Beyond the Stacks

The Economic Value and Community Impact of Texas Public Libraries

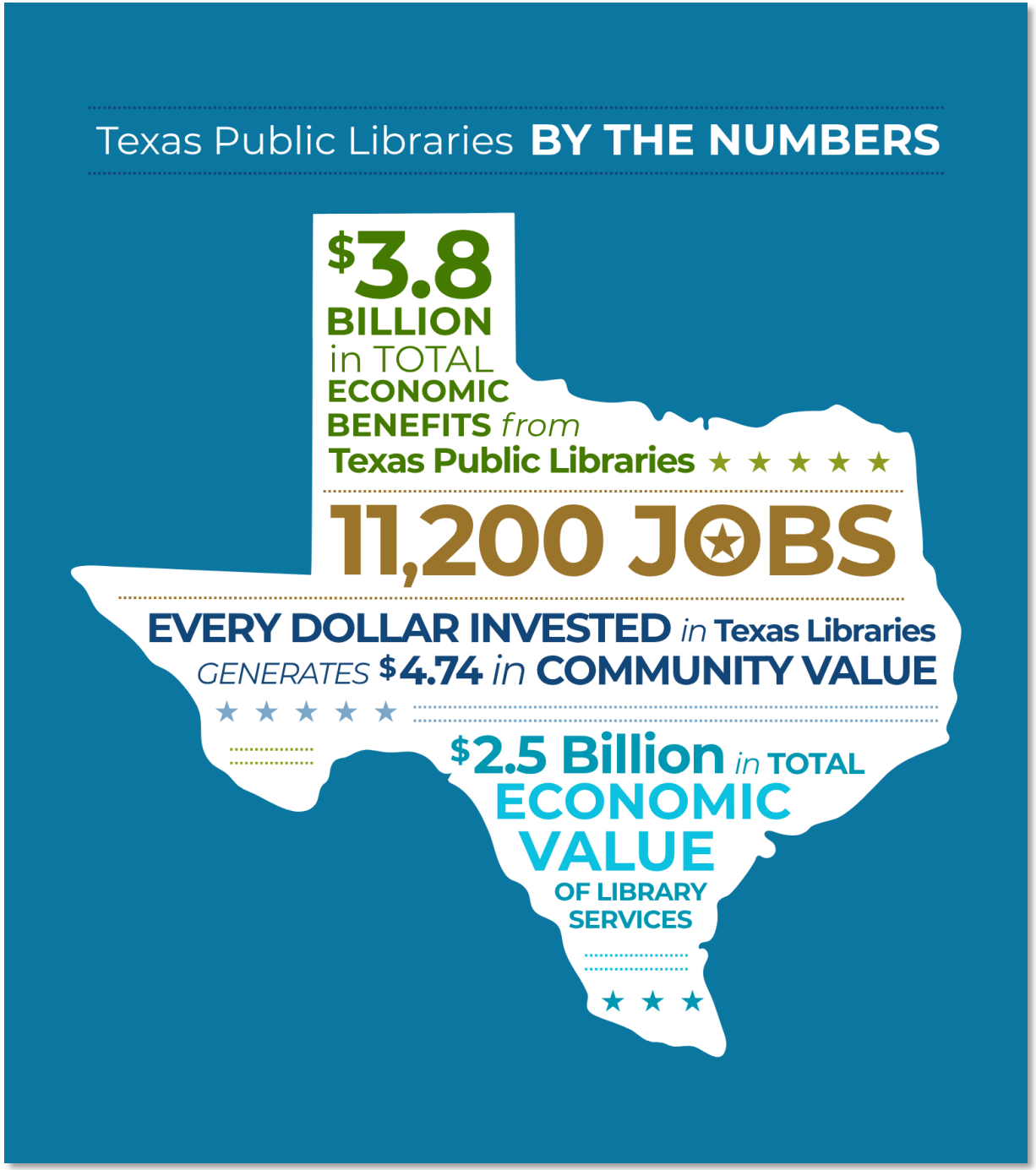
Webinar and Review of Key Findings
September 29, 2026

