

# America's Star Libraries, 2016: Top-Rated Libraries

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**AMERICA'S STAR LIBRARIES**

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**All the Stars, State by State**

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We are pleased to announce the results of the ninth edition of the *Library Journal* Index of Public Library Service, sponsored by Baker & Taylor's Bibliostat. The *LJ* Index rates U.S. public libraries based on selected per capita output measures. The 2016 *LJ* Index derives from data recently released by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) for FY14.

In 2016, 7,349 U.S. public libraries qualified to be rated in the *LJ* Index of Public Library Service. This figure is somewhat smaller than last year's, in part owing to the introduction of the new output measure, e-circ. In this edition, there are 260 Star Libraries, each receiving three-star, four-star, or five-star designations.

## Overview of Star Library Changes in 2016

Eligible libraries are grouped by total operating expenditures and then, within each of those groups, rated based on how their five measures compare to the peer group's means (or averages) of these five measures: library visits, circulation, program attendance, and public Internet terminal use—and, now, electronic circulation. As always, the constellation of Star Libraries changes with the data reported, the movement of public libraries from one spending peer group to another, the relative fortunes of libraries in the same peer group, and the actual fortunes of individual libraries.

Table 1 reports the means against which library measures are compared and the standard deviations (SD), which indicate the average difference above or below the mean for all libraries in each spending category.



**TABLE 1 MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS (SD) OF L/ INDEX STATISTICS BY EXPENDITURE CATEGORY, 2016 (BASED ON FY14 DATA)**

PER CAPITA SERVICE OUTPUT EXPENDITURE CATEGORY	LIBRARY VISITS		TOTAL CIRCULATION		CIRCULATION OF ELECTRONIC MATERIALS		TOTAL PROGRAM ATTENDANCE		PUBLIC INTERNET COMPUTER USE	
	MEAN	SD	MEAN	SD	MEAN	SD	MEAN	SD	MEAN	SD
\$30M +	5.34	2.11	10.45	6.70	0.85	0.70	0.36	0.20	1.32	0.66
\$10M-\$29.9M	5.99	3.02	11.45	8.17	0.98	2.00	0.40	0.24	1.25	0.66
\$5M-\$9.9M	6.27	3.98	11.14	8.06	0.76	1.64	0.47	0.39	1.41	1.72
\$1M-\$4.9M	6.57	5.36	9.87	7.84	0.50	0.83	0.55	0.73	1.22	1.15
\$400K-\$999.9K	7.00	6.54	8.91	7.01	0.44	0.91	0.60	0.68	1.30	1.48
\$200K-\$399.9K	6.08	5.89	7.62	6.17	0.36	0.75	0.55	0.68	1.26	1.87
\$100K-\$199.9K	5.59	4.76	7.47	6.28	0.32	0.58	0.56	0.76	1.30	1.80
\$50K-\$99.9K	4.87	3.98	6.45	4.97	0.32	1.49	0.51	0.66	1.21	1.36
\$10K-\$49.9K	3.21	2.68	4.27	3.61	0.21	1.03	0.37	0.70	0.95	1.15

KEY: M-Millions K-Thousands

## New Stars

Table 2 lists counts of libraries belonging to each expenditure category each year. In the 2016 edition, 199 of 2015 Star Libraries retain Star status, though their numbers of stars may have changed. There are also 61 new or returning Star Libraries that were not awarded stars in last year's edition.

Among libraries spending \$30 million or more, the lone new Star Library, with three stars, is Salt Lake County Library Services.

Among libraries spending \$10 million-\$29.9 million, there are seven new Star Libraries. Beverly Hills Public Library, CA, is a new five-star library. Tulsa City-County Library System and Berkeley Public Library, CA, are new four-star libraries. And new three-star libraries include Pikes Peak Library District, CO; Loudoun County Public Library, Leesburg, VA; Central Arkansas Library System; and Charleston County Public Library, SC.

**TABLE 2 PUBLIC LIBRARIES ELIGIBLE FOR THE L/ INDEX AND REPEAT AND NEW STAR LIBRARIES, 2009-16 (BASED ON FY06-14 IMLS DATA)**

