

Libraries and Community Engagement

An Analysis of Library Public Programming and Community
Demand for Social Services

Maria Belopolsky
Nola Brooks
Madeline Bryant
Dahlia Elroos
Hana Elbadry
Desanka Malinović
Hannah Stoll

May 8th, 2026

Prepared by:

In partnership with:

the[PaulDouglas](#)institute



MISSION STATEMENT

The Paul Douglas Institute is a student-run, public policy think tank based at the University of Chicago. Inspired by the life and work of Professor and Senator Paul H. Douglas, we channel public policy interest on campus into solution-oriented research projects that allow students to make an impact on the legislative process. To this end, we use a multidisciplinary approach to produce rigorous, data-driven social science research that is innovative, practical, and free from political affiliation. We often work with legislators and civic organizations, and welcome both research commissions and partnerships.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the following for their immense help in data collection: Austin Public Library staff, Laurie Covington (Houston Public Library), Kelly Pearson (Phoenix Public Library), Dale McNeill (San Antonio Public Library), Ian A. Navas (Virginia Beach Public Library), Savannah Ball and Jaime Nix (Wichita Public Library).

Thank you to Jess Hagman (University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign) for her guidance in data analysis.

Thank you to John Chrastka (EveryLibrary Institute) for his valuable mentorship throughout this project's many stages.

This research would not have been possible without all of your help!

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	3
Abstract	4
Introduction	4
Literature Review	5
Background and Motivation.....	5
An Analysis of Public Programming.....	7
Funding as a Means to Library Operations.....	9
Libraries as a Community Body.....	10
Methodology	12
Methodology Goals.....	12
Data Collection.....	12
Statistical Analysis.....	16
Results	17
Raw Counts.....	17
Monotonic Trends.....	18
ANOVA.....	19
Discussion	22
Funding and Budgets.....	22
Staff and Program Support.....	23
Policy Recommendations	27
Dissemination Through the Public Library.....	27
Leveraging Libraries as Venues.....	29
Social Work in the Public Library.....	30
Conclusion	31
References	33
Appendix	38
Table 1.....	38
Table 3.....	38
Table 4.....	39
Table 5.....	40

Abstract

In recent years, public libraries in the United States have transitioned from traditional lending institutions into community hubs that facilitate essential social services such as disaster relief and legal aid. In light of this shift, our paper investigates the community's demand for social services and the library's efficacy in providing them. While previous studies have framed library programming as essential to community well-being, little research has measured its actual activity against community need. We leverage data from six target libraries to answer the following question: to what extent does library public programming fulfill a demand for social services, and what institutional factors (e.g., funding and staff) constrain their capacity to do so? While there is evidence that libraries are providing social service programs, we find no significant association between the distribution of 211 social service requests and library programming. Moreover, government funding does not predict how much programming is offered. As a result, we theorize that library programming relies on funding, outside of traditional government contributions, and that library staff are a crucial component to the persistence of service-related programming despite funding scarcity. Based on these findings, we argue that restructuring social service provision through collaborative efforts will help staff implement more service-related programs. The policy recommendations are consistent with our findings that recognize the difficulties of social service program development, while emphasizing the public library's strength as a trusted community institution.

Introduction

The relationships maintained between American public libraries and their patrons have influenced the services that they provide. While historically these institutions were restricted scholastic spaces, they gradually became more embedded in their communities and supported the most vulnerable members of society.¹ Libraries nurture these service-relationships with their audiences through curated and community-oriented public programming.

Past research has sought to define public programming to create a common language across studies. Thus, the “public” refers to the specific audience a library serves, and towards whom its programs and initiatives are geared and “programming” encompasses the many events offered: from K-12 book clubs and all age chess tournaments, to English language lessons for non-native speakers.²

From an application standpoint, public libraries have attempted to use their programming to respond and engage with the social, economic, and political shifts that have affected their service areas. In particular, the growth of service-oriented public programming emerged after the American

¹ Dahlkild, Nan. 2011. “The Emergence and Challenge of the Modern Library Building: Ideal Types, Model Libraries, and Guidelines, from the Enlightenment to the Experience Economy.” *Library Trends* 60 (1): 11–42. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2011.0027>.

² Barchas-Lichtenstein, Jena -, Rebecca J. Norlander, John Fraser, Mary Davis Fournier, John Voiklis, Kathryn Nock, and Elizabeth Danter. 2020. “Categorizing Library Public Programs.” *The Library Quarterly* 90, no. 4 (October): 563 - 579. <https://doi.org/10.1086/710259>.

Library Association (ALA) established its Public Program Office (PPO) in 1992, aimed at improving the quality and bolstering the quantity of service programs libraries provided. Their support manifested in programming inspiration and resource access for event implementation. The legacy of this change is reflected in the fact that, within the past 10 years, public libraries have experienced a steady increase in the attendance of their in-person programming events, while actual circulation of materials has declined.³ As such, many Americans have come to find their local public library as spaces of support, aid, and community engagement. Relatedly, studies examining public library funding find that libraries are spending more per capita and providing more services to their communities while their funding has concurrently experienced a decrease, or at best, stagnation.⁴

With these two factors in mind, namely, that modern public libraries are spending more towards social services for their community members and that they may work with less funding than is comfortable, we seek to investigate the relationship between the public programming provided by libraries and the expressed needs of their communities. By utilizing 211 calls to measure this need, we shift the discussion from inward operations to the outward impact of libraries when they inhabit the role of social service providers. Our investigation and policy recommendations aim at helping public libraries more feasibly aid their communities.

Literature Review

Background and Motivation

Recent historical literature considers the evolution of modern libraries to be closely related to the growing accessibility of reading, information, and knowledge associated with the Western Enlightenment.⁵ Libraries were once institutions of restricted knowledge whose information was exclusively housed for nobility and restricted from the public. As Enlightenment ideals grew predominant over the following centuries, libraries became increasingly accessible to the public, and thus central to public knowledge.⁶

The public library's engagement with social progress ties closely with the public's investment in library maintenance. In 1833, the first tax-supported library in the US opened.⁷ Soon after came the public library movement of the 1840s and 1850s, which advocated for an informed citizenry to maintain effective democracy.⁸ Libraries became establishments that the public relied upon for

³ Review of Use of Public Libraries. n.d. Amacad.org. American Academy of Arts and Sciences. <https://www.amacad.org/search?keywords=Use+of+Public+Libraries>.

⁴ American Academy of Arts and Sciences. 2018. "Public Library Revenue, Expenditures, and Funding Sources." American Academy of Arts and Sciences. <https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/public-life/public-library-revenue-expenditures-and-funding-sources>.

⁵ Dahlkild, Nan. 2011. "The Emergence and Challenge of the Modern Library Building: Ideal Types, Model Libraries, and Guidelines, from the Enlightenment to the Experience Economy." *Library Trends* 60 (1): 11–42. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2011.0027>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ 2024. Gratefulamericanfoundation.org. 2024. <https://gratefulamericanfoundation.org/where-was-the-first-tax-supported-library-located/>.

⁸ Horrigan, John. n.d. "Libraries, Trust and Social Capital Libraries Are Highly Trusted Institutions That Cultivate Social Capital in the Communities They Serve." https://www.urbanlibraries.org/files/ULC_White-Papers_LIBRARIES-TRUST-AND-SOCIAL-CAPITAL.pdf.

accurate information that would impact the future of its country; even today, surveys show that libraries are one of the most trusted government institutions.⁹ This trust has driven their reputation as community gathering places and safe havens for their members when visiting,¹⁰ indicating that they possessed a growing social role distinct from that of other service providing government bodies.

In the 2000s, public libraries have adopted another role, in which they have been regarded not only as open sources of knowledge, but also as crucial hubs for social services through public programming.¹¹ This shift is in part driven by the public's consistent trust in public libraries versus other government agencies, and is most recently driven by the Covid-19 pandemic. Following 2020, public libraries saw increased needs from their communities relating to financial, housing, health, and more. Though libraries had already been in the process of making their classes, materials, and services available via virtual mediums, these efforts were accelerated once Covid-19 restrictions were implemented, and members took advantage of their availability.¹² As compensation for their efforts, libraries were eligible for a portion of the \$200 million dollars made available by the American Rescue Plan Act in 2021 for the purpose of assisting libraries in their pandemic efforts.¹³ However, this funding only accounted for the immediate effects of the pandemic, and not the long-term impacts of their efforts. After the pandemic, libraries were not only responsible for providing both in-person and digital services, but also experienced growing demand for the social services they provided during the pandemic.¹⁴ Library staff and resources have been redirected to support the public's unmet social needs, despite little support.¹⁵

The role of public libraries in the communities they serve has been expanding over the past decade. This shift has been widely accepted by Americans: when surveyed about what programming they wanted to see most from public libraries, a majority were overwhelmingly in favor of services that were broader than education, such as job and employment services, classes, cultural events, and third spaces – environments distinct from home or the workplace, where people can gather and find community.¹⁶ In fact, in the past decade, libraries have experienced a decline in circulation of physical materials, whereas there has been a steady increase in the public's attendance of their

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Dahlkild, Nan. 2011. "The Emergence and Challenge of the Modern Library Building: Ideal Types, Model Libraries, and Guidelines, from the Enlightenment to the Experience Economy." *Library Trends* 60 (1): 11–42. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2011.0027>.

¹² "Public Libraries Innovate to Serve Vulnerable Populations on the Front Lines of COVID-19," Urban Libraries Council, accessed April 29, 2026, <https://www.urbanlibraries.org/newsroom/public-libraries-innovate-to-serve-vulnerable-populations-on-the-front-lines-of-covid-19>.

¹³ "American Rescue Plan - Library Relief | ALA," accessed April 29, 2026, <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/federal-resources/library-funding/american-rescue-plan-library-relief>.

¹⁴ Brian Real, "Public Libraries in the Wake of COVID-19, Part 1: Public Programming, Circulating Materials, and Digital Shifts," *Libri* 76, no. 1 (2026): 29–41, <https://doi.org/10.1515/libri-2025-0088>.

¹⁵ Rose Artushin, Heather. 2024. Review of The Evolution of Library Social Work. Social Work Blog (blog). May 6, 2024. <https://www.socialworkblog.org/advocacy/2024/05/the-evolution-of-library-social-work/>.

¹⁶ Pew Research. 2013. Review of Part 4: What People Want from Their Libraries. [Pewresearch.org](https://www.pewresearch.org). January 13, 2013.

in-person programming events.¹⁷ The literature suggests that the role of public libraries has become about serving the community and that the public is widely receptive to this goal, but we still require more knowledge about whether those services accurately reflect community needs and whether modern libraries are equipped to sustain these programs, given funding restraints.

An Analysis of Public Programming

Library public programming has been the subject of extensive analysis and meta-analysis within the past decade as civil demand for library services has risen. As such, it is essential to understand the term public programming as consisting of two key factors:

1. The public refers to the specific audience that a library serves. This is impacted not just by library type (e.g. academic, public, school) but also by factors such as geographic location (urban or rural). Understanding the public behind a library is crucial to understanding its aims as a community actor.¹⁸
2. A program, according to the National Impact of Library Public Programs Assessment (NILPPA) of 2019, is “an intentional service or event in a group setting developed proactively to meet the needs or interests of an anticipated target audience.”¹⁹ Program can describe a variety of events including book clubs and movie nights, or English language classes for non-native speakers.

Public libraries, in particular, use their programming to service their communities, acting as the “first-responders” to social, economic, and political shifts that affect their audiences.²⁰ Community members who require non-emergency assistance typically seek their local library for services or referrals to external organizations. Current literature has focused on solidifying methods of categorization and examination of public programming. These goals are of particular interest to both the libraries themselves and to independent library grantmakers that require more robust tools for examining the institutions they look to invest in.