Prepared for the Texas Library Association
by JBK Economics Group

JBK
Economics Group

$4.74

returned to Texas communities for every $1 invested in public libraries


Texas Public Libraries BY THE NUMBERS
$3.8 BILLION in TOTAL ECONOMIC BENEFITS from Texas Public Libraries
11,200 JOBS
EVERY DOLLAR INVESTED in Texas Libraries GENERATES $4.74 in COMMUNITY VALUE
$2.5 Billion in TOTAL ECONOMIC VALUE OF LIBRARY SERVICES

Contents

Findings, programs on the ground, and how to use them locally

01	**What this study measures** Four lines of evidence and how they fit together	4
02	**Return on investment and economic impact** $4.74 per dollar, $3.83 billion in benefit, jobs and tax revenue	5–9
03	**The value of library services** Service-by-service values and how each one was derived	10-11
04	**What 298 directors report** Business support, community infrastructure, and emergency roles	12–15
05	**Programs on the ground** Spotlights on Terrell, Mission, Harris County, and four small towns	16–20
06	**Communicating the value** Data with narrative, four engagement channels, and takeaways	21–22

What this study measures

Four lines of evidence on the value that Texas public libraries return to their communities

01

Return on investment

Value delivered to communities for every dollar of public library funding.

02

Economic and tax impact

IMPLAN modeling of $808.6 million in library operating and capital spending: jobs, labor income, output, and tax revenue.

03

Value of library services

Market-price valuation of eleven service categories, from circulation and e-materials to wi-fi, computers, and databases.

04

Voices from the field

A survey of 298 library directors about community- and business-related services, plus nine profiles of innovative local programs.