EXPENDITURE CATEGORY	NUMBER OF LIBRARIES								
	NOVEMBER 2016 (2014 DATA)	NOVEMBER 2015 (2013 DATA)	NOVEMBER 2014 (2012 DATA)	NOVEMBER 2013 (2011 DATA)	NOVEMBER 2012 (2010 DATA)	NOVEMBER 2011 (2009 DATA)	OCTOBER 2010 (2008 DATA)	NOVEMBER 2009 (2007 DATA)	FEBRUARY 2009 (2006 DATA)
\$30M +	49	51	47	46	44	48	45	36	31
\$10M-\$29.9M	107	112	113	112	114	107	106	98	88
\$5M-\$9.9M	222	209	209	198	191	211	186	176	159
\$1M-\$4.9M	1,401	1,397	1,381	1,367	1,349	1,307	1,282	1,209	1,125
\$400K-\$999.9K	1,414	1,446	1,394	1,395	1,373	1,377	1,333	1,278	1,247
\$200K-\$399.9K	1,171	1,209	1,208	1,174	1,170	1,129	1,087	1,113	1,089
\$100K-\$199.9K	1,180	1,257	1,237	1,251	1,258	1,236	1,204	1,191	1,173
\$50K-\$99.9K	1,055	1,088	1,122	1,111	1,126	1,145	1,128	1,152	1,115
\$10K-\$49.9K	750	894	875	919	945	953	1,036	1,015	1,088
<b>TOTAL LIBRARIES RATED</b>	<b>7,349</b>	<b>7,663</b>	<b>7,586</b>	<b>7,573</b>	<b>7,570</b>	<b>7,513</b>	<b>7,407</b>	<b>7,268</b>	<b>7,115</b>
LIBRARIES: REPEAT STARS (from prior year)	199	207	198	196	203	195	195	208	n/a
LIBRARIES: NEW STARS (no stars prior year)	61	54	60	67	59	67	63	50	n/a
<b>TOTAL STARS</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>263</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>n/a</b>

KEY: M-Millions K-Thousands



Among libraries spending \$5 million–\$9.9 million, there are seven new Star facilities. Washington County Cooperative Library Services, OR, is a new five-star library. Brentwood Public Library, NY; Half Hollow Hills Community Public Library, Dix Hills, NY; and Vernon Area Public Library District, Lincolnshire, IL, are new four-star libraries. New three-star libraries include Pueblo City-County Library District, CO; Cerritos Public Library, CA; and Comsewogue Public Library, Port Jefferson, NY.

Among libraries spending \$1 million–\$4.9 million, there are five new Star Libraries. Lancaster System Administrative Unit, PA, is a new five-star facility. Sanibel Public Library, FL, is a new four-star library. And new three-star libraries include: Mountain Brook–Emmet O’Neal Library, AL; Belvedere-Tiburon Library, CA; and Coal City Public Library District, IL.

Among libraries spending \$400,000–\$999,999, there are eight new Star Libraries. New Port Richey Public Library, FL, and Leslie County Public Library, Hyden, KY, are new five-star libraries. Hewitt Public Library, TX, and Brewton Public Library, AL, are new four-star libraries. And new three-star libraries include: Oak Bluffs Public Library, MA; Homer Public Library, AK; Orrville Public Library, OH; and Bridgeport Public Library, WV.

Among libraries spending \$200,000–\$399,999, there are eight new Star Libraries. Columbiana Public Library, AL, and Richland Community Library, MI, are new five-star libraries. This group has no new four-star libraries but six new three-star institutions: John A. Stahl Library, West Point, NE; Roxana Public Library District, IL; Stinson Memorial Public Library District, Anna, IL; Ak-Chin Indian Community Library, Maricopa, AZ; Kalkaska County Library, MI; and Garden Home Community Library, Portland, OR.

Among libraries spending \$100,000–\$199,999, there are six new Star Libraries. Parker Public Library, AZ, is a new five-star facility. Montevallo–Parnell Memorial Library, AL; Ava Ich Asit Tribal Library, Mohave Valley, AZ; and Quartzsite Public Library, AZ, are new four-star libraries. The two new three-star libraries in this group are Oxford Public Library, IN, and Pentwater Township Library, MI.

Among libraries spending \$50,000–\$99,999, there are eight new Star Libraries. Overbrook Public Library, KS, is a new five-star library. There are four new four-star libraries: Dr. Grace O. Doane Alden Public Library, IA; Gardner Public Library, Wakefield, NE; Huachuca City Public Library, AZ; and Wellsburg Public Library, IA. And new three-star libraries include Buhler Public Library, KS, and Saint Paul Public Library, NE.

Among libraries spending \$10,000–\$49,999, there are 11 new Star Libraries. New five-star libraries are Wilsonville–Vernice Stoudenmire Library, AL, and Double Springs Public Library, AL. The one new four-star library in this group is Pembroke Public Library District, IL. The remaining eight are new three-star libraries, including Bath Public Library, NH; Lanark Public Library, IL; Parker Public Library, SD; Scotland Public Library, SD; Henry D. Moore Library, Steuben, ME; Barton Public Library, VT; Arma City Library, KS; and Gilbertville Public Library, MA.

### More, fewer, and lost Stars

Each year, some libraries that remain in the same expenditure category as they did the previous year earn additional stars compared with the earlier edition. In this 2016 edition, 65 such Star Libraries moved between the three-, four-, and five-star ratings. Of those 65, 16 Star earners moved up from three stars to four, 11 from four stars to five, and—in only one case, Vincent-Lallouise F. McGraw Library, AL—from three stars to five.

