



Fact Sheet: Libraries in Tough Economic Times

In times of economic hardship, people turn to – and depend on – their libraries and librarians. When the economy is down, libraries are busier and more vital than ever.

- As more people look for employment, libraries are helping level the playing field for job seekers. Many patrons are turning to library computers and Internet access to find work, apply for jobs online, type resumes and cover letters and open email accounts.
- Libraries are seeing more users as individuals and family cut back personal expenditures for books and other forms of entertainment. Besides reading, people are able to borrow movies, check out CDs, use databases, download audio books and attend programs — all for free!
- Libraries are America's great information equalizers – the only place people of all ages and backgrounds can find and freely use such a diversity of resources, along with the expert guidance of librarians.

A survey of libraries across Washington State demonstrates that libraries are busy keeping up with the rising demand for services:

- The average 2009 percentage change in the number of library visits (relative to open hours) exceeded the compounded rate of the previous three years combined.
- The average 2009 percentage change in the number of items checked out (relative to open hours) exceeded the compounded rate of the previous three years.
- The average 2009 percentage change in the number of public computer users (relative to open hours) represents an increase of more than 40% over that of either of the two previous years.

Many libraries are responding to these significant increases in library usage without corresponding increases in funding or resources. Others libraries, struggling with tight budgets, have been forced to cut back the number of open hours — reducing access when it's needed most.

It's clear that libraries are part of the solution when a community is struggling economically. From free access to books and online resources for families to library business centers that help support entrepreneurship and retraining, libraries support lifelong learning. They're a community investment with strong and steady rate of return.