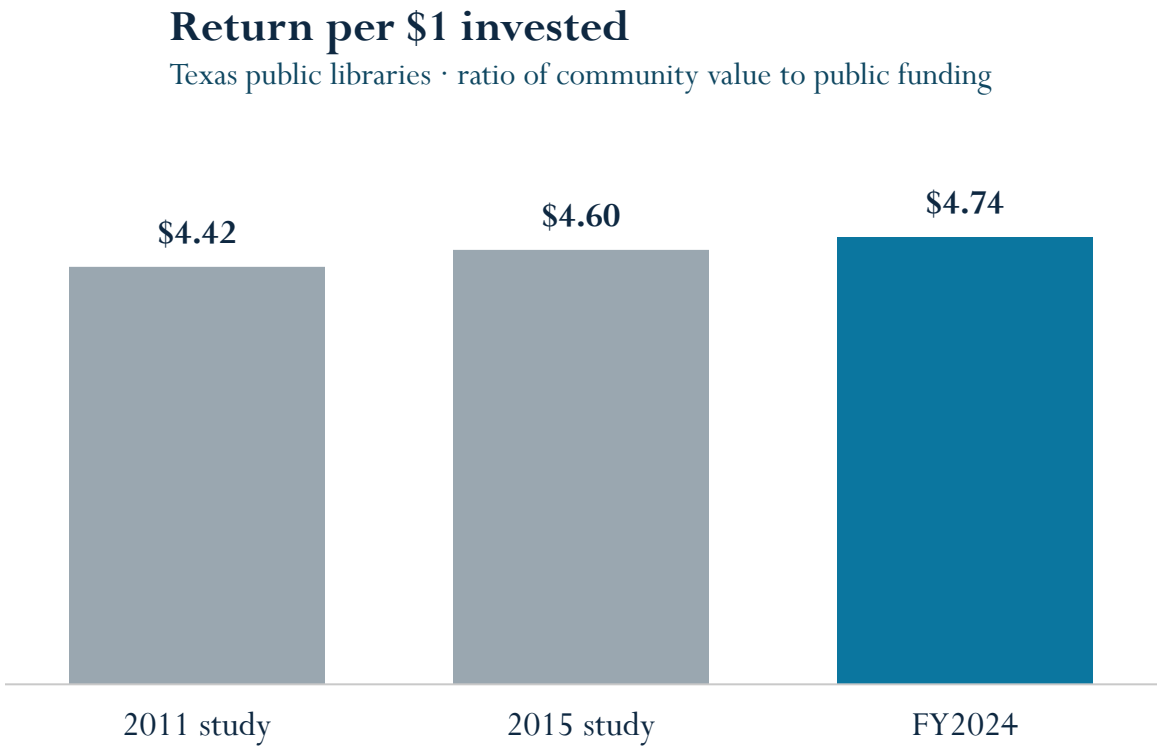
Some Key Economic Terms

- **Economic Benefits**: The dollars generated and distributed throughout the economy from the existence of an establishment. The sources of impacts that contribute to economic benefits include capital and operating expenditures and employee spending.
- **Return on Investment (ROI)**: The $ amount that a community or region can expect in additional economic activity after an investment in a business, government program, or non-profit
- **Operating & Capital Expenditures**: what a library spends to keep the doors open and build new facilities
- **Employment/Jobs**: We use "headcount" and include full-time, part-time, and seasonal employment to match U.S. Dept. of Labor data.
- **Labor Income**: This includes employee compensation (wages, salaries, and benefits).
- **Direct Impact**: Initial economic activity (e.g., expenditures, employment) by a library.
- **Indirect Impact**: The upstream (backward) economic activity impacted by purchases of goods and services from other companies.
- **Induced Impact**: Economic activity derived from workers spending their earnings on goods and services in the economy.

Every $1 invested returns $4.74

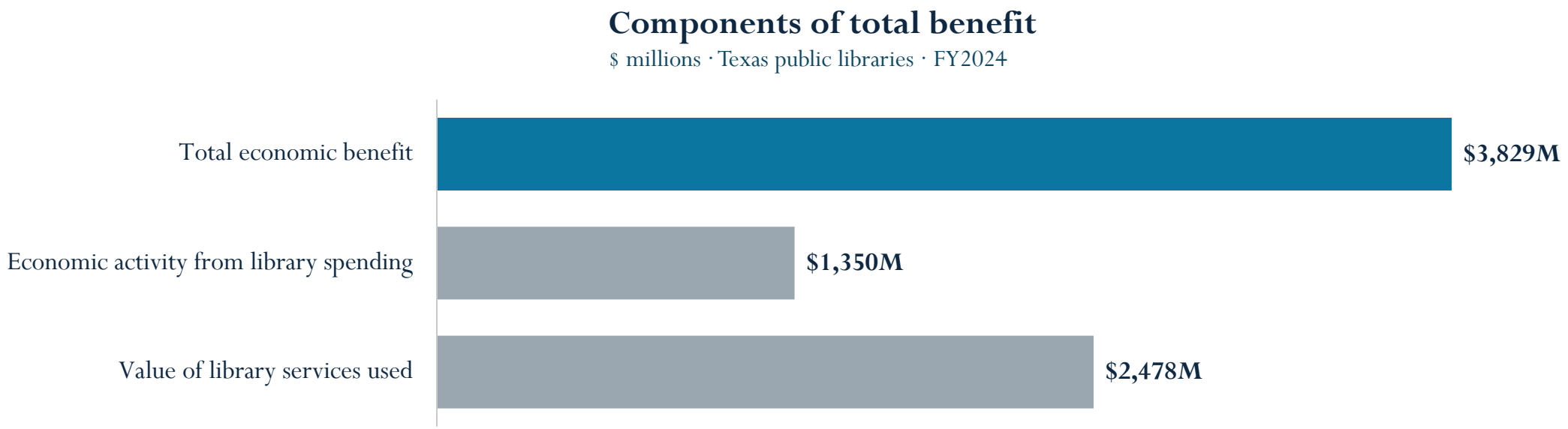
Return on investment, Texas public libraries, FY2024 compared with prior studies

- Texas public libraries returned $4.74 in community value for every dollar invested in FY2024.
- The result compares favorably with the two prior Texas estimates.
- $3.8 billion in total economic benefit, including direct library spending, indirect and induced economic effects, and the economic value of services.



$3.829 billion in total economic benefit

Two components: the value of services used and the economic activity generated by library spending



By rough comparison, Texas public libraries had about the same economic footprint in FY2024 as the state's motion picture and sound recording industry. Service value is estimated at market prices; economic activity is modeled in IMPLAN.

Library spending drives jobs, income, and tax revenue

$808.6M
total library spending, FY2024

11,200
Texas jobs supported

$164M
federal, state, and local taxes

Economic contribution of Texas public libraries, FY2024

Impact	Employment (000s)	Labor income ($M)	Value added ($M)	Output ($M)
Direct	8.5	$538	$629	$808
Indirect	0.7	$59	$98	$177
Induced	2.0	$109	$223	$366
Total	**11.2**	**$706**	**$950**	**$1,350**

Spending comprises $717.0 million in operating expenditures and $91.6 million in capital outlays. Source: IMPLAN modeling of TSLAC FY2024 data.