Other facilities lost stars between the 2015 and 2016 editions. Without changing expenditure categories, 17 went from five to four stars and 20 went from four stars to three. No libraries dropped from five stars to three.

### Changing Constellations

Ten libraries retained Star Library status despite moving from a lower to a higher expenditure category and, in two cases, the reverse.

Three libraries gained stars between 2015 and 2016 while moving up one expenditure category:



- Princeton Public Library, NJ, four to five stars, from \$1M–\$4.9M to \$5M–\$9.9M
- Brumback Library, Van Wert, OH, three to four stars, \$400K–\$999.9K to \$1M–\$4.9M
- Real County Public Library, Leahey, TX, four to five stars, \$10K–\$49.9K to \$50K–\$99.9K.

Five libraries retained their Star status while moving up one expenditure category:

- Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, three stars, \$10M–\$29.9M in 2015 to \$30M+ in 2016
- Henderson Memorial Public Library Association, Jefferson, OH, three stars, \$200K–\$399.9K in 2015 to \$400K–\$999.9K in 2016
- Beresford Public Library, SD, four stars, \$100K–\$199.9K in 2015 to \$200K–\$399.9K in 2016
- Claude H. Gilmer Memorial Library, Rocksprings, TX, five stars, \$50K–\$99.9K in 2015 to \$100K–\$199.9K in 2016
- North Freedom Public Library, WI, five stars, \$10K–\$49.9K in 2015 to \$50K–\$99.9K in 2016.

Two libraries moved down an expenditure category between 2015 and 2016 while retaining their Star Library status. Skidompha Public Library, Damariscotta, ME, \$400K–\$999.9K to \$200K–\$399.9K, retained its four-star status, while Pelham Library, MA, \$100K–\$199.9K to \$50K–\$99.9K, gained a star, going from four to five.

The other libraries that moved from a lower to a higher expenditure category lost stars but retained their Star Library status.

### Understanding Star Status Changes

Library leaders often wonder why their library's star status changes from year to year. In last year's *LJ* Index article, we discussed several alternative explanations for changes in a library's Star status:

- Which libraries qualify for inclusion in the *LJ* Index in a given year (see FAQ).
- Changes in the output data reported by libraries within a spending peer group.
- Actual local changes in the library's output data.

This year, there is another potential explanation: the first substantial change in the design of the *LJ* Index of Public Library Service. *LJ* Index scores have never been comparable from year to year, and this year's introduction into the calculation of a new per capita statistic, e-circ, only underscores this point (as well as causing the upper range of scores in each expenditure category to increase compared with prior years).

### The Basics & How They're Changing

To receive an *LJ* Index score, a library must have a legal service area population of at least 1,000; spend at least \$10,000 annually; and report all of the data required to calculate its score.

Over this project's nine-year history, there has been a ten percent decline in the number of public libraries that serve a population of fewer than 1,000. According to IMLS's 2016 document, "Supplemental Tables, Public Libraries Survey, Fiscal Year 2014," there were only 972 libraries nationwide serving fewer than 1,000 people. Compare that with IMLS's 2008 document, "Public Libraries Survey, Fiscal Year 2006," in which there were 1,082 libraries nationwide serving fewer than 1,000 people.

There has also been a 58 percent increase in the size of the highest spending group—\$30 million or more—and a 31 percent decrease in the number of libraries in the lowest spending group—\$10K to \$49.9K. Comparing the first *LJ* Index, in 2009 (2006 data) to this year's (2014 data), the number of libraries in the highest spending group has grown from 31 to 49, while the lowest spending group shrank from 1,088 to 750.

Despite the fairly dramatic proportional changes in these basic criteria over the *LJ* Index's history to date, we do not yet see sufficient reason to consider adjusting any of these criteria. Since its earliest years, the *LJ* Index has enjoyed a high level of reporting compliance—the vast majority of libraries that met the population and spending qualifications reported all of the needed data, too. With a new statistic becoming involved in scoring libraries annually—e-circ this year and Wi-Fi access usage next year—it is probably inevitable that more libraries will be excluded from the Index because they fail to report a new statistic. We hope that wishing to remain included in the *LJ* Index and Star Library ratings will serve as an incentive for libraries to be early adopters of these important new output measures.

If you are new to the *LJ* Index and the Star Library ratings, [please consult the FAQ](#), which explains when, why, and how the *LJ* Index and Star Library ratings were created; how libraries qualify to be rated; the sources and limitations of the data used; and how the ratings do—and why they don't—address certain issues.

There are also online-only resources linked from the web version of this article, including an expanded data file on all public libraries that received *LJ* Index ratings in the current edition, so that those from non-Star Libraries can undertake their own “do-it-yourself” peer comparison. Some ideas for such projects were [included in last year's article](#).

» [Next page: “What is E-Circ and Why Did We Add It?”](#)