Current scholarly analysis breaks down public programming into four categories. The paper from the NILPPA 2019 Summative Report is quite informative and details four distinct dimensions of program categorization.²¹

¹⁷ Review of Use of Public Libraries. n.d. Amacad.org. American Academy of Arts and Sciences. <https://www.amacad.org/search?keywords=Use+of+Public+Libraries>.

¹⁸ Barchas-Lichtenstein, Jena -, Rebecca J. Norlander, John Fraser, Mary Davis Fournier, John Voiklis, Kathryn Nock, and Elizabeth Danter. 2020. “Categorizing Library Public Programs.” *The Library Quarterly* 90, no. 4 (October): 563 - 579. <https://doi.org/10.1086/710259>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Mary Davis Fournier, John Voiklis, Kathryn Nock, and Elizabeth Danter. 2019. “National Impact of Library Public Programs Assessment: Summative Report.”

1. Library Profile – Consisting of the primary subdivision of library “type” (public, academic, K-12, etc.), along with geographic location, size, capacity, etc.²²
2. Program Characteristic – Rather than taking a typological (idealized and descriptive type, not supported necessarily by empirical evidence) approach and emphasizing the content of the programs, both papers instead emphasize the intended outcomes of a given program, whether participants are gaining new knowledge or skills, participating in fun community events, or changing their behavior. This prioritizes looking at how value and impact accumulate within the audience rather than whether certain program topics are present or absent.
3. Program Audience – An informed understanding of what subset of the public is being addressed by a program. Does a program’s scope include the entire breadth of the community, or perhaps specific subsections, restricted by age, language, etc? Further, understanding the scope entails considering not only the targeted audience, but also collecting information on the actual audience that a program serves in order to assess whether community impact goals are being sufficiently met.
4. Program Administration – The organizations through which a program is provided to the public. Considering how programs can be developed is valuable for gauging the possibilities of potential impact. This entails looking at whether the program is financed and developed by the library itself, with aid of a partner organization and community partner, or with a regional or national organization. Understanding the role of partner institutions and patrons influences the extent to which libraries can provide necessary programs to their communities that might be out of the direct expertise of their staff.

This dimensional categorization of libraries is integral, considering the rising emphasis on measuring community impact. The opening of the 2014 NILPPA White Paper introduces the philosophical foundation of their research as the belief that “ the effectiveness of library programming can be measured in meaningful qualitative and quantitative ways that illustrate deep impact, enhance institutional strength, and address and reflect community needs.”²³ This comes with the understanding that measuring “impact” can be extremely difficult when considering that many times, it is an intangible and individual change in a community member. As such, the dimensional framework above describes an approach to identifying and measuring library impact even when the benefits are more implicit.

Funding as a Means to Library Operations

Most of libraries’ revenues come from public funding. In 2018, 86% of library revenue came from local governments, while state funding represented less than 7% of revenue, and federal

²² Barchas-Lichtenstein, Jena, Rebecca J. Norlander, John Fraser, Barchas-Lichtenstein, Jena -, Rebecca J. Norlander, John Fraser, Mary Davis Fournier, John Voiklis, Kathryn Nock, and Elizabeth Danter. 2020. “Categorizing Library Public Programs.” *The Library Quarterly* 90, no. 4 (October): 563 - 579. <https://doi.org/10.1086/710259>.

²³ American Library Association. 2014. “National Impact of Library Public Programs Assessment White Paper.” Chicago.

funding, donations, fees, and grants together represented 7% of library revenue.²⁴ Though the share of funding from each level of government varies between libraries, funding in general largely dictates who libraries can hire, what materials they can provide patrons with, and what kinds of programs they can offer.

When funding environments change, librarians must reassess their allocation of resources. In one study, reactions to budget concerns after an economic downturn in the late 2000s and early 2010s, libraries “showed a strong tendency toward eliminating print resources in their strategic planning designed to adjust to the ‘new reality’ they face.”²⁵ Many reported they intended to shift money to more inexpensive digital resources, including “open source” content access that could be offered widely to patrons. Further, many librarians reported either deciding to “forego replacing departing staff members (nearly 54%) or eliminating positions (31.7%)” to adjust. 62.9% of surveyed librarians planned to reduce technical services staff. The economic downturn likely affected government revenues which alternate the resources libraries could offer.

In 2025, the Trump administration’s cuts to federal library funding, especially its large cuts to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), further illustrated libraries’ dependence on government funding to maintain their services. These cuts generated significant anxiety in many libraries, though many were later reversed. The American Library Association (ALA) documented examples of libraries’ reactions across the country.²⁶ In Nebraska, one library weighed “cutting their general library services and program budget to ensure internet access if the federal E-Rate Program ends.”²⁷ A library director in Montana said his library expected “to lose a little over \$6,000 in the coming year, which is bigger than their annual book buying budget.”²⁸ Much of that money went to a monthly data bill for device hotspots, and the director said he felt “they will have to cut their devices from 8 to 1, unless the county steps in.”²⁹ These two libraries serve rural communities, and their experiences in 2025 reflect the vulnerability of libraries in rural and low-income areas in particular. In areas where local property taxes, which constitute most of library revenue, are low, community need for library services is often high, and funding cuts can be particularly impactful.³⁰

Libraries’ reactions to increased budgets, in contrast, reveal the range of possibilities that increases in library funding offer. While library budgets have largely decreased in recent years, they grew in 2023, which led many libraries to be optimistic about resource and service expansions.³¹ According to *The Library Journal’s* 2023-2024 annual report, the largest priorities were staffing

²⁴ Sciences, Academy of Arts And. n.d. “Public Library Revenue, Expenditures, and Funding Sources.” American Academy of Arts & Sciences.

<https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/public-life/public-library-revenue-expenditures-and-funding-sources>.

²⁵ Collins, Tim. 2012. “The Current Budget Environment and Its Impact on Libraries, Publishers and Vendors.” *Journal of Library Administration* 52 (1): 18–35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2012.630643>.

²⁶ American Library Association. n.d. “Library Funding Stories.”

<https://www.ala.org/advocacy/show-up-for-our-libraries/funding-stories>.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Candid. 2025. “The Funding Crisis Facing America’s Public Libraries.” September 4, 2025.

<https://candid.org/blogs/todays-funding-crisis-facing-us-public-libraries/>.

³¹ Peet, Lisa. 2024. “A Complex Landscape | Budgets and Funding 2024.” *Library Journal*. February 12, 2024.

<https://www.libraryjournal.com/story/a-complex-landscape-budgets-and-funding-2024>.

increases, as well as materials, building maintenance, outreach, and technology offerings. The reasons for the libraries' budget increases were complex, but included national economic improvements that trickled down to increased local funding. 67% of libraries surveyed reported local funding increases that year, while 26% and 24% reported state and grant funding increases, respectively. Further, 49% of libraries said they would increase technology spending, and 50% said they would increase programming spending, in the following year.

Libraries as a Community Body

Public libraries are chiefly divided into two main subtypes:

1. **Municipal Public Libraries** – The municipality can stand in for the city, town, or county in which a library is located. As such, the municipality votes to establish the library, for which the municipality's governing board approves a budget for the library. This is collected through a tax levy (property taxes applied to properties within the municipality to fund the operations of the library). The library board members are citizens of the municipality who are appointed and confirmed by a municipal governing board.³²
2. **Special District Public Libraries** – These are established by a special act of the state legislature, and/or with the vote of those residing within the special district. Each SDPL is unique and is designed to provide services to the district's constituents in a way that the municipality or state does not. The budget (also based on tax levies) for the SDPL is voted and approved by the district voters, though the library can petition to receive a tax levy from the municipality if legislation permits it. The library board members are residents of the district who are elected by residents of the district.³³

With both public library subtypes, it is understood that the “public” owns the library, electing either municipality officials in the former case or library trustees in the latter to attend to its needs. What is thus emphasized is the role of the immediate constituents in the establishment, maintenance, and, most importantly, funding of public libraries. The existing literature on the funding of public libraries indicates that a vast majority of funding comes from aforementioned tax levies at the municipal level. As of 2018, state funding may be as low as 7% on average, and federal funding makes up only a portion of the “other” funding that 7% of public libraries receive, such as external grants, donations, and fees.³⁴

In addition, the funding that public libraries do receive from their municipality constituents is controlled and voted on by said constituents. There is no minimum requirement as to how much money should be allocated towards the upkeep of public libraries. As such, the majority of these

³² New York State Library Editors. 2026. “Resources: Public Library District Toolkit: Strategies to Assure your Library's Legal and Financial Stability: Preface.” NYS Library LibGuides. <https://nyslibrary.libguides.com/pldtoolkit>.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ American Academy of Arts and Sciences. 2018. “Public Library Revenue, Expenditures, and Funding Sources.” American Academy of Arts and Sciences. <https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/public-life/public-library-revenue-expenditures-and-funding-sources>.

levies only cover the essential services public libraries provide, with most libraries relying heavily on third-party grants or independent foundations that work with libraries to increase funding (such as with fundraisers, auctions of books, etc.) and maintain strong community engagement between the library and the community it is servicing.

The existing literature on library funding is keen to point out a growing, worrisome issue; public libraries are spending more per capita and providing more services to their communities while their funding has concurrently experienced a decrease, or at best, stagnation. A study by the American Academy for Arts and Sciences, examining public library funds and expenditures from 1995 to 2018, found that while library expenditures were up 32%, state funding in comparison dropped 5% from an already low 12% stake.³⁵

More specifically, there exists a large discrepancy between the value of the services provided by public libraries and the funding received. A framework to understand this inequality is employed by Million and Bossaller of the EveryLibrary Institute, which looks at public library funding through the context of core and discretionary services as well as core and discretionary spending. These terms can be defined as such:

1. Core Services – those which a municipality is by law responsible for providing to its residents. These services are supported by required governmental spending.³⁶
2. Discretionary Services – those which are not required by law to be provided to residents; these services often augment or supplement core services, while being funded by discretionary funding (allocated through appropriations processes).³⁷

What Million and Bossaller find is that public libraries are increasingly providing core services, such as computer and internet access, and discretionary services that enhance core areas, such as the role of after-school STEM programming in augmenting K-12 education, that should be fully provided by other governmental agencies. They find that on average, per capita spending was \$2,121.35 on elementary and secondary education, \$933.21 on high education, \$366.15 on law enforcement and public safety, and only \$39.83 on library services.³⁸ It is notable then, that public libraries have taken on some of the functions of designated agencies that are much better funded. We recognize that the functions of libraries are not directly comparable to those of schools and policing, which explains some of the lower expenditures. However, library funding still seems too low considering how vital they are for the provision of these other services. The mechanisms that lead to this discrepancy are likely twofold. First, funding for such services is determined by a “priority list” at the hands of state officials, and second, that libraries are not recognized for the provision of any of these services, core or discretionary, thus leaving libraries in a position of constantly needing to justify and advocate for their funding.³⁹

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Million, A. J., and Jenny Bossaller. 2023. “Funding Our Priorities: Comparisons of Public Library Funding and Services with Other Sectors in Post-COVID America.” *The Political Librarian* 6 (2). https://www.everylibraryinstitute.org/funding_priorities_2023.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

While previous research has examined the internal system of library operations or their outward influence during the pandemic, our research aims to understand libraries as continuous suppliers of social services and explore the potential longevity of their role within the recent environment. Those who have never considered libraries as social service providers may wonder what tangible impacts result from libraries' inability to continue or increase social service-related programs. We find that beyond being a trusted institution for community members, libraries are oftentimes the most convenient and committed to their duties in public servitude.⁴⁰ In the areas that our target libraries serve, there do exist external organizations that provide social services akin to what is available through library programming; however, their number and effectiveness have declined over the last few years as a result of budget cuts and the aftereffects of Covid-19.⁴¹ Meanwhile, the literature suggested an increasing burden borne by libraries to provide social services.⁴² What it further points to is that though public libraries are increasingly stepping in to fill the gaps of governmental agencies in terms of service, the funding they are receiving is not reflecting such changes. We attempt to quantify the public library's contributions to social services and further detail the features of the modern public library that either qualify or inhibit their new role.