A workforce the size of a public safety profession

Library employment, salaries, and reach across Texas counties, FY2024

7,994

library jobs statewide (7,396 FTE)

$499M

total compensation: $356M wages, $143M benefits

233 of 254

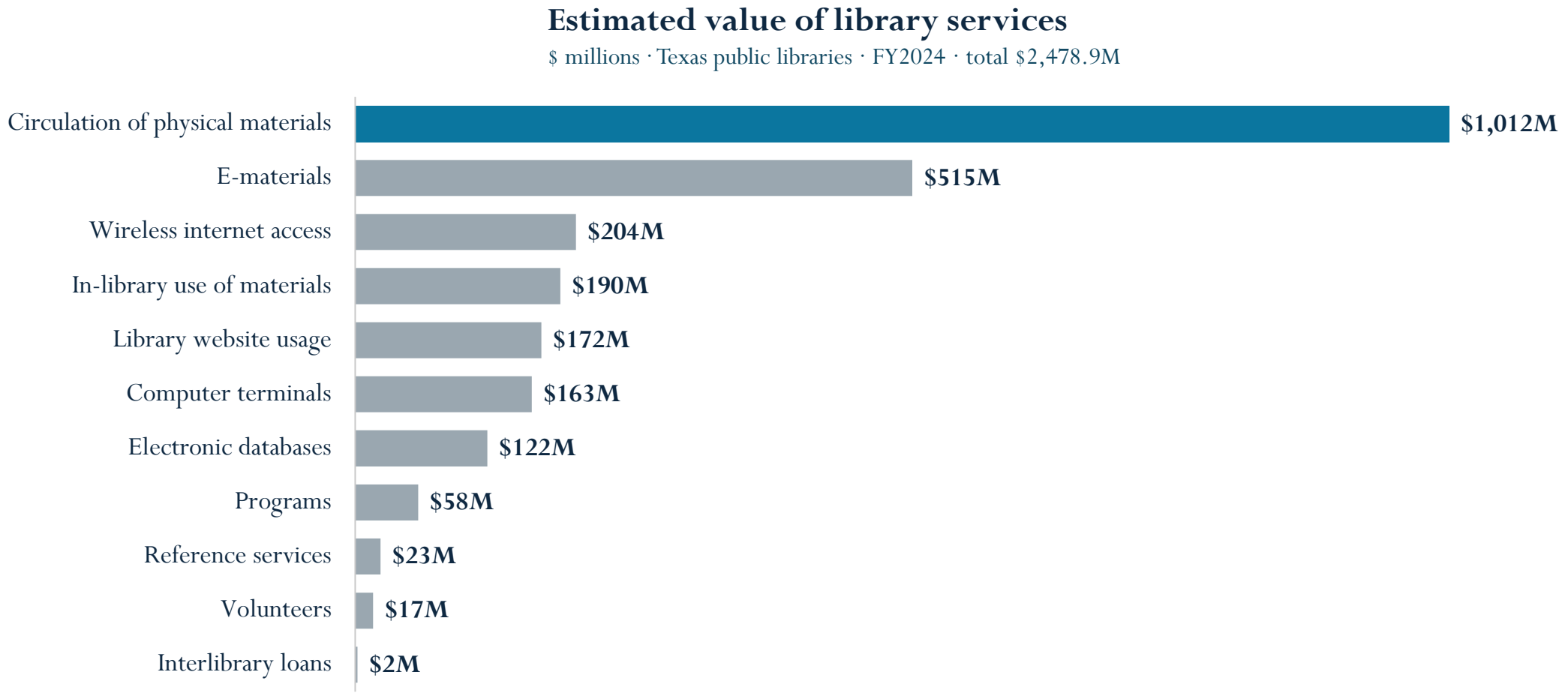
Texas counties report library employment

Comparable Texas occupations — similar headcount, lower pay

	Headcount	Avg. salary
Public library staff	**7,994**	**$44,595**
Mental health and substance abuse social workers	8,220	$53,450
Paramedics	8,410	$57,590
All Texas industries, average	—	$75,394

Headcount and average annual salary excluding benefits · library spending supports 11,200 jobs in total

Circulation and e-materials drive most of the service value



Behind the numbers

Every service priced at what a Texan would otherwise have paid — deliberately conservative

Programs

Valued at museum admission prices — the midpoint of Texas museum tickets: $8 for children's programs, $12.50 for adult, $10.25 blended.

