**Maine Library Statistics Trend Analysis 2015-2019**

By

Stephanie Zurinski,

Data and Evaluation Specialist

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Maine’s 256 public libraries submit an annual statistical report each year. These statistics include performance indicators like circulation and visits as well as financial and staffing levels.

The State Data Coordinator and the Data and Evaluation Specialist used these statistics to analyze the overall health of Maine’s libraries in the last five years.

**Annual Report**

The State Data Coordinator has worked diligently over the last 10 years to ensure that we receive high quality data from our libraries. In spite of her efforts, there are still libraries which don’t understand the importance of collecting good and consistent data. From year to year, a library might not report a statistic or change the collection method for that statistic so that there is a large fluctuation. Some libraries just don’t collect certain statistics like numbers of reference questions or library visits. Still, the annual report data is the best data we have, but we must be aware of its limitations.

**Methodology**

The Data and Evaluation Specialist used LibPAS, our annual report software from Counting Opinions, to generate a trend report for the years 2015-2019. We looked at

1. Financial data: 2. Services data:

Municipal allocation Library visits

Other operating revenue Programs and attendance

Total expenditures Circulation

Staff expenditures ILL

Collection expenditures Computer and Wi-Fi use

Using Excel's built in averaging function, the Data and Evaluation Specialist analyzed the statistics and created charts. Because of different response rates between years and within population groupings, averages for statewide statistics might differ from the population group averages. The numbers are consistent within each group.

We created charts for a statewide picture as well as for the 6 library service population groups we commonly use in Maine (see the table below). The 2019 assigned population was the basis for dividing the statistics up for analysis. The statewide picture is presented first followed by the population groupings.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Population** | **# of Libraries** | **Population** | **# of Libraries** |
| <1,000 | 35 | 5,000-9,999 | 46 |
| 1,000-2,499 | 83 | 10,000-24,999 | 23 |
| 2,5000-4,999 | 63 | >25,000 | 6 |

**Statewide Picture**

**Finances**

Overall, municipal allocations for libraries have been relatively stable during 2015-2019 with a 12% increase over the time period. Other operating revenue includes everything not reported under local, state or federal revenue. It can include monetary gifts and donations, fines and fees, interest, fundraising, or grants. For most municipal libraries, fines and fees don’t stay in the library. They end up in the town’s general fund. Over this time frame, libraries began eliminating overdue fines.

Even though town allocations increased about 12%, overall library revenue only increased 7% while expenses increased 11% during the same time period. 2019 saw the biggest discrepancy between income and expenses with a 3% deficit.

The overall average gain in personnel was only 2% across the five-year span with an 11% increase in overall staff expenditures and a 15% increase in benefits reported.

**Services**

Leaving out the anomalous year 2016, we see a 3% drop in library visits between 2015 and 2017. By 2019, the number of visits has recovered, with the difference between 2015 and 2019 being less than 1%.

The number of programs offered between 2015 and 2019 rose by 16% but the attendance during that same time period only rose by 2%.

Overall circulation decreased by 5% between 2015-2019. Electronic materials circulation rose 18% but physical materials circulation declined by 8%.

The drop in circulation numbers can’t be explained by collection expenditures which fluctuated over the period between a low of $42,688 and a high of $45,151. The average for the period totaled $43,823 as show on the chart below.

Average $43,823

The number of ILLs provided rose by 16% from 2015-2019. This is probably reflecting the increase in the number of libraries in Minerva and the addition of the MILS consortium to MaineCat. ILL received rose 11% during the same time period.

The use of library Public Access Computers fell during the period by 28%. The Wi-Fi statistics reported between 2015-2017 are not reliable because only in 2018 did significant numbers of libraries adopt technology to track these numbers accurately. In 2018, the SDC began checking with libraries who reported Wi-Fi use to find out what technology they were using. She deleted statistics from libraries that were still manually counting use. We should have better data going forward to determine just how important library Wi-Fi is to rural communities.

**Libraries Serving Populations Below 1,000**

There are 35 libraries in this category serving populations as low as 59 up to 992. Eight (23%) of these libraries are all volunteer.

**Finances**

For libraries serving populations below 1,000, fundraising makes up a large part of their operating budget. The chart below indicates that close to 60% of their revenue comes from other sources than town, state or federal dollars. For these libraries, a strong board that understands and embraces its role as a fundraiser is critically important.

These libraries watch their spending and manage to stay within budget.

Staff levels for the five years were fairly steady at .75 FTE (Full Time Equivalent). The 20% increase in staff expenditures can be attributed to the increasing costs for benefits and increases in the minimum wage.

**Services**

Library visits in this population group mirror the statewide chart with a high in 2016.

If we leave out that anomalous year, 2019 is a 5% drop from 2015 but the trajectory is up 3% from 2017.