Methodology

Methodology Goals

To evaluate how library public programming is associated with community need, we classified public programming and non-emergency calls made through 211 lines into 12 event categories inspired by the framework developed by the National Impact of Library Public Programs Assessment (NILPPA). The aggregated data covered a 4 to 6 year period across 6 public library systems. The data was analyzed using the Mann-Kendall Trend test and the ANOVA F-test to detect similar trends in programming and call categories.

Data Collection

Our initial outreach was guided by a list, provided by our partner organization, that contained the largest 150 libraries by population size in 2021. From this list, we narrowed outreach to municipal public libraries whose legal base was a “city” (e.g. the Los Angeles Public Library). After this stage, we obtained 30 libraries to whom we emailed data requests.

After initial outreach, our final sample included the following six libraries: Austin Public Library, Houston Public Library, San Antonio Public Library, Virginia Beach Public Library, Phoenix Public Library, and Wichita Public Library. Due to the variation in record keeping across libraries, our sample units provided anywhere between 4 and 6 years of data over the period from 2019 to

⁴⁰ Horrigan, John. n.d. “Libraries, Trust and Social Capital Libraries Are Highly Trusted Institutions That Cultivate Social Capital in the Communities They Serve.”

⁴¹ Dilworth, Kathryn. 2021. “Philanthropy in Public Libraries: Its Impact on Community Well-Being Missions.” International Journal of Community Well-Being, August. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42413-021-00140-8>.

⁴² Ibid.

2026. Given that the Mann-Kendall test compared variation within the library, rather than between, we elected to preserve the range of data provided instead of trimming all events to 4 year periods.

Our second dataset measured community need, which we proxied through 211 calls, a non-emergency line through which people can inquire about social services. We obtained records of these calls through 211 Counts, a database specifically for tracking the frequency of calls in areas. However, the 211 Counts geographic parameter does not provide “city” as an option. Thus, we narrowed our scope of 211 calls to either region or zip code matching our target libraries, based on their availability within the system. As a result, our records of social service calls are not a 1:1 match to the libraries’ service area, but they remain a good proxy of the issues that libraries might be sensitive to within their community.

Because the literature identifies funding as one of the main constraints to public library operations, we were interested in the available government revenue for each of our target libraries and its association with social service-related programs. These statistics were gathered from the Public Libraries Survey (PLS), a data tool administered by the Institute of Museum and Library Services through which participating libraries respond to inquiries regarding funding, staff, and operations.

Following the acquisition of these datasets, the next stage of data collection was to classify library programs and 211 calls into categories for comparison. Inspired by the NILPPA’s framework for describing library public programs, our categories were most similar to the “Program Characteristics” dimension, a description of which can be found in Figure 1.⁴³ We aimed to capture the library’s role as a facilitator of particular outcomes rather than a convenient space for these interactions to take place. For example, library-sponsored tutoring programs would be considered education programs, but not outreach programs held in schools; the distinction being that in the former, the library acts as the teacher and in the latter as a setting. Hence, our categories should be understood to refer to the role of the library. Table 1 contains the finalized 12 categories; the columns include the category name, the definition, the abbreviation utilized for this report, the variable name for the following statistical analysis, and an example of the program.

Figure 1

⁴³ Barchas-Lichtenstein, Jena, Rebecca J. Norlander, John Fraser, Mary Davis Fournier, John Voiklis, Kathryn Nock, and Elizabeth Danter. 2019.

What Makes a Library Program?

DIMENSION		PRIMARY SUBDIMENSION	OTHER SUBDIMENSIONS
LIBRARY PROFILE		Library Type - Public - Academic - K-12 - Special	Library Subtype Geographic Area Community Demographics Library Size and Capacity
PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS		Primary Intended Outcome - Participants learn new knowledge - Participants learn new skills - Participants change their attitudes - Participants change their behaviors - Participants gain awareness of library resources, services, or programs - Participants have fun or are inspired - Together, libraries and communities build stronger and healthier communities	Program Topic Program Format Location Deliverer Program Frequency
PROGRAM AUDIENCE		Audience Scope - Appealing to a library's entire audience - Appealing to a subset of the library's entire audience	Target Audience Demographics Actual Audience Demographics
PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION		Development Model - Developed by the library itself - Developed by or with a community partner - Developed by a national or regional organization	Funding (library, patron, partner, etc.) Specific Sponsors or Partners

Table 1

Program Name	Definition - Programs\Events for...	Paper Abbreviation	Analysis Variable	Example
Housing and Shelter	...finding and maintaining housing	Shelter	shelter_pro	Shelter referrals
Health and Human Services	...fostering healthy habits and practices	Health	health_pro	Blood drives
Career, Job, Employment, and Income	...finding work, building a career, acquiring a job	Career	career_pro	Resume workshops
Household, Clothing, and Utilities	...obtaining household items/clothes and paying bills	Household	household_pro	Clothing drives
Childcare, Parenting, and Engagement	...providing childcare and parenting assistance	Childcare	child_pro	Afterschool programs
Fun and Enrichment Activities (all ages)	...promoting hobbies and activities for enjoyment	Fun	fun_pro	Book club
Government and Legal	...legal advice and navigating government entities	Government	govt_pro	Citizenship classes
Civic Engagement and Social Services	...fostering community well-being, activism, and addressing underserved communities	Civic	civic_pro	Community discussions
Education	...bridging formal education and learning gaps	Education	education_pro	Language practice
Transportation	...acquiring knowledge or access to transportation options	Transport	transport_pro	Cycling groups
Disaster Relief	...navigating the aftermath of natural disasters	Disaster	disaster_pro	Warming spots
Other	...catching everything else	Other	other_pro	Mobile library

The above categories were used to classify the library programs and 211 calls gathered from the 211 database. Because 211 Counts already aggregates calls by request type, their labels were

mapped to our categories and manually entered into tables. A similar approach was replicated for library programs, using library-assigned event types as the mapping variable. However, as our target libraries differed in their assigned descriptors, we utilized GPT-5-mini, a large language model (LLM) API, to gather and assign our labels based on the provided category definitions. For libraries that did not provide assigned event types and programs that were simply missing this variable, the algorithm assigned one of our labels using the event title and target audience as a reference. We reviewed the automated assignments for accuracy, adjusting counts when we believed certain programs were misclassified. By the end of this data preparation, we possessed one table per library with counts for each program type, call type, and funding.

Statistical Analysis

Two statistical approaches were applied to analyze the relationship between library programming and community need, as proxied by coded programming data and 211 counts, respectively. Consistency in the results of these two approaches would indicate that the project's overall findings are robust to different methodological assumptions and processes.

The first approach was the Mann-Kendall Test, which assesses whether time-series data has a monotonic trend.⁴⁴ For each library, this test is applied to the yearly data for each event and 211 types. The formula below will capture the sign of the change in each of these numbers per year to measure whether the numbers tend to increase or decrease.⁴⁵

$$S = \sum_{i=1}^{n-1} \sum_{j=i+1}^n \text{sign}(x_j - x_i)$$

The null hypothesis for this test is that $S=0$, indicating that there is no monotonic trend in a dataset over time, and the alternative hypothesis will be two-sided, that is, $S>0$ or $S<0$, indicating a trend in either the positive or negative direction, represented by a value of tau on a scale from -1 to 1. In addition to a line chart, this test helps us to determine statistically significant monotonic changes in programming data and 211 counts over time that could reveal similarities between the trends of these two datasets.

In an effort to compare programming and funding between libraries, we utilized the ANOVA F-test; we sought differences in programming per branch and funding per branch. The following formula is used to calculate the F-statistic:

$$F = \frac{MS_{trt}}{MSE}$$

The F-statistic is a measure of how the variation caused by different treatments compares to the natural variation in the data. The libraries were treated as treatment groups, and the means of

⁴⁴ Clinton, Nicholas. "Non-Parametric Trend Analysis." *Google for Developers*, 2020, developers.google.com/earth-engine/tutorials/community/nonparametric-trends.

⁴⁵ Zaiontz, Charles. "Mann-Kendall Test | Real Statistics Using Excel." *Real-Statistics.com*, real-statistics.com/time-series-analysis/time-series-miscellaneous/mann-kendall-test/.

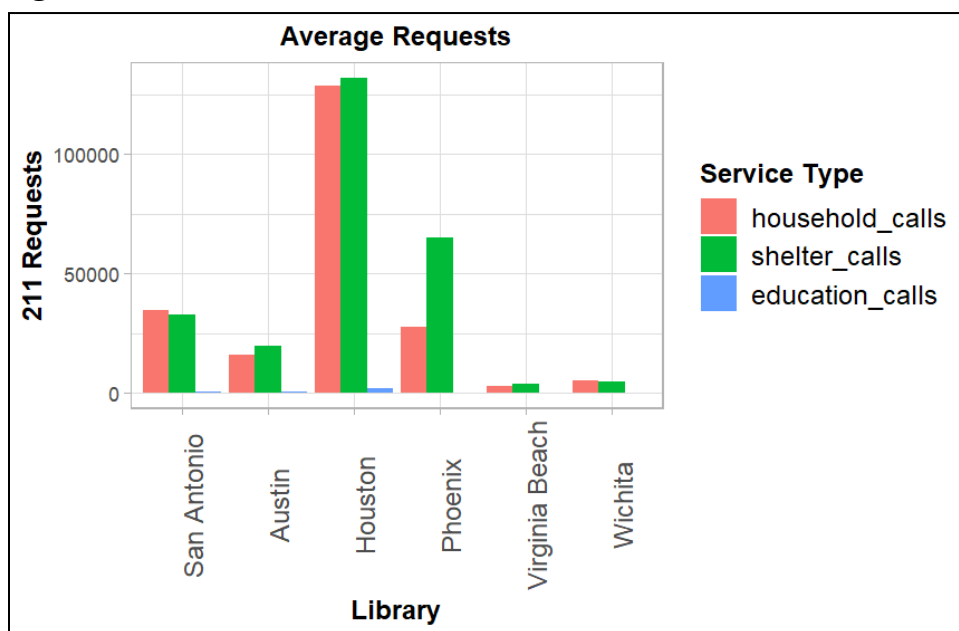
library programs and government funding were treated as the variables of interest. Taken together, these tests reveal patterns among library programs, 211 calls, and funding.

