

Public libraries pack a powerful \$\$\$ punch

They mean big bucks for their states, communities

BY TOM STOREY



Today's public libraries are more than technology centers, book repositories, quiet reading spaces, coffee shops or busy community centers. They are engines that pump millions of dollars into local and state economies.

That's the conclusion of two recently released studies by the University of South Carolina and the State Library and Archives of Florida. Using surveys, interviews and economic modeling, the two studies showed the sometimes forgotten financial impact that libraries have and how important they are to creating jobs, raising wages and improving the financial well-being of a community and state.

Florida

Among the findings from the Florida study:

- In Florida, public libraries return \$6.54 for every \$1 invested in them. The value of libraries is \$2.9 billion, based on library wages and spending and the cost of replacement services and lost local spending. Federal, state and local funding is \$449 million.
- One job is created for every \$6,448 spent on public libraries from public funding sources. That means an estimated 68,700 jobs were created in 2004, generating wages of \$5.6 billion.
- Gross regional product increases by \$9.08 for every \$1 of public support spent on public libraries.
- For every \$1 of public support spent on public libraries, income (wages) increases by \$12.66.
- Whether they use libraries for personal, educational or work-related purposes, residents indicated that they saved 57.6 million hours and \$2.4 billion.
- Public libraries provide a direct economic benefit of \$6 billion per year to Florida's

communities and population, based on an average benefit of \$97 per 62 million uses by businesses, educators, students and the general public.

■ In 2003/2004 there were 68.3 million in-person visits to public libraries in Florida and at least 25.2 million remote Internet connections to public libraries.

In addition, Florida's public libraries stimulate an economic ripple effect valued at \$4 billion, the study says. This includes direct in-state expenditures by public libraries for books, periodicals, electronic equipment and resources, as well as large capital projects, such as library construction and renovation.

More than 2,380 individuals and 169 organizations participated in the groundbreaking study, which was the first of its kind ever completed in the state. It was conducted by: José-Marie Griffiths, Dean and Professor, School of Library and Information Science, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Thomas Lynch and Julie Harrington, Director and Assistant Director, Center for Economic Forecasting and Analysis, Florida State University; and Donald King and Christinger Tomer, Research Professor and Associate Professor, School of Information Services, University of Pittsburgh.

To view or download the study, go to dlis.dos.state.fl.us/bld/roi/index.cfm.

South Carolina

The University of South Carolina study values the impact of the state's public libraries at \$347 million. Faculty members from the School of Library and Information Science conducted this study in two phases. The first phase involved surveying 3,689 general library users, 161 businesses, 298 job seekers and 172 personal investors to determine their perceived value of the library. In phase two, researchers placed a dollar value on library services, based on usage statistics from the State Library, to determine the economic benefit to the state.

Key findings from the study:

- South Carolina's public libraries return \$4.48 to the state's economy for every \$1 invested in them.
- South Carolina's public libraries pump \$347 million into the state's economy; the state spends approximately \$77.5 million on public libraries.
- South Carolina's public libraries provide \$102 million and \$26 million annually in circulation and reference services, respectively.

■ South Carolina's public libraries bring nearly \$5 million to the state from federal and private sources.

■ About half of the businesses surveyed use the library as a primary resource for business and research information; three quarters of them said that the library contributed to the success of their businesses and that not having access to a public library would have a negative impact on their operations.

■ Business owners reported saving up to \$5,000 by getting information (economic data, government regulations, legal and technical information, as well as information on management, marketing and sales) from the library.

■ About 90 percent of general users said that libraries improved overall quality of life and 47 percent said they help increase local property values.

■ Nearly half of the personal investors surveyed said that investment information from the library definitely contributed to their financial well-being.

The project was developed by the School of Library and Information Science at the University of South Carolina in collaboration with the South Carolina Association of Public Library Administrators and the South Carolina State Library. Researchers were: Daniel D. Barron, Director; Robert V. Williams, Professor; Stephen Bajjaly, Associate Professor; Jennifer Arns, Assistant Professor; and Steven Wilson, Research Assistant.

The study can be downloaded at www.libsci.sc.edu/SCEIS/home.htm. ■

According to the study, Florida's public libraries stimulate an economic ripple effect valued at \$4 billion.