Library programming stayed relatively flat with an average of 60 programs over the years. Attendance fluctuated during the time period. The 2016 high reflects the high in visits that year.

Circulation for this population group remains relatively robust. Again, 2016 is an anomalous year but there is a 3% rise from 2015 to 2019 and a 43% rise in eBook circulation.

Collection expenditures rose 11%.

ILL for this group is interesting. ILL received stays about the same but ILL provided is roughly 25% higher than that received. Ten of these libraries are not automated and only 3 are in a consortium. How are these libraries making their collections known to other libraries to facilitate ILL?

Use of public access computers is falling, down 33% since 2015. Wi-Fi usage appears to be going up but again, these statistics aren’t reliable since most libraries only recently acquired technology to accurately count Wi-Fi sessions.

**Libraries Serving Populations between 1,000-2,499**

There are 83 libraries in this population category. In 2015, 14 (17%) of these were all volunteer but by 2019 two have begun to pay staff. This is attributed to the new library standards.

**Finances**

Like their counterparts in libraries serving population under 1,000, libraries in this category are also fundraising around 60% of their operating budget.

These libraries also spend less than they take in with a 3% cushion in 2015 up to a 7% cushion in 2019.

Staff expenditures rose by 12%, most of which can be attributed to increases in the minimum wage and rising benefits costs. Staffing remained level at .9 FTE for this period.

**Services**

Library visits for this group are down. Between 2017 and 2019, there is a 5% drop in visits, but it appears to be flattening out with less than a 1% difference between 2018 and 2019.

Even though visits are down, the number of programs offered rose 26%, and program attendance rose 20% since 2015.

Physical materials circulation has dropped 12% in these communities, but eBook circulation has risen 48%. Looked at another way, in 2015 physical materials circulation accounted for 95% of total circulation. In 2019, physical materials circulation is down to 90% of the total. Overall circulation has dropped 8% over this period.

Some of the drop in circulation might be due to a reduction in collection development budgets. This chart shows a 5.6% drop in spending on materials.

Of the 83 libraries in this group, 13 (15%) are not automated at all. Eight (10%) of these libraries are members of a consortium. That could explain the growth in ILL provided as seen in the chart below. We see a 26% growth in ILL provided from 2015 to 2019. ILL received had a 21% growth during this time frame.

Library public access computing dropped 47%.

**Libraries Serving Populations Between 2,500-4,999**

There are 63 libraries in this population category and only 4 of those are all volunteer. This group gets more support from their communities with just over 67% of their operating budgets coming from the town.

**Finances**

Town support helps these libraries stay within budget. The chart below shows that operating revenue averaged just around 3% of expenditures.

Staffing levels during the study period averaged 1.74 FTE. Total staff expenditures rose 12% with most of the increase happening in 2018 which can be attributed to an increase in minimum wage. Cost of benefits rose 13% over the time period.

**Services**

Programming is as important for these libraries as it is for all libraries. There was a 5% increase in the number of programs held from 2015 to 2019 with an 11% rise in attendance between those two years.

As with most libraries, circulation of physical materials is down 21% over the five-year period but eBook circulation rose just under 48%.

Collection spending dropped 3% between 2015 and 2016 and stayed relatively flat through 2018. In 2019, collection spending exceeded the 2015 level by 1.5%.

Eight libraries in this population group are not automated as of 2019. Twelve belong to one of Maine’s consortia which could account for the rise in ILL. Three libraries joined MILS, 4 are in the Balsam Consortium using Evergreen and 5 are in Minerva. Between 2015 and 2019, ILL received rose 7% and ILL provided rose nearly 6%.

Like most libraries in Maine, the use of the library’s public access computers has fallen 43% since 2015. However, the use of library Wi-Fi shows a steady increase. Even discounting the anomaly of 2018, Wi-Fi use increased 77% since 2015.

**Libraries Serving Populations Between 5,000 - 9,999**

There are 46 libraries serving this population range. None of them are all volunteer.

**Finances**

Libraries in this category are well-supported by their towns receiving 75% of their operating budgets from the community.

Even with that support, these libraries ran an average 2% deficit between revenue and expenses. Fundraising is unable to make up that shortfall.

Staff levels in this population group averaged just under 4 FTE. Staff expenditures rose 17% from 2015 to 2019.

**Services**

Library visits rose 13% over the 5-year span with a very slight drop between 2018 and 2019.

The number of programs offered rose 18% and attendance rose 12%.

Physical materials circulation fell 9% but eBook circulation rose 23% during this time frame.

Collection expenditures rose 7%.

With the addition of more libraries to Minerva and MILS, we see a steady rise in both ILL provided and received. ILL provided increased by 25% and ILL received increased by 21%.

As we’ve seen with other population groups, use of library public access computing dropped 39% over the period 2015-2019. However, library Wi-Fi use jumped 32% just between 2017 and 2019. Since we aren’t sure of the accuracy of the Wi-Fi stats prior to 2018, we aren’t calculating percent change using the earlier years.