Materials and e-materials

Circulated items valued at retail and rental substitutes by audience and format, then netted down for in-library use.

Volunteers

Hours valued at library staff wage rates by skill level — and excluded entirely from the economic-impact side, which counts only the flow of funds.

Where this lands compared to other regional studies

The estimates behind every service value are published in the report, and the $4.74 ROI sits squarely mid-range among recent state and local library ROI studies summarized in Appendix B.

Survey of library directors about community and business programs

Spring 2026 survey of 513 Texas public libraries · 58% participation rate

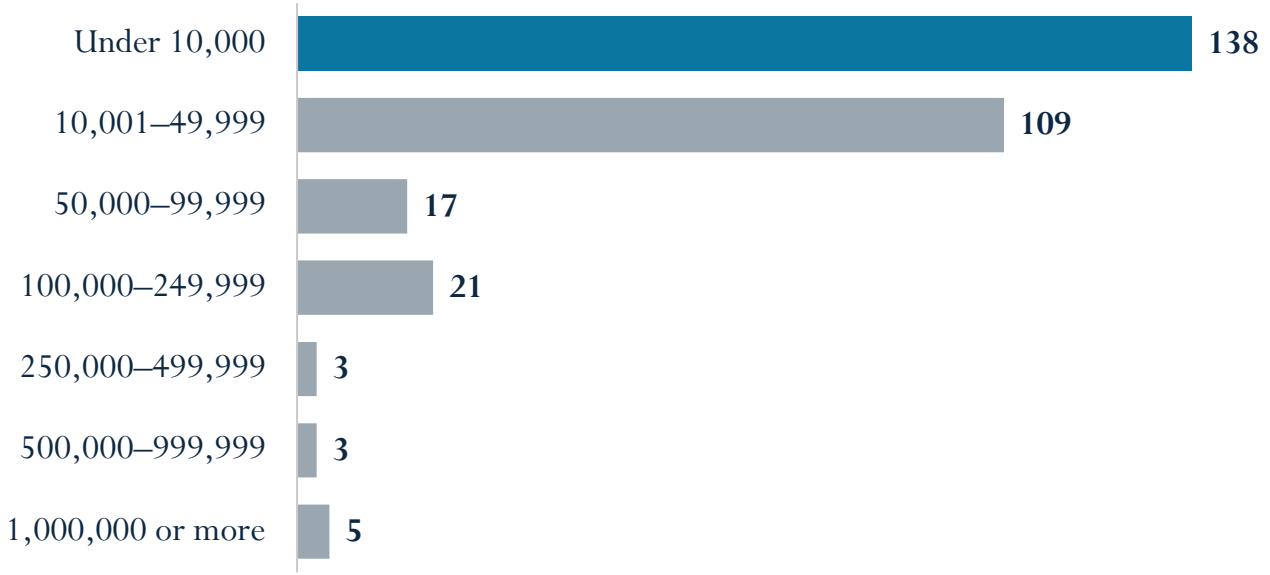
513 Library directors invited

298 directors responded

58% participation rate

Responding libraries, by population served

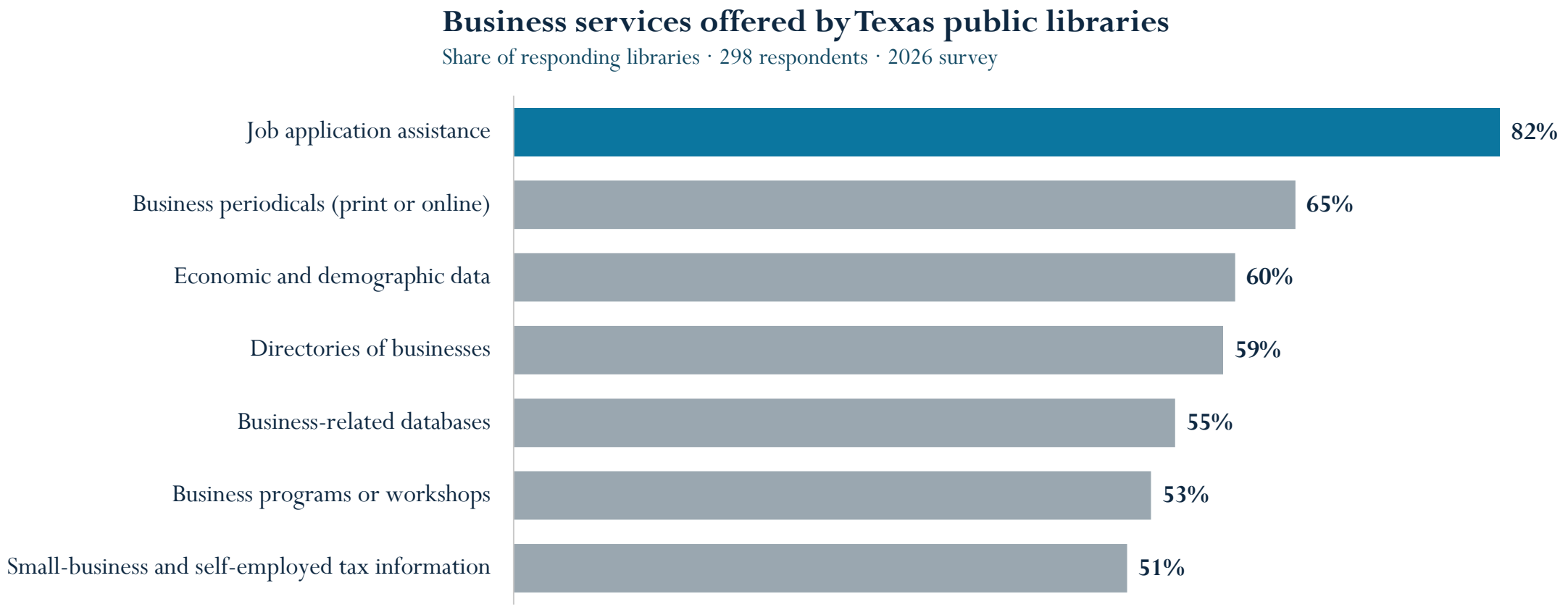
Number of libraries · 298 respondents · 2026 survey



Responses mirror the statewide distribution of libraries by population served; more than three-quarters serve fewer than 50,000 residents.

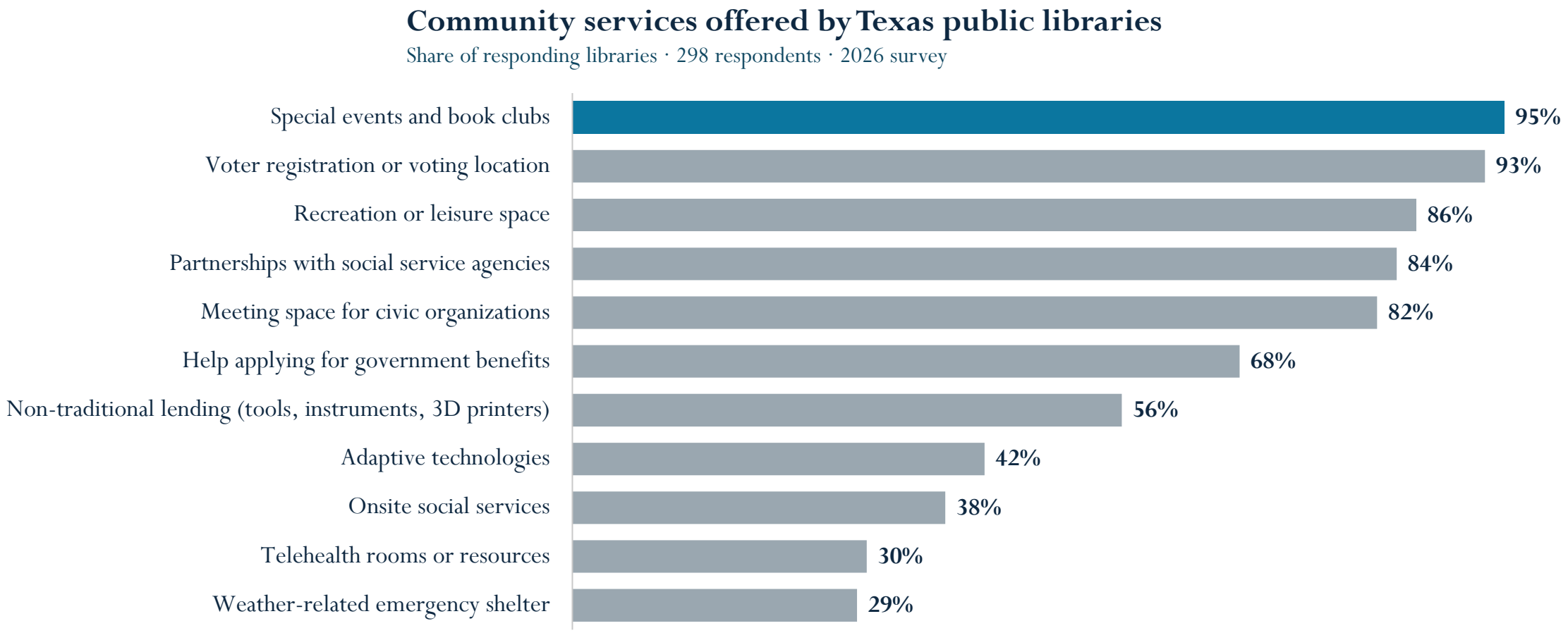
Libraries are front-line business support