Results

Raw Counts for 211 Calls

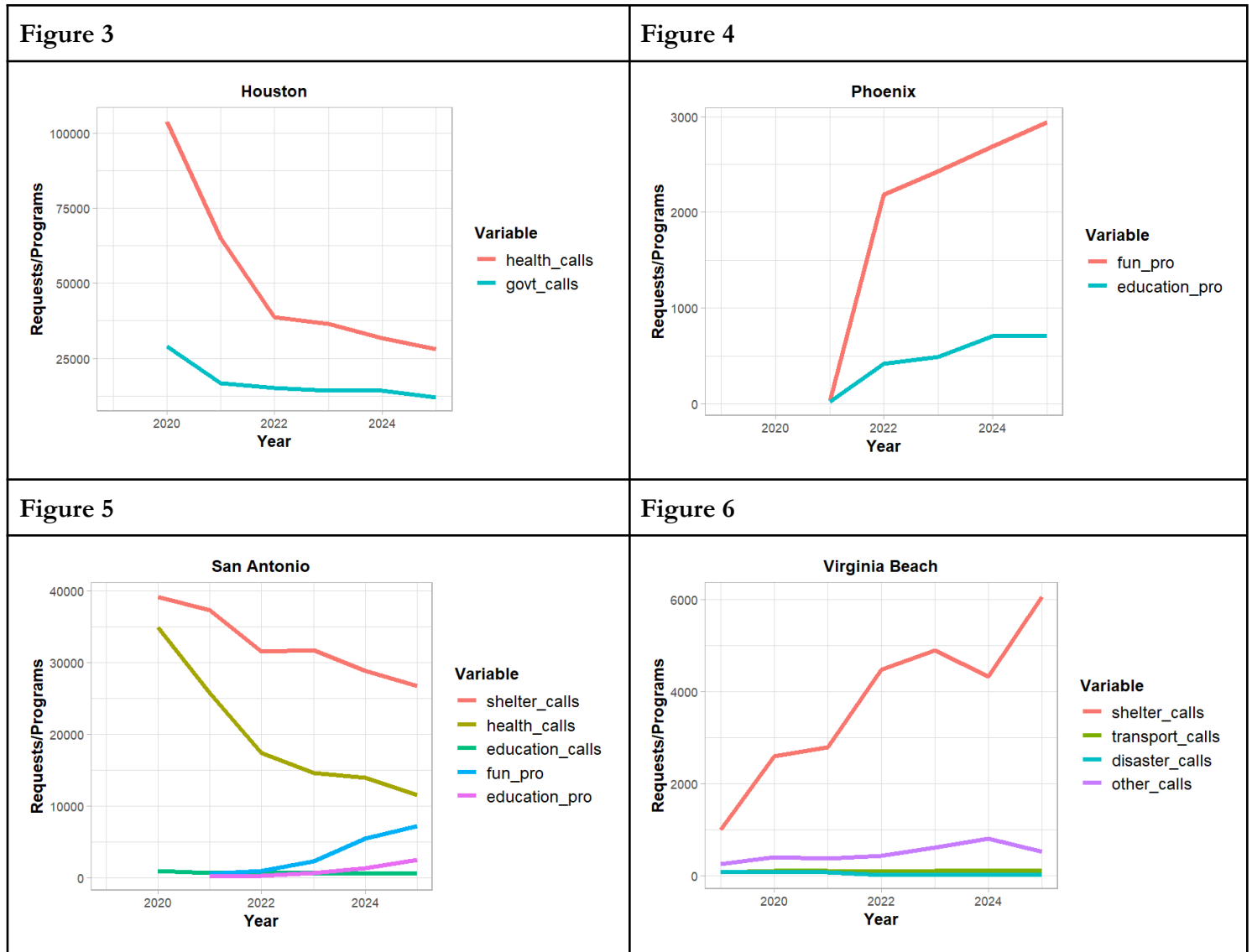
A look at the requests made through the 211 non-emergency line reveals that every year, the largest number of calls were made regarding shelter or household services. These categories encompassed people looking for emergency living situations, assistance in paying bills, and acquiring essential household items. The calls made least often were those in the education category, which were assigned to requests for services such as financial aid and literacy resources. Figure 2 demonstrates the average counts for these variables over a 6-year period (2019 - 2025). Table 2 with the exact numbers may be found in the appendix.

Figure 2



Monotonic Trends

The Mann-Kendall trend test revealed a few variables to have significant monotonic trends. Significant variables were mostly 211 calls rather than programming by the libraries. Figures 3 - 6 show the statistically significant programs and calls for all libraries, excluding Wichita, for which there were no significant variables. Table 3 in the appendix includes the values for tau and p-value of these distributions.



The graphs omit any request or program categories that did not demonstrate a significant trend over time. Of those remaining, calls and programs did not typically fall within the same categories. For example, the Virginia Beach area showed a significant, though moderate, increase in “shelter”, “transportation”, “disaster”, and “other” calls, but did not see a similar change in programming offered by the Virginia Beach Public Library.

The Houston area experienced a decrease in “health” and “government” calls, but no change in their programming. While in San Antonio, both education calls and programs were significant, they moved in opposite directions with requests for education services decreasing and education programs increasing. Similarly, the Phoenix Public Library provides greater education programs over

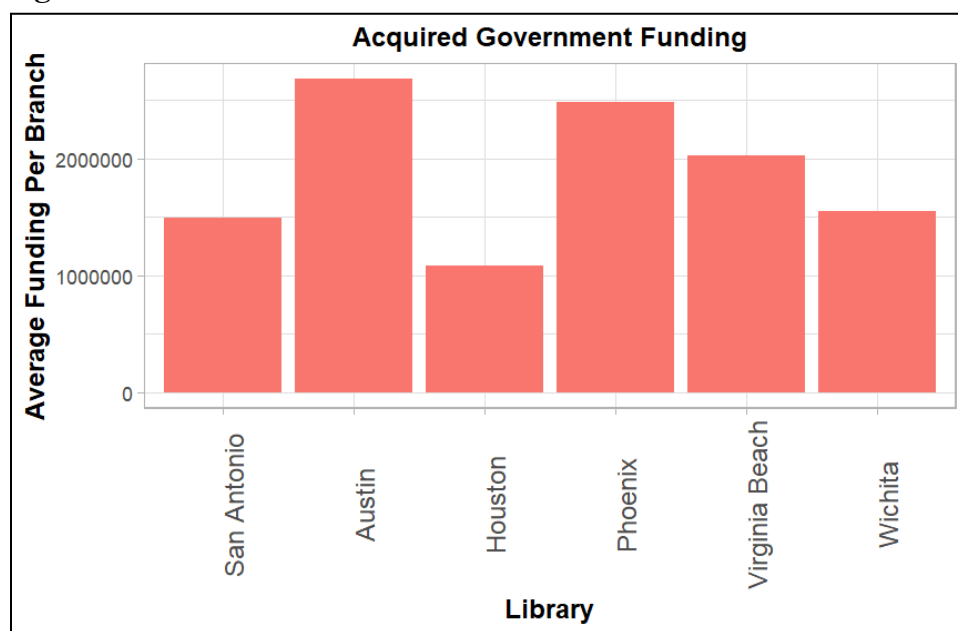
time, even those there is no significant request for them. The graph highlights the lack of association between call types and program types within the library service area over the years.

ANOVA

The Austin Public Library, Houston Public Library, Phoenix Public Library, San Antonio Public Library, Virginia Beach Public Library, and Wichita Public Library are composed of 22, 42, 17, 30, 10, and 7 branch locations, respectively. Assuming that these libraries would then differ in funding and program capacity due to size, multiple paired ANOVA tests were conducted to detect significant differences in mean funding and programming. Since these tests were not pre-planned, adjustments to the p-value were made using the Scheffe correction.

Testing for differences between funding per branch proved to be significant between all combinations of library branches except for the following contrast: San Antonio-Wichita and Austin-Phoenix. Figure 4 presents the average funding per branch for the 6 libraries. Table 4 in the appendix contains the estimated differences and p-values.

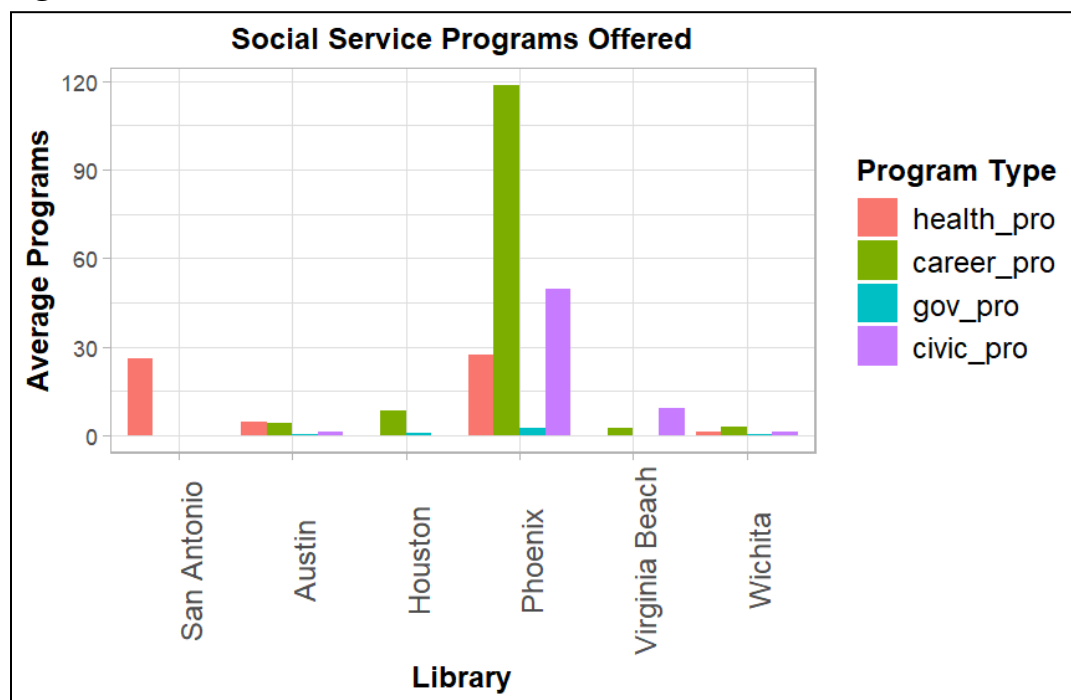
Figure 4



Houston, followed by San Antonio have the least average funding per branch and the Austin Public Library has the most funding per branch.

As a result of these funding differences, we investigated the differences in programs per branch, specifically focusing on programs that appeared to have large discrepancies in counts; these programs of interest were the “health,” “career,” “government,” and “civic” programs. While, per year, these counts only existed between 5 and 200 out of thousands of programs, and much fewer when averaged over the 6-year timespan, there was enough variability between libraries to indicate a possible trend. We once again performed an ANOVA F-test, the significant results of which can be found in Table 5 in the appendix. Figure 8 shows the programs per branch for the 6 libraries.

Figure 8



Despite only a few pairings being significant, a trend stands out over the four categories. Though concentrated within health programs, the San Antonio library appears to have more of these programs than the combination of all four categories for most of the other target libraries. Specifically, San Antonio has significantly more “health” programs than all libraries except the Phoenix Public Library. Of these four categories, the Phoenix Public Library has significantly more programs than nearly all others.

Our analysis provides evidence of service-related programs, even if the quantity does not change significantly over time; furthermore, it indicates discrepancies in the funding available to our target libraries and the number of social service programs provided. In the next section, we seek to explain the relatively low levels of social service programs within our target libraries through the lens of institutional factors such as funding sources and staff coordination. While doing so, we also attempt to explain how differences in funding between libraries, evident in the F-test, would arise given that their constraints are assumed to be similar.

