

Beyond the Stacks Key Findings

Measuring the Economic
and Community Value
of Texas Public Libraries



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Introduction

The Texas Library Association (TLA) commissioned JBK Economics Group to conduct this Return on Investment (ROI) study to examine the economic impact of public library funding, public library services, and the broader contributions public libraries make to communities across Texas. The JBK Economics Group conducted research activities and analyses in the spring and early summer of 2026.

Public libraries are valuable community resources and often serve as hubs for public services that today go well beyond promoting literacy and circulating books. One of the study's main goals is to describe the economic value of the wide range of services offered by Texas public libraries. This analysis is timely as the COVID-19 pandemic forced libraries and their patrons to shift to new service delivery models, prompting the adoption of new digital and virtual technologies and forcing reductions in other traditional library services; many of these shifts have remained in place. Some of the report's analysis is quantitative: direct spending by libraries produces significant indirect and induced economic activity throughout the Texas economy, and the estimates of the value of library services presented here significantly increase the overall economic impact we describe. Other economic effects are more descriptive and qualitative in nature. For example, the community benefits of English Language Learner programs, lawn equipment borrowing initiatives, and meeting space for the vision impaired and those applying for community benefits are harder to quantify but absolutely demonstrate the community value of Texas public libraries Texas today.

Throughout the report, *Beyond the Stacks: Measuring the Economic and Community Value of Texas Publix Libraries*, we try to be conservative in our economic impact estimates. We analyze library expenditure and services data from the Texas State Library and Archive Commission for FY2024 because that is the most recent full year available. We use a widely adopted economic impact software (IMPLAN) to analyze the direct, indirect, and induced economic effects of spending by libraries, and understand that the economic estimates of library services are sometimes more art than science. The reader will notice that we describe in detail how we calculate the value of services to arrive at our conclusions, often discounting the value to account for the assumptions we make, or for missing or outdated data that may limit an analysis.

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



SOURCE: Beyond the Stacks: Measuring the Economic and Community Value of Texas Public Libraries
by JBK Economics Group for the Texas Library Association (2026)



Summary of Key Findings

Return on Investment and Other Quantifiable Economic Impacts

- Every \$1 invested in Texas public libraries generates \$4.74 in community value. This is slightly higher and compares favorably with two prior ROI estimates in 2011 (\$4.42)¹ and 2015 (\$4.60).²
- Public library expenditures directly and indirectly support 11,200 jobs in Texas.
- \$808.6 million spent by public libraries in FY2024, including \$717.0 million in operating expenditures and \$91.6 million in capital expenditures.
- \$1.35 billion in statewide economic activity produced by public library spending.
- \$2.478 billion in total economic value of library services statewide.
- \$3.829 billion in the total economic benefits from Texas' public libraries in FY2024.
- \$164 million in total fiscal (tax) impacts in FY2024 at the federal, state, and local level from the economic activity generated by library spending.

Estimates of the Economic Value of Library Services

The research team developed particular methodologies to examine the economic value of many of the traditional services provided by Texas public libraries. The findings are presented in Table 1 next.

Table 1. Statewide Values of Public Library Services, FY2024

Service	Value
Programs	\$58,165,069
Circulation of Physical Materials	\$1,011,796,295
In-Library Use of Materials	\$189,663,338
E-Materials	\$515,350,463
Interlibrary Loans	\$2,027,794
Reference Services	\$23,417,463
Volunteers	\$16,610,679
Computer Terminals	\$163,327,160
Wireless Internet Access	\$204,161,132
Library Website Usage	\$172,207,150
Electronic Databases	\$122,151,648
Total All Services	\$2,478,878,191

¹ Jarrett, J., & Kuipers, R. (2012). *Texas public libraries: Economic benefits and return on investment*. Bureau of Business Research, The University of Texas at Austin. <http://hdl.handle.net/2152/19093>

² Jarrett, J. (2017). *Texas public libraries: Return on investment*. Bureau of Business Research, The University of Texas at Austin. <http://hdl.handle.net/2152/45600>

When the value of services is combined with the economic impact of library capital and operational expenditures, we estimate that the total impact on the Texas economy to have been \$3.8 billion in 2024. By rough comparison, public libraries had about the same economic footprint as the Texas motion picture and sound recording industry (\$2.9 billion in Gross Domestic Product in 2024) or the Texas paper manufacturing industry (\$4.0 billion in Gross Domestic Product in 2024).³ In addition, direct employment by public libraries—at about 8,000 employees with an average annual salary of \$44,595 (excluding benefits) in FY2024—is comparable to the number of people employed as mental health and substance abuse social workers (8,220; average annual salary excluding benefits \$53,450) and paramedics (8,410; average annual salary excluding benefits \$57,590) in Texas.⁴

Survey of Public Library Directors

In the spring of 2026, the research team surveyed directors of 513 Texas public libraries to gather information on services that support local businesses, community-oriented programs and initiatives, and unique library partnerships and activities.⁵

Survey Findings Highlights

Overall:

- 298 responses received for a survey participation rate of 58%.
- Survey responses were representative of the entire universe of public libraries in Texas, based on population sizes served by the libraries.
- Over three-quarters of the respondents lead libraries that serve populations of fewer than 50,000 residents.

Business-Oriented Services:

- 82% of the respondents' libraries provide job application assistance.
- 65% provide business periodicals.
- 60% provide publicly available economic and/or demographic data.

