There’s a public library in each of Minnesota’s 87 counties. Libraries have a public service orientation, and they are viewed as community assets.

**Operating budgets**

Public libraries in Minnesota receive most of their operating revenue from local government—counties and cities. State and federal government also contribute funds. Other revenue includes fees, fines, gifts and donations.

Staff expertise is the largest operating expenditure followed by general operations. Collections account for 11 percent of library budgets statewide, but can differ greatly by each library.
Public library operating funds have increased in each of the past seven years, growing by about $32 million statewide. Expenditures have been consistently less than revenues adding to public library reserves.

**Capital budgets**

Capital funds are used for construction projects; furnishings, equipment, and initial collections for new buildings, additions, or renovations; computer hardware and software; and vehicles such as bookmobiles. Counties provide most of the capital revenue for public libraries. Cities, the state and other donors also support capital projects.

![Graph showing capital expenditures and capital revenues from 2011 to 2017](image)

Capital revenues are frequently issued prior to libraries spending the money and can cross fiscal years. Capital investments in public libraries peaked in 2015.

**Staffing**

Public libraries employed 2,228 full time equivalent staff (FTE) or about ten library staff per 25,000 population in 2017. Staff include about one-third librarians and two-thirds non-librarian staff. A quarter of staff members have a master’s degree in library science from an accredited school of higher learning.

![Graph showing total, librarian, and other staff FTE from 2011 to 2017](image)
Public library staffing has been fairly steady during the past seven years. Library employees have grown less than 1 percent since 2011. The librarian job class has grown by 45 FTE. All other paid staff has decreased by 33 FTE.

Public library personnel costs grew 11 percent from 2011 to 2017. Salaries grew while benefits remained fairly flat.

Customers

There were 3,859,406 registered public library users in 2017. Nearly seven out of every 10 Minnesotans had a public library card. Public library card holders decreased by about 9 percent from 2011 to 2017. Most of the loss was due to fewer non-resident registrations—individuals who do not live within the legal service area and do not pay taxes to support the library. Registered user numbers also fluctuate according to when and how often libraries purge their records for cards that have not been used within the past few years.

Public library card holders decreased by about 360,027 from 2011 to 2017.
Collections

Minnesota public libraries owned 16.7 million items for loan to customers in 2017. In addition, libraries have almost 25,000 magazine subscriptions and hundreds of licensed information databases. The number of print and other physical materials are decreasing while e-books and other downloadable media are increasing in library collections. While electronic materials were 5 percent of library collections in 2017, books and other physical materials remain by far the largest share of public library collections.

Collection expenditures increased 10 percent from 2011 to 2017. Most of the increase was for electronic materials—$3.4 million. Print materials were reduced somewhat, although expenditures for print materials remained the largest portion. Audio visual material expenses for compact discs and DVDs decreased by $805,000 over the period. Physical audio-visual materials are likely being replaced by downloadable media. The dip in 2012 was likely due to budget cuts following the Great Recession.

Loans

Public library customers borrowed or downloaded 49 million library items in 2017. Use of books and other physical materials has gradually dropped while use of electronic materials is increasing. Users are likely substituting electronic for print, but are hybrid users of both. Electronic materials such as ebooks and
downloadable audio and video accounted for 12 percent of circulation in 2017. Electronic items also circulated almost three times more often than physical items.

Electronic materials circulation grew 80 percent between 2012 and 2017, but physical materials remain the greatest share of circulation. Demographic changes have perhaps caused adult and children’s materials to reach circulation parity.

**Resource sharing**

Libraries shared over 1.2 million unique and hard-to-find titles with other libraries through interlibrary loan services to meet customers’ needs. Interlibrary loans come from out-of-state libraries as well as in-state libraries of all types, not just other public libraries.

2017 was the first year that more titles were received than provided by Minnesota public libraries.
Open hours

Public libraries in Minnesota are open seven days a week during mornings, afternoons and evenings. Fridays have the most open hours, and weekends the least. About 10 percent of libraries have seasonal hours almost exclusively during the summer months between Memorial and Labor days. Public libraries in Minnesota were open 15,181 hours per week in 2017.

Public libraries were open about 742,000 hours in 2017. Public libraries were open 12,371 more hours in 2017 than they were in 2011. Public libraries are restoring hours lost due to budget cuts following the Great Recession. The dip from 2016 to 2017 was likely due to the number of libraries closed for remodeling.

Visits

In 2017, customers made more than 23.3 million visits during open hours. Minnesota’s public libraries drew almost 3 million more visitors than Walt Disney World! Public library visits dropped 15 percent from 2011 to 2017.

Visits have decreased by over 4 million from 2011 to 2017. The proliferation of personal electronic devices and growing electronic materials collections in libraries have made actual visits unnecessary for digital users.
Reference

Librarians answered 3.4 million reference questions in 2017. Questions included requests for information, advice on what to read for enjoyment, information technology assistance, internet navigation and instruction, and referrals to community resources. Librarians respond to customer queries in-person, by phone and online using live chat, email and text. Reference transactions decreased 4 percent since 2011.

Reference transactions peaked in 2014 and have been dropping ever since. The drop may be due in part to the fact that many libraries have stopped reporting reference transactions in the state’s annual survey.

Internet access

Public libraries offer 6,702 internet computers—5,739 desk top computers and 963 mobile devices—for the public to use without charge. Users logged on nearly 11 million times in 2017—4,506,041 computer and 6,417,488 wireless sessions. While computer use is declining, wireless use is increasing as more Minnesotans own mobile devices. Internet access at libraries that includes both computers and Wi-Fi on personal devices is growing in public libraries.

**Programs**

Public libraries are offering more programming and attracting diverse audiences of all ages. They enjoyed meeting favorite authors and experiencing dance, music and art. They learned about new ideas and computer and language skills. They actively joined in during Makerspace, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math), “Read to a Dog” and other interactive programs. Children’s programs were by far the most popular. In 2017, libraries offered 69,788 library programs that 1,644,466 people attended. Programs grew by 42 percent and attendance by 34 percent from 2011 to 2017.

Programs have increased since 2011 due in part by the public library funding from the state’s Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund. Program attendance grew from 1.2 to 1.6 million statewide.

**Public meetings**

Libraries are considered welcoming and neutral ground for diverse groups and organizations to meet. Sixty-six percent of Minnesota’s public libraries have meeting rooms for community meetings and discourse. Libraries hosted 74,209 public events in 2017.

Meeting room use has increased 42 percent over the past seven years.
Minnesota public libraries are required by Minnesota Statutes, section 134.13, to submit annual reports to the Minnesota Department of Education. Data is also submitted to the Institute of Museums and Library Services for the Public Libraries in the United States Survey.

Statistics include input and output measures related to facilities, services, programs, collections, staffing, hours of operation, and income and expenditures. Statistical information is used by public libraries and policymakers to plan and implement services that meet the needs of their communities.

Data for 2017 was submitted February through April 2018 using an online survey. All regional library systems and 99 percent of public library administrative entities in Minnesota completed the survey. (Watonwan County Library did not report.)

For information about the 2017 Minnesota Public Library Report or historical data, please contact:

Minnesota Department of Education
State Library Services
1500 Highway 36 West
Roseville, MN 55113-4266
651-582-8640