Discussion

Funding and Budgets

The ANOVA test revealed significant differences in the funding per branch for our target libraries. Some smaller libraries like the Wichita Public Library received more funding than peer

systems with more branches such as the Houston Public Library. This indicates that funding is not consistently tied to the number of branches in a library system. Given our understanding of municipal libraries and their reliance on government funding, we consider that the differences in funding might be attributed to the processes by which public libraries secure their budgets.⁴⁶

The commonality between these libraries is that they are largely funded by the city's annual operating budget which is obtained through tax levies.⁴⁷ However, libraries vary in the actors that are involved in budget planning. For example, in three of our libraries – Virginia Beach, San Antonio, and Phoenix – the city manager takes an active role in initial budget propositions; they either propose the budget themselves or make significant contributions to its drafting.⁴⁸ In contrast, the Houston and Wichita Public Libraries are given greater control over initial proposals as their municipalities task them with initial drafts, though with some guidelines in place.⁴⁹

Differences also consist of the extent to which the public is involved with revision of the draft once the initial budget is proposed. The city council is the main entity through which budgets are processed for all of our libraries. Some of our libraries though, like the Phoenix and Houston public libraries, emphasize direct community input through hearings and workshops where individuals can express their particular concerns or desires for the library. Though these approaches are distinguished by their stakeholder involvement, neither is inherently incorrect. A budget system dependent only on the elected officials is likely to streamline resource allocation and limit input to those who are most aware of the logistics of library maintenance, which can have the impact of keeping operations consistent even during transition periods. On the other hand, collaborative approaches that incorporate community input can make officials more aware of information that may not be explicit to people other than library patrons, resulting in a budget that may be more thorough.

The discrepancy between branch funding and the level of programs provided by our target libraries is perhaps more striking. For example, the Phoenix Public Library's programming exceeded many of the others within the sample, which we would expect, given that it had significantly more funding than the Houston, Wichita, and Virginia Beach libraries. However, the ANOVA test shows that the San Antonio Public Library, despite having significantly less funding, provides more of the social service-related programs. The literature suggests that greater levels of funding should result in more programs, and yet, this trend is not evident in our data. While we don't completely reject this understanding of the association between funding and library outputs, we believe we can reconcile this discrepancy through an understanding of the types of funding sources.

⁴⁶ American Academy of Arts and Sciences. 2018. "Public Library Revenue, Expenditures, and Funding Sources." American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

⁴⁷ New York State Library Editors. 2026. "Resources: Public Library District Toolkit: Strategies to Assure your Library's Legal and Financial Stability: Preface." NYS Library LibGuides. <https://nyslibrary.libguides.com/pldtoolkit>.

⁴⁸ "Budget," City of Virginia Beach, accessed April 17, 2026, <https://budget.virginiabeach.gov/>; "Budget Calendar," accessed April 17, 2026, <https://www.sa.gov/Directory/Departments/OMB/Budget-Development/Budget-Calendar>; "Budget FAQ," City of Phoenix, accessed April 17, 2026, <https://www.phoenix.gov/administration/departments/budget/faq.html>.

⁴⁹ "Budget Process | Wichita, KS," accessed April 17, 2026, <https://www.wichita.gov/342/Budget-Process>; "How Is the Library Funded? - Ask Us! - Austin Public Library," accessed April 17, 2026, <https://library.austintexas.libanswers.com/faq/14037>.

We note in the literature that public libraries rely on government sources such as local and federal revenue, but the use of external organizations is less frequently mentioned. Most libraries, including our target institutions, take advantage of partner organizations to supplement funding (e.g. Friends of the San Antonio Public Library and the San Antonio Public Library Foundation).⁵⁰ Such organizations are tasked with acquiring additional funding through grants – for which their nonprofit status typically qualifies them – or book drives, as is most common. Fundraisers such as these are often how the more social service-related programs are supported: for example, career and literacy services for the Phoenix Public Library, community service and impact for the Austin Public Library, and technology and literacy programs for the Houston Public Library.⁵¹ In this scenario, then, libraries that obtain more funding through municipalities, such as the Phoenix Public Library, may not necessarily be the greatest providers of social service-related programs. Instead, libraries whose partnerships are more solidified or successful can obtain the necessary resources to supply community-oriented social services, which may explain the San Antonio Public Library’s relative success in providing these services in larger amounts than our other target libraries.

In addition to giving context to the results of our funding and program comparisons, we also believe that there are unintended consequences to the strategic use of partnership organizations. If social service programs are primarily funded through these library adjacent partners, it may undermine libraries’ arguments for more funding; public officials may perceive the existence of social service programs as evidence of adequate funding rather than resourcefulness on the part of the library.

Staff and Program Support

Our analysis did not indicate that the number of social service related programs changed over time. Instead, we see consistently low levels of these programs, often less than 1% of programs offered by these libraries. While we believe that even a few programs are effective, it seems that libraries are not providing as many programs as we’d expect. One possible explanation is that library staff have reached the capacity of programming that their training and experience can reasonably provide. There are characteristics of the public library that make them logical providers of social services, giving credence to our argument that they should act in this capacity. However, other relevant factors, specifically the availability of qualified staff, hinders the growth of service-related programs resulting in the low numbers present in our data.

Thinking geographically, we might see how the branch structure of libraries allows them to be more accessible. Within government and legal services, we recall the citizenship assistance and ESL classes offered at the Houston and Phoenix Public Libraries. The library systems have 42 and 17 locations throughout their respective cities, acting as the most geographically accessible institutions with staff and volunteers dedicated to guiding the public through the citizenship and

⁵⁰ “Friends of the San Antonio Public Library,” Friends of the San Antonio Public Library, accessed April 17, 2026, <https://www.friendsofsapl.org/>.

⁵¹ “About | Phoenix Public Library Foundation | Phoenix, Arizona,” *Phoenix Public Library Foundation*, n.d., accessed April 17, 2026, <https://www.phoenixlibraryfoundation.org/about/>; “Mission,” *Houston Public Library Foundation*, n.d., accessed April 17, 2026, <https://houstonlibraryfoundation.org/mission/>; “Impact,” *VB Library Foundation*, n.d., accessed April 17, 2026, <https://www.vblibraryfoundation.org/impact/>.

language learning processes. Similar services are also provided through organizations like Friendly House and RICE in Phoenix, as well as CCL Houston in Houston. The libraries' services have still seen an uptick in demand in recent years, yet their ⁵² increased usage coincides with federal funding cuts for related programs.⁵³ Additionally, the Houston 211 count data pertaining to government assistance has increased significantly according to the Mann-Kendall test. As there was no comparable uptick in government programs at the library, this implies that libraries are unable to supply services that tend to be most conveniently received from them.

In terms of Health and Household resources, we look to the Virginia Beach Public Library's Library of Things, which offers health and accessibility resources to its members, such as outdoor supplies, kitchen items, self-care items, and wifi hotspots. We observed a significant increase over time in 211 calls pertaining to housing assistance in Virginia, indicating that the available resources are not fully meeting local needs. When organizations like the Salvation Army and the Samaritan House were impacted by Covid-19 and natural disasters, their resources suffered, causing libraries to be seen as the last viable option, despite their limitations.

We conclude that the inability to provide a large number of social service programs does not negate the impact of even the few that are available. Ultimately, libraries are many citizens' best option for social service needs, whether that be because they are the most trustworthy institutions, the least costly to access, or the most convenient due to the fact that their various programs are housed in one building, making multidirectional travel unnecessary. As the literature shows that library staff are very responsive to community needs – their actions during Covid being one example – data showing evidence of these programs remaining stagnant is surprising. If funding were the only constraint, we would expect social service programs to decrease in light of their shrinking funding, and yet, we see no significant trend in either direction from the Mann-Kendall test.

We theorize that types of staff may be the driver behind the trend in our data. While funding may contribute to the initial levels of social service programs offered by public libraries, the quality and quantity of staff might impact the ability to maintain these levels. Staff pages of library websites are a helpful, though not comprehensive, tool for determining who the agents of the public library are. When we look at the staff pages of our target library websites, we find that most libraries do not employ only licensed professionals. Their staff also tends to include volunteers, both youth and adults, who aid in the daily operations. Of those librarians who are licensed, their specializations are typically in education-related fields such as literary specialists and writing instructors.

We find this distribution of staff to be relevant in the context of limited funding, as we assume that in the case of unexpected shortages due to a lack of budgetary support, personnel are the next best resource to bridge these gaps through event modifications or crafty planning, as was the case during previous economic downturns.⁵⁴ However, when library staff is primarily composed of volunteers and educators, neither of whom are trained in the particulars of social services,

⁵² Towery, April. 2025. "Living the American Dream: Houston Public Library Offers Free Citizenship Classes." Houston Press. August 20, 2025.

<https://www.houstonpress.com/news/houston-libraries-offer-free-classes-to-guide-people-to-citizenship-21086283/>.

⁵³ Raji, Tobi. 2025. "DHS Cuts Funds for Groups Helping Legal Immigrants Become U.S. Citizens." The Washington Post. April 2, 2025. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/2025/04/02/citizenship-programs-dhs-cuts/>.

⁵⁴ Collins, Tim. 2012. "The Current Budget Environment and Its Impact on Libraries, Publishers and Vendors." *Journal of Library Administration* 52 (1): 18–35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2012.630643>.

creating programs within this area remains difficult. Such a statement is not a criticism of library training, but rather seeks to highlight that libraries utilize community engagement – i.e., partner organizations and institutions – to supply programs, and budgets can restrict the feasibility of working with such partners. In the absence of the funding that facilitates the acquisition of programming resources, human or material, libraries are forced to provide programs through their internal staff, thus acting in a capacity that they likely are neither trained nor comfortable with. Perhaps, for our target libraries, many have reached their staff’s capacity, creating a plateau in all but “education” and “fun” programs.

Because libraries are open to everyone, librarians encounter a wide variety of people with a wide range of needs in their day-to-day work. Traditional library offerings can address many of these needs, but some library patrons require resources and services that go beyond the traditional scope of librarian responsibilities and skillsets. For example, librarians often encounter homeless individuals seeking a place to stay. Libraries can serve as an alternative to shelters that are, if not closed during the day, often perceived as crowded, loud, unsafe, or unclean.⁵⁵ Many libraries have responded by offering resources such as hygiene kits, free clothing, and housing application assistance, but some librarians have struggled to navigate situations in which mental illness, substance addiction, and other issues that disproportionately affect homeless individuals⁵⁶ come up. Ryan Dowd of Homeless Training, which provides “online de-escalation training for staff who interact with individuals experiencing homelessness,”⁵⁷ told *The Guardian* that he “hears a lot of comments like, ‘they didn’t teach me this stuff in library school.’”⁵⁸

This sentiment is widespread: According to a study of adult librarians’ opinions toward providing social services,⁵⁹ “participants unequivocally stated that their library and information science degree did not prepare them” for this responsibility. Those who did feel prepared often cited experiences that are not universal, such as previous customer service jobs, training from voluntary librarian conferences, and coursework in social justice issues or research. Many librarians also expressed that the official boundaries on the social services that they can and should offer are frustratingly ambiguous. These complications can make it difficult for librarians to respond to local needs effectively. Moreover, funding scarcity can impede the attainment of helpful materials and trained staff, furthering the burden borne by inexperienced library staff.

Recent crises have only made the enormous responsibility that libraries face more apparent. Factors such as the recent unprecedented rise in homelessness⁶⁰ and an increase in resettlement of

⁵⁵ Corner, Brighten The. 2023. “Why Some Homeless People Avoid Homeless Shelters.” Brighten the Corner. February 13, 2023. <https://brightenthecorner.org/2023/02/12/why-some-people-avoid-homeless-shelters/>.

⁵⁶ Gutwinski, Stefan, Stefanie Schreiter, Karl Deutscher, and Seena Fazel. 2021. “The Prevalence of Mental Disorders Among Homeless People in High-income Countries: An Updated Systematic Review and Meta-regression Analysis.” *PLoS Medicine* 18 (8): e1003750. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1003750>.

⁵⁷ “Homeless Training.” 2026. <https://homelesstraining.com/>.

⁵⁸ Reporter, Guardian Staff. 2023. “Why US Libraries Are on the Frontlines of the Homelessness Crisis.” *The Guardian*, January 24, 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/24/us-libraries-homeless-crisis-social-workers>.