Eight in ten responding libraries help residents apply for jobs



Libraries are community infrastructure

Civic access, social services, meeting space, and emergency shelter



When the weather turns, libraries open

Local emergency management support reported by surveyed directors

18%

hold a formal emergency designation — a distribution center, disaster-recovery site, or shelter role written into local plans

- 17 directors report warming and cooling center duty
- Coordinating and managing donations after local emergencies
- Operating bases for first responders arriving from outside town
- Family reunification sites, and hosts for FEMA recovery programs

"All branches serve as warming/cooling stations; we also provide services in community shelters in the immediate [disaster] aftermath and host assistance programs like FEMA during longer-term recovery."

Nine libraries, nine local answers

Common thread: community collaboration generates the ideas and sustains the programs.

Hulsey Public Library
Terrell
GED and ESL classes

Plano Public Library
Plano
Workforce development for people with disabilities

Harris County Public Library
Houston
Education and economic advancement for underserved populations

Lewisville Public Library
Lewisville
Access to state and federal benefit programs

Hondo Public Library
Hondo
Digital and financial literacy

Harrie P. Woodson Memorial Library
Caldwell
Adult basic education classes

Speer Memorial Library
Mission
Lawn and garden equipment lending

Comanche Public Library
Comanche
Experimenting with new program ideas

Gatesville Public Library
Gatesville
Low-vision services

Spotlight: the county's only GED testing center

WINGS Adult Education Program · Hulsey Public Library · Terrell, Texas

- Nearly 30 years old: began as a single adult literacy coordinator with small Rotary Club grants, now offers all four GED subjects plus four levels of ESL.
- Students who finished GED prep still could not test — the nearest centers were outside Kaufman County with waiting lists stretching months.
- The Terrell Economic Development Corporation asked what the library was doing for workforce development, then funded a testing center on site.
- Trinity Valley Community College donated classroom space and technology; local employers now approach the library for ESL training for their workers.
- Friends of the Library gave the first support, and early grant money covered GED testing fees for students who could not afford them.

Residents now credential locally instead of testing out of county.

Program housed in a restored downtown train depot

BY THE NUMBERS

1,500+

exams in the testing center's first six months

244

GED and ESL applications in 2025–26

180+

students enrolled that academic year

2

EDC grants, the second for the testing center

Spotlight: a $2,000 tool shed, a citywide payoff

Toolshed Community Program · Speer Memorial Library · Mission, Texas

- A three-year-old lending program at a 110-year-old library, funded by a $2,000 annual city allocation plus donated equipment.
- Loans 30–40 pieces of lawn and garden equipment for up to two days; many borrowers return items within hours.
- Anchors the City of Mission's "Keeping Mission Beautiful" initiative, with help from Permits, Health, Legal, Water, and Parks and Recreation.
- Runs on an existing catalog system: tools are tracked like books, and all 26 staff are trained by Parks and Recreation to operate the equipment.
- Brought new patrons into the library in a city of 134,000.