**Libraries Serving Populations Between 10,000 - 24,999**

There are 23 libraries serving this population with one all volunteer.

**Finances**

Libraries in this population category consistently receive just over 75% of their operating revenue from their towns.

In 2018 and 2019, this town support is enough to keep the libraries in the black but in the earlier part of this period, these libraries operated with a small deficit.

The average staff level was around 8 FTE throughout the reporting period. Staff expenditures rose 11%.

**Services**

Visits dropped 7% from 2018 to 2019. Looking at the period overall, visits were down 3 % from 2015. The average for the 5 years is 77,777 so 2019 is 4% below the average.

Even though visits are down, library programming remains popular. This chart indicates a 16% increase in the number of programs from 2015-2019 and a 19% increase in attendance during that same time period. The drop between 2018 and 2019 is 6% in program numbers and 8% in attendance.

Across the state, circulation of physical materials is down. This population group is no different. We see a 15% drop in physical materials circulation between 2015 and 2019. However, there is a 20% increase in eBook circulation over the same time period.

Collection spending dropped off about 1% between 2018 and 2019 but is still up 8% over 2015.

Of the 23 libraries in this group, 15 are members of Minerva, 1 is a member of MILS and 7 are on stand alone library systems. The use of ILL in communities across Maine is up. There is a 20% increase in ILLs provided in this group and an 8% increase in ILLs received.

Use of library public access computers fell 48% from 2015 to 2019. Library Wi-Fi use fell 46% between 2017 and 2019. This may reflect that citizens in larger communities are better able to afford home Wi-Fi networks than their counterparts in rural parts of the state.

**Libraries Serving Populations Over 25,000**

There are 6 libraries in this category. Most serve populations below 37,000. Portland serves a population of 66,215.

**Finances**

These libraries receive an average of 80% of their funding from their community.

Even with that significant town support, these libraries ran a deficit of 1-2% until 2019 where the deficit went up to 5%.

The average staff level is 25 FTE across the reporting period. Staff expenditures rose 11% from 2015 to 2019.

**Services**

Library visits during this period dropped 2% from 2015 to 2019. The good news is that they are headed up again.

Programming in these communities is a big draw. The number of programs offered rose 17% and the attendance rose 27%. The slight decline between 2018 and 2019 is due to a 1% reduction in the number of programs offered and a resulting 3% drop in attendance.

Of all the libraries in the state, these showed the smallest decline in physical materials circulation at 4%. eBook circulation rose 16%.

Materials spending averaged $178,326 across this period. The spiky appearance of this chart is a bit misleading.

All of these libraries are in MaineCat so borrowing among consortium members boosts their ILL numbers. Still, ILL provided rose 13% and ILL received rose 10% during this period.

As we’ve seen across the state, computer use in these libraries fell 23% from 2015 to 2019. Since Wi-Fi statistics were not reliable in the earlier years of this period, the percent change calculation has been based on 2017-2019. That shows a 16% increase in the use of library Wi-Fi.

**Summary**

* All of Maine’s libraries must fundraise to meet expenses. Those serving populations below 5,000 manage to stay within their revenue but the larger libraries run on a deficit of anywhere from 1% to 5% across these reporting years.
* Staff levels have remained static for 5 years however staff expenses have risen an average of 11%.
* Library visits dropped but are showing signs of recovery.
* Libraries offer more programs and more people come.
* Circulation of physical materials is down but eBook circulation is rising.
* ILL remains a very popular service
* Public Access Computer use is down at least 20%. Wi-Fi use shows an increase since 2018, the first year where the numbers are gathered using technology, so we feel more confident in the accuracy.
* Maine has 27 (11%) all-volunteer libraries.
* Thirty-one (12%) libraries are not automated.
* Maine’s smallest libraries are underfunded by their towns. Libraries serving populations below 2,500, receive only 40% of their operating revenue from the town. They must fund raise the rest. These are also the libraries with less than 1 FTE staff and open the fewest hours. For libraries serving under 1,000, 34% are open less than 12 hours a week. For libraries serving between 1,000-2,499, that number is 12%. Nineteen percent (22 of 118) of these libraries are all volunteer.

**Recommendations**

* Work closely with the Maine Municipal Association (MMA) to ensure that town managers and town government understand and appreciate the critical value libraries provide with the ultimate goal of all libraries receiving at least 60% of their operating budget from the town.
* Identify the libraries serving populations under 2,500 that are willing to work towards meeting the standards. Help these libraries make the case to their town for better funding by helping the librarian to focus on adding value to the community.
* Work on getting the remaining libraries automated starting with any in the group identified above.
* Encourage libraries to invest in robust Wi-Fi networks and devices to count use.
* Invest in eBooks statewide.