⁵⁹ Latham, Don, Melissa Melissa Gross, and Brittany Baum. 2025. “Helping or Overstepping?: Adult Services Librarians Talk About Social Services in Public Libraries.” Latham | RUSQ: A Journal of Reference and User Experience. October 20, 2025. <https://journals.ala.org/index.php/rusq/article/view/8565/11897>.

⁶⁰ National Alliance to End Homelessness. 2025. “State of Homelessness: 2025 Edition - National Alliance to End Homelessness.” September 4, 2025. <https://endhomelessness.org/state-of-homelessness/>.

refugees and asylum seekers⁶¹ likely strain librarians further. The New York City public library system has long offered services that recent immigrants rely upon, including English classes, but many have felt overwhelmed in the past few years. Librarians describe insufficient space and staffing for their Adult Learning Program. At one branch, “the staff had to set up a lottery for classes when a surge of migrants started showing up last year.”⁶² In addition, migrants reportedly “often turn to [staff] for help with a range of issues, as if the educators were social workers. ‘I go beyond my job responsibilities to show them where to go,’ [one educator] said.”

Some libraries have begun to hire full-time social workers who can provide these referrals. At the Oak Park Public Library in a western suburb of Chicago, a team of social workers serves patrons by listening to their needs and connecting them to the services offered by 45 collaborating organizations in the area.⁶³ However, the lack of professional capacity to provide social services at libraries is a widespread issue. As of 2018, only 30 public libraries in the US employed full-time social workers, and obstacles to hiring them, such as funding, licensing, and liability concerns, remained.⁶⁴ In addition to these gaps in professional training, librarians often lack some of the basic infrastructure required for their services, such as internet access to patrons. Free WiFi is a key library service, especially in rural communities and on Tribal lands, where broadband access is more likely to be limited.⁶⁵ However, researchers at the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) reported in 2020 that “98% of the public libraries in our study serving less than 50,000 people reported speeds below the FCC’s bandwidth target of 100 Mbps.”⁶⁶ This resource gap makes it challenging to serve kids working on homework, adults applying for jobs, and others relying on libraries to access the internet. Therefore, funding shortages undermine the basic materials that are essential to the few social services in which library staff exhibit considerable self-efficacy, such as education and career support.

What we see is that social service programs depend upon staff who are confident in their capacity to help patrons. Partnerships with other community bodies, in-house support staff, and materials for use aid in their perceptions of self-efficacy, but such resources become scarce due to shortages and intentional funding cuts. Compelled by their core values, library staff will continue to

⁶¹ Batalova, Jeanne. 2026. “Refugees and Asylees in the United States.” Migration Policy Institute. January 8, 2026. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/refugees-and-asylees-united-states>.

⁶² Khullar, Samaa. 2024. “New York Libraries Struggle With Surge of Asylum Seekers Needing Services.” Columbia News Service. April 18, 2024. <https://columbianewsservice.com/2023/10/16/new-york-libraries-struggle-with-surge-of-asylum-seekers-needing-services/>.

⁶³ Jin, Kimberly. 2019. “Chicago Area Public Libraries Offer Staff Social Workers to Link Patrons to Resources - Medill Reports Chicago.” Medill Reports Chicago. January 31, 2019. <https://news.medill.northwestern.edu/chicago/chicago-area-public-libraries-offer-staff-social-workers-to-link-patrons-to-resources/>.

⁶⁴ Gross, Melissa, and Don Latham. 2021. “Social Work in Public Libraries: A Survey of Heads of Public Library Administrative Units.” *Journal of Library Administration* 61 (7): 758–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2021.1972727>.

⁶⁵ “Broadband | Institute of Museum and Library Services.” n.d. <https://www.ims.gov/our-work/priority-areas/broadband>.

⁶⁶ Rhinesmith, Kennedy, and Dutilloy. 2020. “While More Americans Rely on Parking Lot Wi-Fi, Many Public Libraries Do Not Have Adequate Broadband.” Benton Institute for Broadband & Society. May 6, 2020. <https://www.benton.org/blog/while-more-americans-rely-parking-lot-wi-fi-many-public-libraries-do-not-have-adequate>.

provide these programs anyway, but only to the extent that their education and training can reasonably permit.

Though the programs that libraries provide are essential to the community, funding scarcity and staff shortages do not equip them to provide more or to meet the demand specifically asked of them. The most effective policy would generate and distribute the resources necessary to align library operations with their demand, and situate libraries as agents of social service provision in ways that are less intensive until more drastic restructuring can be accomplished.

Policy Recommendations

Dissemination Through the Public Library

Public libraries occupy a unique position in American civic life - with an estimated 17,000 public libraries nationwide receiving four million visits each day, they have extensive population reach. Unlike many service-providing institutions like government agencies or health care institutions, they are also widely trusted by the public.⁶⁷ **We recommend that public libraries leverage this trust and reach by serving as social service navigation centers**, where anyone seeking assistance can reach out to and be connected to the right resources and programs for their needs. This allows libraries to play a more active role in helping individuals connect with social services, without requiring them to provide these services directly. Given existing constraints on funding and staffing, as well as the difficulty of employing specialized social service professionals within library systems, it may be more practical for libraries to function as intermediaries that guide individuals toward appropriate resources.

Information on social services in most communities is scattered across dozens of government and civic organizations' websites and hotlines, forcing members of the public to navigate a fragmented system of resources to find the help they need, if they do find it.⁶⁸ Research shows that lack of awareness of available resources is among the primary reasons people fail to connect with services they are eligible for.⁶⁹ Furthermore, studies have found that individuals reporting the greatest difficulty accessing services are socially and economically vulnerable.⁷⁰ The presence of 211 hotlines and websites indicates a clear demand for centralized, reliable information about available resources; in this context, libraries could serve as centralized, local points of access for social service information to help those most in need.

⁶⁷ Philbin, Morgan M., Caroline M. Parker, Mary Grace Flaherty, and Jennifer S. Hirsch. "Public libraries: A community-level resource to advance population health." *Journal of community health* 44, no. 1 (2019): 192-199.

⁶⁸ Reijnders, Mark, Jelmer Schalk, and Trui Steen. "Services wanted? Understanding the non-take-up of social support at the local level." *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 29, no. 6 (2018): 1360-1374.

⁶⁹ Placzek, Hilary, Stephanie Cruz, Michelle Chapdelaine, Mary Carl, Sara Levin, and Clarissa Hsu. "Intersecting systemic and personal barriers to accessing social services: qualitative interviews in northern California." *BMC public health* 21, no. 1 (2021): 1933.

⁷⁰ Dahrouge, Simone, Alain Gauthier, Francois Chiochio, Justin Presseau, Claire Kendall, Manon Lemonde, Marie-Hélène Chomienne et al. "Access to resources in the community through navigation: protocol for a mixed-methods feasibility study." *JMIR Research Protocols* 8, no. 1 (2019): e11022.

One method through which libraries could do this is by building a consolidated social services webpage where members of the public can easily search and find any service they need. Listed on the page would be both services the library itself provides and those provided externally; examples of such services are local government benefit programs, nonprofit service providers, mental health lines, food assistance, housing support, and emergency aid. Some libraries have already taken steps in this direction. For example, the Austin Public Library maintains an online resource guide covering a range of community services; however, its placement within a “Crisis Support” subdomain limits its visibility to users unfamiliar with the site.⁷¹ Its impact might be significantly greater if it were prominently featured on the homepage. The Cincinnati & Hamilton County Public Library provides a more prominently accessible and regularly updated guide to community resources, available in multiple languages.⁷² Similarly, the Santa Barbara Public Library’s “Community Connections” page not only links to external services but also facilitates direct engagement with these community service providers by hosting office hours for local service providers within library spaces.⁷³

Beyond the webpage, libraries could establish dedicated hotlines for social service navigation. This would position them as localized extensions of existing referral systems like 211, which already connects individuals to local services nationwide. To be most effective, library phone numbers should be listed within 211 databases, expanding the network of entry points available to members of the public. Our findings suggest that a great deal of the programs offered by the six public libraries in our research have been made possible through the work of volunteers; we propose that libraries similarly recruit volunteers to fill this community navigator role, which would make this initiative cost-effective as it requires no significant new funding or infrastructure and yet has the potential for a significantly meaningful impact.

Our research points to an opportunity for greater coordination between local governments, social service providers, and library systems. Rather than expecting libraries to expand their service provision capacity, policymakers could focus on centralizing social service information at the municipal level and formally designating libraries as disseminators of this information. This could include investing in unified knowledge bases, improving the visibility of existing resource guides, and integrating library-based contact points into the broader information and referral hub 211. If individuals are more likely to seek information from libraries, leveraging these institutions as primary access points could make it easier for individuals to connect with the services they need while still being feasible given libraries’ staffing and financial constraints.

Leveraging Libraries as Venues

Public libraries should be used as event spaces for social services delivered by external organizations that are better equipped to provide them. Instead of expanding the responsibilities of

⁷¹ Austin Public Library. n.d. “General Aid - Social Services.” Austin Public Library Research Guides. Accessed April 13, 2026. <https://library.austintexas.libguides.com/socialservices>.

⁷² Cincinnati & Hamilton County Public Library. n.d. “Community Resources Guide.” Cincinnati & Hamilton County Public Library. Accessed April 13, 2026. <https://chpl.org/services/community-resources-guide/>.

⁷³ Santa Barbara Public Library. n.d. “Community Connections.” *Santa Barbara Public Library*. Accessed April 13, 2026. <https://library.santabarbaraca.gov/library-services/community-connections>.

library staff to directly handle complex social needs, policymakers should encourage partnerships between libraries and organizations such as nonprofits, healthcare providers, and government agencies. This approach builds on existing library structures and allows services to be delivered more effectively without overextending library capacity. As many libraries already operate through partnerships, this model is comparable to current operations. Our six target libraries have demonstrated as such, through their close interactions with external groups such as Friends of the Library organizations and library foundations.⁷⁴ These organizations raise funds, support programming, and maintain strong ties between libraries and their communities, highlighting that libraries are already embedded in networks of collaboration.⁷⁵

Libraries are also particularly strong at outreach and community engagement.⁷⁶ Research has shown that public libraries have increasingly taken on roles that go beyond traditional education and literacy, including employment assistance, language learning, and civic services.⁷⁷ However, our findings suggest that libraries are not always equipped to meet more complex needs such as housing, healthcare, or crisis intervention. Librarians regularly interact with individuals experiencing homelessness, unemployment, or mental health challenges, but many report that they are not trained to provide these services directly.⁷⁸ A hosting model would address this gap by shifting service delivery to trained professionals while keeping libraries as the central point of access.

This model also improves upon current access to services. Rather than requiring individuals to locate and travel to multiple organizations, services would be brought into libraries, which are already widely used and familiar spaces. Libraries function as “third spaces” that are free, open to the public, and distributed across neighborhoods.⁷⁹ Because of this, individuals are more likely to visit a library than a specialized service provider, particularly if barriers such as cost, transportation, or lack of awareness exist.⁸⁰ Shifting services into libraries reduces these barriers and increases the likelihood that people will receive support.

Accessibility and trust are key advantages of libraries. Unlike many social service organizations, libraries do not require appointments, eligibility verification, or payment.⁸¹ While shifting more services to libraries may introduce the need for new administrative tasks, they are likely ones libraries are equipped to handle due to their current experience in patron interactions.

