

APRIL 7, 2016

# Libraries and Learning

*Majorities of Americans think local libraries serve the educational needs of their communities and families pretty well and library users often outpace others in learning activities. But many do not know about key education services libraries provide*

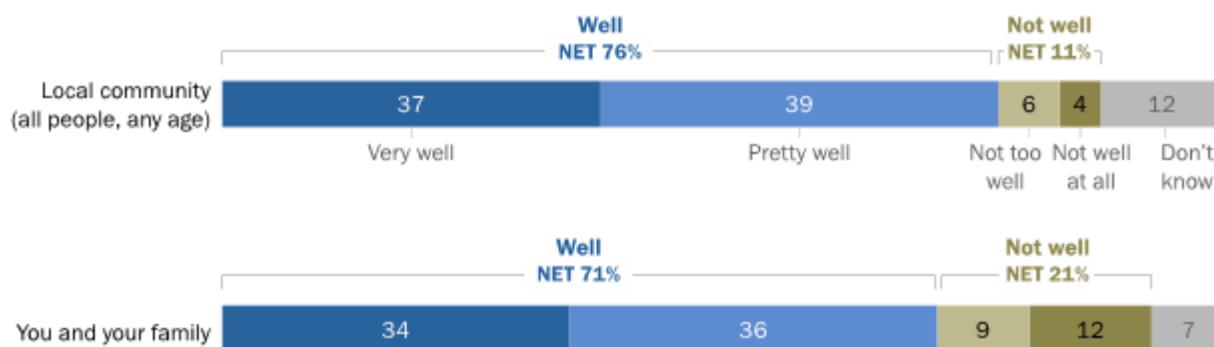
BY LEE RAINIE

Most Americans believe libraries do a decent job of serving the education and learning needs of their communities and their own families. A new survey by Pew Research Center shows that 76% of adults say libraries serve the learning and educational needs of their communities either “very well” (37%) or “pretty well” (39%). Further, 71% say libraries serve their own personal needs and the needs of their families “very well” or “pretty well.”

As a rule, libraries’ performance in learning arenas gets better marks from women, blacks, Hispanics, those in lower-income households, and those ages 30 and older.

## Majorities of adults say their local libraries are serving the educational needs of their communities and their own families at least ‘pretty well’

% of adults who say that local public libraries serve the learning and educational needs of the following groups ...



Note: Those who refused to answer not counted. Some figures reflect rounding

Source: Survey conducted Oct. 13-Nov. 15, 2015.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

At the same time, many do not know that libraries offer learning-related programs and materials such as e-books, career and job resources, and high school certification courses.

### **Library users think of themselves as lifelong learners**

Additionally, these views arise in a context where strong majorities of adults consider themselves “lifelong learners” and libraries around the country are working to fit their programs and services into local educational ecosystems – both the formal parts of it (such as schools) and the informal parts of it (such as “do it yourself” learning opportunities). A [recent Pew Research report](#) found that 73% of adults say the label “lifelong learner” applies “very well” to them. Additionally, 74% of adults have participated in personal learning experiences of various kinds in the previous 12 months – we call them personal learners. And 63% of full- and part-time workers have taken courses or done training on the job to improve their skills in the past year – we called them professional learners.

Recent library users overwhelmingly embrace those ideas and activities. Fully 97% of those who used a library or bookmobile in the past 12 months say that the term “lifelong learner” applies “very well” or “pretty well” to them and a similar share of library website users (98%) also strongly identified with being lifelong learners.

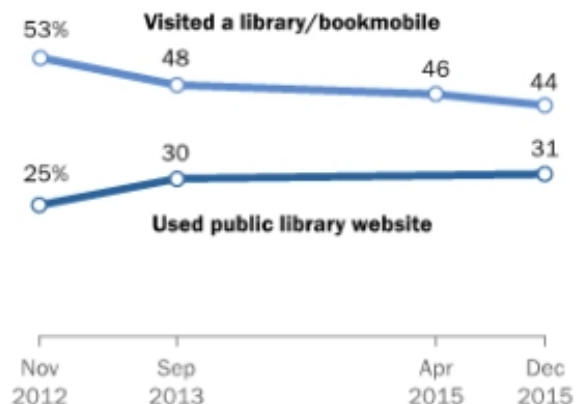
Moreover, 84% of those who visited a library in the past 12 months fit our definition of personal learner, compared with 66% of those who had not recently visited a library or bookmobile. Recent library users are more likely than others to read “how to” publications, take courses related to personal interests, attend learning-related events and meetings, and take online courses.

Interestingly, among workers, recent library users are no more likely than others to fall into the category of professional learners.

### **Library usage continues to evolve**

## Use of libraries drifts down, while use of library websites levels off

% of adults who ... in the past 12 months



Note: Data for April 2015 are not reported for public library website usage because the question wording was not the same in that survey.

Source: Survey conducted Oct. 13-Nov. 15, 2015.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

In addition to examining the role of libraries as contributors to people's learning, this survey also continued the Center's benchmarking of library usage. Some 78% of adults say they have ever gone to a library, while 44% say they went to a library or bookmobile in the past 12 months.

