2%	8.1%	5.4%

15d. Workforce Development	n	Should definitely do	Should maybe do	Should definitely not do	No opinion either way	Don't know
a. Provide credentialing and certification opportunities	1,816	18.5%	46.8%	12.8%	14.5%	7.4%
b. Provide training, technology, and resources to develop job-related skills	1,814	31.9%	41.9%	8.6%	11.1%	6.5%
c. Coordinate with local employers to connect community residents to training and career development resources that local employers need	1,808	31.3%	41.5%	7.9%	12.3%	7.0%

15e. Economic Development	n	Should definitely do	Should maybe do	Should definitely not do	No opinion either way	Don't know
a. Provide information and training on how to start a business	1,812	22.2%	48.9%	10.8%	12.1%	6.0%
b. Provide business support services, including access to databases, market analysis, sample business plans, etc.	1,815	26.5%	44.5%	10.5%	12.3%	6.2%
c. Provide opportunities to connect with mentors and small business assistance counselors	1,812	18.5%	47.1%	12.3%	15.1%	7.1%
d. Provide workspace for mobile workers and entrepreneurs	1,807	23.4%	40.9%	14.4%	13.9%	7.4%

16. Please share any other thoughts on the role that your local public library can play in advancing your community's goals.

See full dataset for open-ended responses.