⁷⁴ American Academy of Arts and Sciences. 2018. “Public Library Revenue, Expenditures, and Funding Sources.” <https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/public-life/public-library-revenue-expenditures-and-funding-sources>

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Knology. 2023. “Building Social Capital: How Libraries Are Helping Communities Connect.” <https://www.knology.org/article/building-social-capital>

⁷⁷ Pew Research Center. 2013. “What People Want from Their Libraries.” <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2013/01/13/what-people-want-from-their-libraries>

⁷⁸ Latham, Don, Melissa Gross, and Brittany Baum. 2025. “Helping or Overstepping? Adult Services Librarians Talk About Social Services in Public Libraries.” *RUSQ: A Journal of Reference and User Experience*. <https://journals.ala.org/index.php/rusq/article/view/8565/11897>

⁷⁹ Knology. 2023. “Building Social Capital: How Libraries Are Helping Communities Connect.” <https://www.knology.org/article/building-social-capital>

⁸⁰ Pew Research Center. 2013. “What People Want from Their Libraries.” <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2013/01/13/what-people-want-from-their-libraries>

⁸¹ American Library Association. 2014. “National Impact of Library Public Programs Assessment White Paper.” Chicago: American Library Association

Furthermore, they are also widely trusted by the public, making them effective entry points for individuals who may be hesitant to seek help elsewhere. At the same time, external organizations often have fewer locations and more limited visibility. By partnering with libraries, these organizations can expand their reach and connect with individuals who might otherwise go underserved.

This recommendation also addresses the funding and capacity challenges identified in our research. Libraries rely heavily on local government funding, which primarily covers basic operations, while additional services depend on less stable sources such as grants and donations.⁸² Simultaneously, libraries are increasingly expected to provide services that resemble core government functions despite receiving significantly less funding than sectors such as education or public safety.⁸³ Partnering with organizations that already receive targeted funding for social services allows libraries to expand their impact without relying solely on inconsistent funding streams. Using libraries as hosting spaces for social services allows each institution to operate within its strengths. Libraries provide accessibility, trust, and community presence, while external organizations provide specialized expertise. This partnership-based model offers a more efficient and sustainable way to meet growing social service needs.

Social Work in the Public Library

As libraries continue to increase the social services they provide, they might also increase staff support for these social services; specifically, cities should consider hiring social workers to supplement the social services already provided with additional expertise and training for situations beyond librarians' typical purview.

Social services that attend to more vulnerable populations, such as resources for housing and food, and workshops for career support, provide essential value to communities that help maintain the relevancy of libraries today⁸⁴. Beyond the programming which we identified that libraries currently provide in the form of events and resources, social workers in libraries could help connect patrons to external resources⁸⁵ with increased efficiency, because of their existing knowledge of the systems and services available. Specifically, social workers could give valuable support to patrons facing homelessness, which is just one example of a sizable demographic of library patrons that libraries strive, but struggle, to support due to needs beyond traditional library support. Further populations who may benefit from social worker presence include those facing addiction and mental health struggles.⁸⁶

⁸² American Academy of Arts and Sciences. 2018. "Public Library Revenue, Expenditures, and Funding Sources." <https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/public-life/public-library-revenue-expenditures-and-funding-sources>

⁸³ Million, A. J., and Jenny Bossaller. 2023. "Funding Our Priorities: Comparisons of Public Library Funding and Services with Other Sectors in Post-COVID America." *The Political Librarian* 6 (2). https://www.everylibraryinstitute.org/funding_priorities_2023

⁸⁴ "Social Workers and Librarians— A Case for Why We Are BFFs | ALA," accessed April 12, 2026, <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/diversity/odlos-blog/social-workers>.

⁸⁵ "Social Workers in Public Libraries: Creating Powerful Community Connections," *IFLA*, n.d., accessed April 12, 2026, <https://www.ifla.org/news/social-workers-in-public-libraries-creating-powerful-community-connections/>.

⁸⁶ Tracy M. Soska and Adria Navarro, "Social Workers and Public Libraries: A Commentary on an Emerging Interprofessional Collaboration," *Advances in Social Work* 20, no. 2 (2020): 409–23, <https://doi.org/10.18060/23690>.

As libraries face a range of scenarios that differ tremendously from their origins, social workers can make several key contributions; for example, they can provide training on how to handle scenarios of patrons in crisis, including volatile mental health scenarios and overdoses.⁸⁷ Even in the absence of training, the presence of social workers who themselves are prepared to handle more challenging situations might relieve library staff anxiety regarding future interactions. In fact, social workers in libraries have been correlated with fewer police calls by the library and reduced worker stress.⁸⁸ In addition, by delegating social service tasks to social workers, the library could alleviate some burden, allowing staff to focus on maintaining traditional library systems.

Notably, hiring new staff might further strain library resources, and thus, this policy recommendation would not be the most practical initial solution. However, in the long term, when more substantial resource allocation alterations have been made, this policy is worth revisiting. It has the potential to enhance the quality of the social services the libraries provide, enabling specific and continued community interaction and support.

Conclusion

We have attempted to frame the public library as a social service provider through its public programs and events. Our analyses focused on six library systems in Austin, Houston, Phoenix, San Antonio, Virginia Beach, and Wichita. The classification of the programs provided by these libraries revealed strong efforts to make available and accessible programs that not only are enriching, but also help citizens to navigate varying aspects of society, such as careers and legal systems. When comparing these programs to the requests made through the 211 line, however, we did not find any association between library programming and 211 calls, and differences in programs provided per branch were not fully aligned with the funding per branch. We attribute the lack of association to funding shortages and staff capacity, both of which limit the public library's ability to be as responsive as it might like. Despite this, our findings, which show the existence of social service programs, even in low and stagnant amounts, lead us to believe that libraries are driven to produce the events that best serve their communities, remaining both involved and responsive to the societal climate.

We identify three limitations in our study. The first is our narrow sample size. We hope to see future studies examine a larger and more diverse sample of libraries and to engage in more qualitative research, such as interviews with library staff, to better understand the processes in program development. Secondly, our evaluation of funding did not include the partnerships that libraries maintain. We believe that future studies should explore funding acquired through adjacent non-profit organizations, and determine if the strengths of these relationships are predictors for the number of social service programs. Finally, our research did not consider that a singular program serves more than one person. Whereas 211 calls reflected an individual calling (though perhaps the

⁸⁷ "Social Workers in Public Libraries."

⁸⁸ "NYS Library Blog - Resources at New York Education Department," accessed April 13, 2026, <https://nyslibrary.libguides.com/blogs/system/social-work-perspectives-the-intersection-of-social-work-and-library-work>.

same individual at times), a social service program might serve 15 people. New research into this topic should observe not only programs, but their capacity, to determine associations between 211 calls and library public programming.

Our observations are a helpful reminder that changes made to the public library, including the recommendations proposed in this paper, will be difficult to implement without the necessary social and logistical support that is necessitated by role expansion. We believe our recommendations propose strategies to utilize public libraries to their fullest potential while making their existence more widely acknowledged, and thus furthering fruitful interactions between public libraries and the areas they serve.

References

- “About | Phoenix Public Library Foundation | Phoenix, Arizona.” Phoenix Public Library Foundation, n.d. Accessed April 17, 2026. <https://www.phoenixlibraryfoundation.org/about/>.
- “About - Public Library Donations.” San Antonio Public Library Foundation, n.d. Accessed April 17, 2026. <https://www.sapl.org/about/>.
- “American Rescue Plan - Library Relief | ALA.” Accessed April 29, 2026. <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/federal-resources/library-funding/american-rescue-plan-library-relief>.
- Barchas-Lichtenstein, Jena, Rebecca Joy Norlander, John Fraser, et al. “Categorizing Library Public Programs.” *The Library Quarterly* 90, no. 4 (2020): 563–79. <https://doi.org/10.1086/710259>.
- Barchas-Lichtenstein, Jena, Rebecca Joy Norlander, John Voiklis, John Fraser, and Elizabeth Danter. National Impact of Library Public Programs Assessment Summative Report. June 2019.
- Batalova, Jeanne Batalova Jeanne. “Refugees and Asylees in the United States.” Migrationpolicy.Org, January 7, 2026. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/refugees-and-asylees-united-states>.
- Benton Foundation. “While More Americans Rely on Parking Lot Wi-Fi, Many Public Libraries Do Not Have Adequate Broadband.” May 6, 2020. <https://www.benton.org/blog/while-more-americans-rely-parking-lot-wi-fi-many-public-libraries-do-not-have-adequate>.
- “Broadband | Institute of Museum and Library Services.” Accessed April 17, 2026. <https://www.imls.gov/our-work/priority-areas/broadband>.
- “Budget Calendar.” Accessed April 17, 2026. <https://www.sa.gov/Directory/Departments/OMB/Budget-Development/Budget-Calendar>.
- “Budget Process | Wichita, KS.” Accessed April 17, 2026. <https://www.wichita.gov/342/Budget-Process>.
- “Building Social Capital: How Libraries Are Helping Communities Connect - Knology.” Accessed April 17, 2026. <https://knology.org/article/building-social-capital-how-libraries-are-helping-communities-connect/>.
- Candid. “The Funding Crisis Facing America’s Public Libraries.” Accessed April 17, 2026. <https://candid.org/blogs/todays-funding-crisis-facing-us-public-libraries/>.
- Cigarroa, Maria-Elena. “Research Guides: Social Services: General Aid.” Accessed April 17, 2026. <https://library.austintexas.libguides.com/socialservices/generalaid>.
- City of Phoenix. “Budget FAQ.” Accessed April 17, 2026. <https://www.phoenix.gov/administration/departments/budget/faq.html>.
- City of Virginia Beach. “Budget.” Accessed April 17, 2026. <https://budget.virginiabeach.gov/>.

- Collins, Tim. "The Current Budget Environment and Its Impact on Libraries, Publishers and Vendors." *Journal of Library Administration* 52, no. 1 (2012): 18–35.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2012.630643>.
- Community Resources Guide. n.d. Accessed April 17, 2026.
<https://chpl.org/services/community-resources-guide>.
- Corner, Brighten the. "Why Some Homeless People Avoid Homeless Shelters." Brighten the Corner, February 13, 2023.
<https://brightenthecorner.org/2023/02/12/why-some-people-avoid-homeless-shelters/>.
- Dahlkild, Nan. *The Emergence and Challenge of the Modern Library Building: Ideal Types, Model Libraries, and Guidelines, from the Enlightenment to the Experience Economy*. 2011.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2011.0027>.
- Dahrouge, Simone, Alain Gauthier, Francois Chiochio, et al. "Access to Resources in the Community Through Navigation: Protocol for a Mixed-Methods Feasibility Study." *JMIR Research Protocols* 8, no. 1 (2019): e11022. <https://doi.org/10.2196/11022>.
- Dilworth, Kathryn. "Philanthropy in Public Libraries: Its Impact on Community Well-Being Missions." *International Journal of Community Well-Being* 5, no. 2 (2022): 455–73.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s42413-021-00140-8>.
- Dowd, Ryan. "Online De-Escalation Training for Employees." Homeless Training. Accessed April 17, 2026. <https://homelesstraining.com/>.
- Friends of the San Antonio Public Library. "Friends of the San Antonio Public Library." Accessed April 17, 2026. <https://www.friendsofsapl.org/>.
- Google for Developers. "Non-Parametric Trend Analysis | Google Earth Engine." Accessed April 17, 2026.
<https://developers.google.com/earth-engine/tutorials/community/nonparametric-trends>.
- Gross, Melissa, and Don Latham. "Social Work in Public Libraries: A Survey of Heads of Public Library Administrative Units." *Journal of Library Administration* 61, no. 7 (2021): 758–75.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2021.1972727>.
- Gutwinski, Stefan, Stefanie Schreiter, Karl Deutscher, and Seena Fazel. "The Prevalence of Mental Disorders among Homeless People in High-Income Countries: An Updated Systematic Review and Meta-Regression Analysis." *PLOS Medicine* 18, no. 8 (2021): e1003750.
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1003750>.
- Horrigan, John B. *Libraries, Trust and Social Capital*. n.d.
- House, The White. "Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Addresses DEI Discrimination by Federal Contractors." The White House, March 26, 2026.
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2026/03/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-addresses-dei-discrimination-by-federal-contractors/>.
- "How Is the Library Funded? - Ask Us! - Austin Public Library." Accessed April 17, 2026.
<https://library.austintexas.libanswers.com/faq/14037>.
- "How Library Outreach Workers Became a Lifeline to Their Communities During COVID-19 | ALA." Accessed April 29, 2026.
<https://www.ala.org/advocacy/diversity/odlos-blog/outreach-lifeline-COVID>.