Community-Oriented Services and Resources:

- 93% of respondents' libraries provide voter registration and/or serve as voting locations.
- 84% provide partnerships with local social services agencies
- 68% facilitate applications for government benefits
- 38% provide onsite social services
- 30% provide telehealth rooms and/or resources

³ Bureau of Economic Analysis. (2024). *SAGDP2 Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by state, 2024*, retrieved July 17, 2026. While not a straight “apples to apples” comparison because the Bureau’s GDP estimates lack the economic multipliers we have used to analyze the economic impact made by library operations, these industry comparisons are a conservative and useful yardstick.

⁴ Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2025, May). *Occupational employment and wage statistics (OEWS)*, retrieved July 17, 2026.

⁵ There are 517 public libraries in Texas, but director email addresses were available only for 513 of the 517 at time of survey.

In addition, a very high percentage of responding librarians report that their libraries offer what might be termed “traditional” library community services, such as special events, recreation and leisure space, and hosting regular meetings of local nonprofit groups. More than half of survey respondents said that their libraries now offer “new” items to check out such as tools, art supplies, and audio and production equipment. Nearly half (42%) offer various adaptive technologies.

Library Profiles on Innovative Programs

One of our open-ended questions in the survey asked library directors to provide information about unique community-oriented activities being offered at their libraries, and to provide us with contact information so that our research team could arrange short Zoom interviews with the program managers. Of the 298 overall survey responses, 48 respondents described innovative programs or services at their libraries and offered to meet with the research team. Our team created a set of criteria that included program uniqueness, library size, and geographic location across the state in an effort to present a set of programs illustrating the diversity of services offered by Texas libraries.

From the 48 responses we received, the research team developed 9 short program profiles that illustrate the value and community benefits of special and innovative library programs. Our goal is to use these profiles of libraries from around the state to highlight the variety of ways that public libraries contribute to the economic vitality of their communities. The profiles themselves are presented in Section 5 in the full report. Table 2 includes the names, locations, and program descriptions from these profiles.

Among the significant through-lines common to most of the profiles is the importance of community collaborations that exist to generate new ideas and support programs and services among a disparate group of libraries.

Table 2. Overview of Library Profiles on Innovative Programs

Library Name	City	Program Focus
Speer Memorial Library	Mission	Lawn and Garden Equipment Loan
Harrie P. Woodson Memorial Library	Caldwell	Adult Basic Education Classes
Comanche Public Library	Comanche	Experimenting With New Ideas
Harris County Public Library	Houston	Supporting the Education and Economic Advancement of Unique and Underserved Populations
Plano Public Library	Plano	Workforce Development for People With Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD)
Hondo Public Library	Hondo	Digital and Financial Literacy
Hulsey Public Library	Terrell	GED and ESL Classes
Lewisville Public Library	Lewisville	Expanding Access to State and Federal Benefit Programs
Gatesville Public Library	Gatesville	Low-Vision Services

Communicating Library Value: Storytelling, Engagement, and ROI

To conclude the report, we summarize best practices for communicating the value of public libraries through community and stakeholder engagement highlighting storytelling, ROI, and the library's value proposition to its community. Library leadership will find useful communications strategies to pursue in conveying the economic value of libraries to city councils, county commissioners, and the public.

These best practices draw on research and established practice, connecting both to the library profiles documented in Section 5 of the full report. Key points of these communications best practices include:

- Pair data with narrative or story.
- Communicate benefits rather than program or library features.
- Develop success stories that already exist and maintain a “story database” to draw upon in future outreach and communication campaigns.

The four channels for community engagement are: digital, media partnerships, events, and direct relationship-building with community members, target audiences, and key stakeholders.

Conclusion

Using quantitative and qualitative methods, this report has examined the significant economic contributions that public libraries make to the Texas economy. It is very true that public libraries have intrinsic value that is hard to quantify. What, after all, is the value one could place on literacy promotion for a local resident, in a community, or for democracy more broadly? But in an era of tight public budgets, and to be accountable to the taxpayers who fund those budgets, being able to estimate the economic value of public libraries can add a valuable and effective perspective on the important roles that libraries play in their communities.

At every step, the research team has used conservative analytical techniques to avoid inflating the results. Especially in the Services analysis, we have chosen commonly used library services to analyze and have explicitly presented the arithmetic and econometric calculations we employed in the analysis. In Appendix B, the reader can see summaries of other state-level economic impact studies, and how the results of this study fall squarely in a mid-range of other state-level ROI studies.

We hope that the profiles of particular library programs and services presented here have provided some color and nuance to what can sometimes come across as dry economic analysis. Some of the data collected here highlights the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced the closure of libraries for a year or more and accelerated the adoption of digital and virtual technologies by libraries and patrons alike. We trust that all of the library programs and services noted highlight the human aspect of this analysis and make vivid what can be hidden behind the numbers—that libraries are important and valuable community hubs for small towns and big cities across the state of Texas.

About JBK Economics Group

JBK Economics Group is an independent economic consultancy providing impact studies, cost-benefit analyses, market assessments, and policy briefs to improve economic performance. Focused on nonprofits, small municipalities, state agencies, foundations, trade associations, and startups, the firm conducts data-based economic research to support grant writing, strategy, and policymaking. JBK Economics is led by Dr. Bruce Kellison, who directed the Bureau of Business Research at the IC² Institute (at The University of Texas at Austin) and led dozens of economic impact studies over his 30-year academic career.

About the Texas Library Association

The Texas Library Association, the nation's largest state library membership organization, embraces, unites, and amplifies voices of the library community through advocacy and education to ensure library excellence for all Texans. TLA's membership includes almost 5,000 librarians from academic, public, K-12 school, and special libraries. Throughout its 123-year history, TLA has served as an integral partner, innovative leader, and passionate advocate for Texas libraries and librarians. Visit www.txla.org for more information.