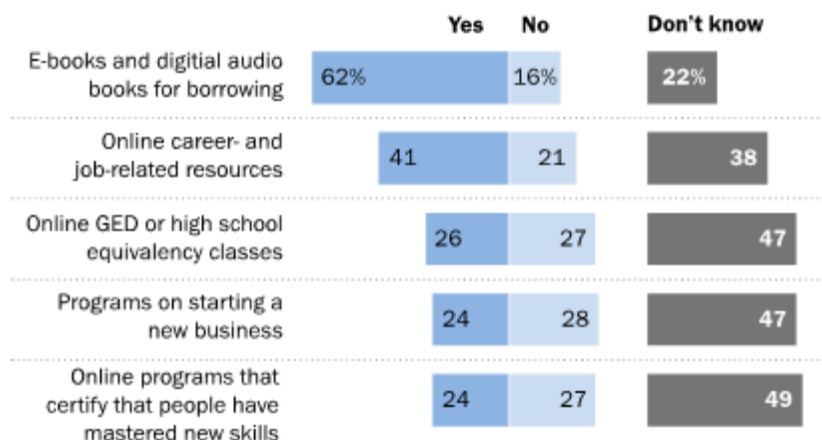
The findings indicate a downward drift in the number of those who use physical library facilities in any given year. In our first survey on this in November 2012, 53% of adults had visited a library or bookmobile in the past 12 months.

Over the same period, the use of library websites has leveled off. In 2013, 30% of adults had used a library website over the past 12 months, while the new finding is that 31% have done so in the past year. Additionally, we found that 9% of adults had used a library-related app in the past 12 months – a first time reading for this question.<sup>1</sup>

### Notable shares of Americans do not know that libraries offer learning-related programs and materials

## Many do not know if their local libraries offer key learning and education resources

*% of adults who say these services are offered by their local libraries*



Source: Survey conducted Oct. 13-Nov. 15, 2015. Those who refused to answer not counted.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

A significant number of libraries have added education- and learning-related material, often in digital form or available on the internet. This survey shows that a portion of adults are aware of those activities, but many do not know about them, including:

E-book borrowing: Fully [90% of public libraries have e-book lending programs](#), according to Information Policy and Access Center (IPAC) at the University of Maryland, and 62% of adults say they know that their local libraries have such programs. At the same time, 22% say they do not know whether e-book lending is done by their libraries and another 16% say it is not done by their community libraries.

Online career and job-related resources: Some 62% of local libraries offer such resources, according to IPAC, and 41% of adults in our survey say they know their local libraries have such material. Still, 38% say they do not know if such resources are offered by their local libraries and another 21% say their libraries do not offer career- and job-related resources.

Online GED or high school equivalency classes: Some 35% of local libraries offer GED prep courses and materials, according to IPAC, and 26% of adults say they know their local libraries offer such programs. Yet nearly half (47%) say they do not know if such programs are offered by their local libraries and another 27% say these kinds of classes are not available in their communities.

Programs on starting a new business: Some 33% of local libraries offer such programs, according to IPAC, and 24% of adults say their local libraries offer programs on starting a

new business. About half (47%) say they do not know if their local libraries do that and another 28% say their public libraries do not offer programs for starting a new business.

Online programs that certify that people have mastered new skills: 24% of adults say their local libraries offer such programs. However, about half of adults (49%) say they do not know if such programs are being offered and another 27% say they are not offered by their local libraries. There are no data about how many libraries offer such programs.

Next: 1. Library users and learning

← PREV PAGE

1 2 3 4 5

NEXT PAGE →

1. In 2014, the Information Policy and Access Center reported that 43% of libraries offer mobile apps. ↩



## Facts are more important than ever

In times of uncertainty, good decisions demand good data. Please support our research with a financial contribution.

DONATE

### REPORT MATERIALS



Complete Report PDF



Topline Questionnaire



Oct. 13-Nov. 15, 2015 – Educational Ecosystem Dataset



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### **Libraries and Learning**

1. Library users and learning
2. How people view libraries as part of community educational systems

Acknowledgments

Methodology

## TOPICS

Internet Activities

Information Seeking

Libraries

Education

Educational Attainment

Life Satisfaction

## RELATED

REPORT | SEP 15, 2015

### **Libraries at the Crossroads**

---

REPORT | MAR 17, 2015

### **Public Libraries and Hispanics**

---

REPORT | MAY 1, 2013

### **Parents, Children, Libraries, and Reading: Select quotes from parents and library staff**

---

REPORT | DEC 11, 2013

### **How Americans Value Public Libraries in Their Communities**

---

REPORT | MAR 22, 2016

### **Lifelong Learning and Technology**

## POPULAR ON PEW RESEARCH

REPORT | APR 15, 2021

## Biden Nears 100-Day Mark With Strong Approval, Positive Rating for Vaccine Rollout

---

FACT TANK | AUG 16, 2019

## What the data says about gun deaths in the U.S.

---

FACT TANK | JAN 17, 2019

## Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins

---

REPORT | APR 7, 2021

## Social Media Use in 2021

---

REPORT | MAR 30, 2021

## Most Democrats and Republicans Know Biden Is Catholic, but They Differ Sharply About How Religious He Is