- “Impact.” VB Library Foundation, n.d. Accessed April 17, 2026.
<https://www.vblibraryfoundation.org/impact/>.
- Jin, Kimberly. “Chicago Area Public Libraries Offer Staff Social Workers to Link Patrons to Resources.” Medill Reports Chicago, January 30, 2019.
<https://news.medill.northwestern.edu/chicago/chicago-area-public-libraries-offer-staff-social-workers-to-link-patrons-to-resources/>.
- Khullar, Samaa. “New York Libraries Struggle With Surge of Asylum Seekers Needing Services.” Columbia News Service, October 16, 2023.
<https://columbianewsservice.com/2023/10/16/new-york-libraries-struggle-with-surge-of-asylum-seekers-needing-services/>.
- Latham, Don, Melissa Gross, and Brittany Baum. “Helping or Overstepping?: Adult Services Librarians Talk About Social Services in Public Libraries.” *RUSQ: A Journal of Reference and User Experience* 61, no. 1 (2025): 42.
<https://doi.org/10.5860/rusq.61.1.8565>.
- Library. “Community Connections | Santa Barbara Public Library.” June 23, 2022.
<https://library.santabarbaraca.gov/library-services/community-connections>.
- “Library Funding Stories | ALA.” Accessed April 17, 2026.
<https://www.ala.org/advocacy/show-up-for-our-libraries/funding-stories>.
- “Mann-Kendall Test | Real Statistics Using Excel.” Accessed April 17, 2026.
<https://real-statistics.com/time-series-analysis/time-series-miscellaneous/mann-kendall-test/>.
- McFadden, Sarah. “Resources: Public Library District Toolkit: Strategies to Assure Your Library’s Legal and Financial Stability: Preface.” Accessed April 17, 2026.
<https://nyslibrary.libguides.com/pldtoolkit/preface>.
- Million, A. J., and Jenny Bossaller. *Funding Our Priorities: Comparisons of Public Library Funding and Services with Other Sectors in Post-COVID America*. 2023.
- “Mission.” Houston Public Library Foundation, n.d. Accessed April 17, 2026.
<https://houstonlibraryfoundation.org/mission/>.
- No. “Part 4: What People Want from Their Libraries.” Pew Research Center, January 22, 2013.
<https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2013/01/22/part-4-what-people-want-from-their-libraries/>.
- “NYS Library Blog - Resources at New York Education Department.” Accessed April 17, 2026.
<https://nyslibrary.libguides.com/blogs/system/social-work-perspectives-the-intersection-of-social-work-and-library-work>.
- Office, U. S. Government Accountability. “Public Libraries: Many Buildings Are Reported to Be in Poor Condition, with Increasing Deferred Maintenance | U.S. GAO.” Accessed April 17, 2026. <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-26-107262>.
- Peet, Lisa. “A Complex Landscape | Budgets and Funding 2024.” *Library Journal*. Accessed April 17, 2026.
<https://www.libraryjournal.com/story/a-complex-landscape-budgets-and-funding-2024>.

- Philbin, Morgan M., Caroline M. Parker, Mary Grace Flaherty, and Jennifer S. Hirsch. “Public Libraries: A Community-Level Resource to Advance Population Health.” *Journal of Community Health* 44, no. 1 (2019): 192–99. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10900-018-0547-4>.
- Placzek, Hilary, Stephanie Cruz, Michelle Chapdelaine, Mary Carl, Sara Levin, and Clarissa Hsu. “Intersecting Systemic and Personal Barriers to Accessing Social Services: Qualitative Interviews in Northern California.” *BMC Public Health* 21, no. 1 (2021): 1933. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-11981-5>.
- “Public Library Revenue, Expenditures, and Funding Sources | American Academy of Arts and Sciences.” Accessed April 17, 2026. <https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/public-life/public-library-revenue-expenditures-and-funding-sources>.
- Raji, Tobi. “DHS Cuts Funds for Groups Helping Legal Immigrants Become U.S. Citizens.” *The Washington Post*, April 2, 2025. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/2025/04/02/citizenship-programs-dhs-cuts/>.
- Real, Brian. “Public Libraries in the Wake of COVID-19, Part 1: Public Programming, Circulating Materials, and Digital Shifts.” *Libri* 76, no. 1 (2026): 29–41. <https://doi.org/10.1515/libri-2025-0088>.
- Reijnders, Mark, Jelmer Schalk, and Trui Steen. “Services Wanted? Understanding the Non-Take-up of Social Support at the Local Level.” *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 29, no. 6 (2018): 1360–74. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-018-00060-w>.
- Rhinesmith, Dr Colin, Jo Dutilloy, and Susan Kennedy. *The State of Broadband Connectivity and Related IT Infrastructure in Montana’s Public Libraries*. March 2020. https://docs.msl.mt.gov/central_services/publications/SimmonsReport_BroadbandConnectivity.pdf.
- Ryan, MacKenzie. “Why US Libraries Are on the Frontlines of the Homelessness Crisis.” *US News. The Guardian*, January 24, 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/24/us-libraries-homeless-crisis-social-workers>.
- Seaton, Jaimie. “Grant Guidelines for Libraries and Museums Take ‘Chilling’ Political Turn Under Trump.” *ProPublica*, February 6, 2026. <https://www.propublica.org/article/institute-of-museum-and-library-services-grant-guidelines-donald-trump>.
- “Social Workers and Librarians— A Case for Why We Are BFFs | ALA.” Accessed April 17, 2026. <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/diversity/odlos-blog/social-workers>.
- Soska, Tracy M., and Adria Navarro. “Social Workers and Public Libraries: A Commentary on an Emerging Interprofessional Collaboration.” *Advances in Social Work* 20, no. 2 (2020): 409–23. <https://doi.org/10.18060/23690>.

- Soska, Tracy M., and Adria Navarro. "Social Workers and Public Libraries: A Commentary on an Emerging Interprofessional Collaboration." *Advances in Social Work* 20, no. 2 (2020): 409–23. <https://doi.org/10.18060/23690>.
- Soucy, Daniel, Andrew Hall, and Joy Moses. "State of Homelessness: 2025 Edition." National Alliance to End Homelessness, September 4, 2025. <https://endhomelessness.org/state-of-homelessness/>.
- "Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation - A Guide to When to Use It, What It Does and What the Assumptions Are." Accessed April 17, 2026. <https://statistics.laerd.com/statistical-guides/spearmans-rank-order-correlation-statistical-guide.php>.
- State-Level Analysis of Public Library Service Adaptations in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. n.d.
- The Evolution of Library Social Work | Social Work Blog. n.d. Accessed April 17, 2026. <https://www.socialworkblog.org/advocacy/2024/05/the-evolution-of-library-social-work/>.
- Towery, April. "Houston Libraries Offer Free Classes to Guide People to Citizenship." *Houston Press*, August 20, 2025. <https://www.houstonpress.com/news/houston-libraries-offer-free-classes-to-guide-people-to-citizenship-21086283/>.
- Urban Libraries Council. "Public Libraries Innovate to Serve Vulnerable Populations on the Front Lines of COVID-19." Accessed April 29, 2026. <https://www.urbanlibraries.org/newsroom/public-libraries-innovate-to-serve-vulnerable-populations-on-the-front-lines-of-covid-19>.
- "Use of Public Libraries | American Academy of Arts and Sciences." Accessed April 17, 2026. <https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/public-life/use-public-libraries>.
- "Where Is the First Tax-Supported Library Located?" Grateful American® Foundation, April 8, 2015. <https://gratefulamericanfoundation.org/where-was-the-first-tax-supported-library-located/>.

Appendix

Table 1

	Shelter Calls	Household Calls	Education Calls
Austin	23128.33333	15821.28571	313.5714286
Houston	131606.1667	128563.1667	2118.166667
San Antonio	32564.66667	34410	686.3333333
Phoenix	65053.71429	27590.71429	281
Virginia Beach	3732.285714	2955.428571	19.57142857
Wichita	4951.857143	5424.428571	35.71428571

Table 3

		Variable	Tau	P-Value
Calls	Houston	health_calls	-1	0.002777778
	Houston	govt_calls	-0.866666667	0.016666667
	San Antonio	shelter_calls	-0.866666667	0.016666667
	San Antonio	health_calls	-1	0.002777778
	San Antonio	education_calls	-0.866666667	0.016666667
	Virginia Beach	shelter_calls	0.80952381	0.010714286
	Virginia Beach	transport_calls	0.714285714	0.03015873
	Virginia Beach	disaster_calls	-0.7200823	0.028136697
	Virginia Beach	other_calls	0.714285714	0.03015873
Programs	Austin	household_pro	0.688032961	0.039008342
	Austin	fun_pro	0.80952381	0.010714286
	Phoenix	fun_pro	1	0.016666667
	Phoenix	education_pro	1	0.016666667
	San Antonio	fun_pro	1	0.016666667
	San Antonio	education_pro	1	0.016666667

Table 4

Contrast	Estimate	P-Value
antonio - austin	-1178724.661	8.55E-09
antonio - houston	416607.7695	0.025869581
antonio - phoenix	-987236.642	2.49E-07
antonio - virginia	-526516.4667	0.002819657
antonio - wichita	-50975.9781	0.998519313
austin - houston	1595332.431	1.65E-11
austin - phoenix	191488.0193	0.656501183
austin - virginia	652208.1945	0.000199417
austin - wichita	1127748.683	2.03E-08
houston - phoenix	-1403844.411	2.47E-10
houston - virginia	-943124.2362	5.68E-07
houston - wichita	-467583.7476	0.009471773
phoenix - virginia	460720.1753	0.010875033
phoenix - wichita	936260.6639	6.47E-07
virginia - wichita	475540.4886	0.008062601

Table 5

	Contrast	Estimate	P-Value
Health	antonio - austin	21.46744589	0.093020599
	antonio - houston	26.22285714	0.057393531
	antonio - virginia	26.24666667	0.024102076
	antonio - wichita	24.81809524	0.055687352
	austin - phoenix	-22.70313216	0.061171875
	houston - phoenix	-27.45854342	0.039539058
	phoenix - virginia	27.48235294	0.015772671
	phoenix - wichita	26.05378151	0.037484115
Career	antonio - phoenix	-118.3203922	3.65E-06
	austin - phoenix	-114.0314744	1.82E-06
	houston - phoenix	-110.1494398	3.10E-05
	phoenix - virginia	115.8470588	2.48E-06
	phoenix - wichita	115.5613445	5.46E-06
Government	antonio - phoenix	-2.276078431	0.112098135
	austin - phoenix	-1.983957219	0.167699782
	phoenix - virginia	2.529411765	0.035584852
	phoenix - wichita	2.21512605	0.134946127
Civic	antonio - phoenix	-49.41019608	0.021695052
	austin - phoenix	-48.37028266	0.012836036

	houston - phoenix	-49.62352941	0.035047336
	phoenix - virginia	40.29019608	0.0812353
	phoenix - wichita	48.3092437	0.026550778