

Drew Brookhart | Librarian's Shelf | The Value of Library Service

The value of library service is often difficult to measure. Do we look at the number of books that are checked out? The people that come through the door? How do we compare these measures of use with the resources the community contributes for services? During the great recession, libraries, along with nearly everything else, were faced with budget constraints. Some overextended communities were even forced to foreclose on their libraries by either passing their operations to for-profit companies or simply closing the doors. These few tragedies aside most libraries were left articulating their worth in various ways. San Francisco undertook a study in September 2015 which projected an overall return on investment of between \$5.19 and \$9.11 for every dollar spent. Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh estimated that they have generated \$6.14 per \$1 of budget provided; Florida public libraries showed that approximately \$6.40 of the total value per \$1 of the budget was created; South Carolina State Library economic impact was \$4.48 per \$1 spent; and Phoenix Public Library results showed a value of \$10 or greater per \$1 spent. In these examples the average return on investment is always higher than the resources expended. What about here in Columbus?

At the urging of the Columbus Area Chamber of Commerce the University of Nebraska conducted a study on the economic impact of the proposed Library/Cultural Arts Center project. One part of that study looked at increased library use in communities who have constructed new facilities and how that use equates to the increasing value of services. The results are striking and very positive. The study found that it is possible to estimate a significant share of both the library's current value to the community and projected value with a new facility. The UNL study focused on two of the most important library services identified by patrons in the 2013-2018 CPL Strategic Plan survey: book loans and library wi-fi access. Based on information from other libraries and data from the current Columbus Public Library the study predicts a 39% increase in the value of library services with the construction of a new facility. Other services including; reference staff support, programming, cultural events and author visits, and spaces for reading, relaxing, and meeting are all presumed to add significant value, but were not tested as a part of the study. There is no question that libraries offer a great value in Columbus and beyond. Ultimately beauty is in the eye of the library card holder. If you have not been in to find the value at your library lately drop by and browse the collection.