"Building the program put us back on the map in Mission. Libraries aren't just for young families or seniors."
Yenni Espinoza, Library Director

BY THE NUMBERS

173
average equipment loans per year

30–40
pieces of equipment, lent up to two days

$2,000
annual city allocation, plus donations

1
late fee imposed since the program began

Spotlight: one system, four on-ramps

Education & consulting services · Harris County Public Library · 27 branches

Career Online High School

An accredited diploma plus a career certificate, self-paced over 18 months, with library-funded scholarships and a staff liaison at every branch.

71 graduates across 330 sessions

FutureU

College and career navigation — applications, FAFSA, certifications, job connections — delivered by a 10-person team working out in the county, not just in branches.

$1.2M county investment · ~1,300 appointments

ESL and citizenship

Twenty years of free instruction: leveled classes, conversation groups that become community hubs, and citizenship preparation at all 27 locations.

32,000+ students since 2024

LAWPods

Sound-dampened legal workspaces sited near court facilities, staffed by Harris County Law Library — private research and consultations at no cost.

Legal help without a trip downtown

"As you get out and do the work, you meet other people in the ecosystem and you make those connections."— Linda Stevens, HCPL

Small libraries, outsized programs

Over three-quarters of responding libraries serve fewer than 50,000 residents

Gatesville

Serves 8,000 · staff of 7

Vision Connect, a monthly low-vision support group, brings in Texas Workforce Commission trainers and service providers. Around 10 patrons plus caregivers attend, some travelling from Waco and Temple.

Comanche

Serves 4,000 · 2,700 sq ft

Four annual events anchor community life: Saturday with Santa, Turkey Tuesday (11 attendees in year one, 84 by year three), an Earth Day festival, and a 19-hole mini golf tournament raising about $5,000 a year.

Hondo

Serves 8,600 · Hill Country

Digital and financial literacy rebuilt after attendance in a nine-year computer class series fell away, aimed at workforce readiness in a city with a poverty rate above the state average.

Caldwell

Serves 5,200 · staff of 5

Adult basic education kept running through pandemic disruption and federal budget cuts, with a full-time ABE coordinator delivering GED and English language learning.

The common pattern: a director who spots a local gap, a modest budget, and a partner already in town — not a large grant or a big staff.

The data is the beginning, not the message.

In October: turning statewide findings into messages people understand, remember, and repeat.

DATA

$4.74

Community value returned for every $1 invested in Texas public libraries.

→

MEANING

So what?

What changed for a resident, a family, a business, or a community because the library was there?

→

MESSAGE

Make it local

What should a decision-maker, partner, reporter, or neighbor be able to repeat tomorrow?

In October: translate the research into stories and messages that travel.

The communication challenge is not more information. It is making the value easy to see and easy to retell.

Coming October 27: Beyond the Numbers

Turning Library ROI Data into Stories That Build Public Support

DATA → **STORY** → **PUBLIC SUPPORT**

01 Pair data with narrative

Use the numbers for credibility, then give people a human reason to care.

02 Communicate the benefit

Move beyond what the library offers to the change the service creates.

03 Reach the right audiences

Connect the message to local leaders, media, partners, and the public.

Tuesday, October 27 · 3:30–4:30 PM

Jonathan Alba · JBK Economics Group

A practical session on turning this study into a case for your library that people can understand, remember, and repeat.

What to take from the report

Conservative estimates, real communities, and a case worth making locally

$3.83B

Total economic benefit from Texas public libraries in FY2024 — service value plus the activity generated by library spending.

$4.74

Returned in community value for every $1 invested, up from $4.42 in 2011 and $4.60 in 2015.

11,200

Jobs supported statewide, with a footprint comparable to Texas paper manufacturing or motion pictures.

Make the case where the budget is decided

Translate the statewide numbers into your own jurisdiction, lead with a resident's story, and keep the evidence current. Libraries are community hubs in small towns and big cities alike — the economics simply make that visible.

Beyond the Stacks

The Economic Value and Community Impact of Texas Public Libraries

Q&A

Thank you for attending today and please send additional questions or comments to Bruce@jbkeconomics.com.

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ECONOMICS GROUP

$4.74

returned to Texas communities for every $1 invested in public libraries



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