

Supplemental Analyses

From Awareness to Funding

Voter Perceptions and Support of Public Libraries in 2018



Data from a survey panel of 2,000 US voters ages 18 to 69 living in areas with populations of fewer than 300,000, administered by Leo Burnett USA between September 29 and October 4, 2017. This research and report is a project led by OCLC, the American Library Association, and its Public Library Association division.

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Supplemental Analyses

From Awareness to Funding: Voter Perceptions and Support of Public Libraries in 2018

Comparison between voters in larger and smaller population areas

To compare 2018 voter perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors to 2008, the panel used to generate the summary analysis included in *From Awareness to Funding 2018* matched that of the original survey panel; i.e., voters between the ages of 18 and 69 who live in communities of fewer than 300,000 residents. For the 2018 study, an additional panel of 1,000 people from areas with a population of 300,000 or more was also analyzed and compared to the main panel.

For the most part, the results from the smaller and larger population area are quite similar. The distribution of voters across the segments is highly consistent, and overall attitudes toward the library and librarians are very similar. Also, funding support levels—in terms of tax attitudes, voter support, and private donation giving—are nearly identical.

Those in larger population areas do visit the library more frequently: an average of 12.8 visits in a year, as compared to 8.6 visits for those in the <300,000 sample. Their use of the library website is also slightly higher: 9.0 visits on average per year versus 7.6 for those from smaller population centers. Those from the large cities also tend to use more services, including higher use of computer/Internet access, tutoring, English as a second language classes, and non-English books. They are also more likely to use several of the newer, tech-based options, such as digital labs and 3D printing. It is certainly possible that the library systems in these large urban centers are more likely to have those types of maker materials and equipment.

Despite their higher usage, residents from larger population areas do not rate libraries differently—both in terms of their perceived importance to the community and to their families—than do those in smaller communities.

These findings indicate that smaller and larger population residents present the same challenges to the library. Any strategies developed to improve perceptions and support among smaller population residents can also be used to address those in larger cities.

TABLE 1. Library Service Usage

| Library Service Usage (% Used Past 6 Months) Among Those Who've Visited the Library in the Past 12 Months | < 300,000 Pop. | 300,000+ Pop. |
|--|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Access the Internet using the library's Wi-Fi | 44% | 51% |
| Use the computer/Internet to search for information with search engines like Google | 40% | 50% |
| Use online resources such as databases, ebooks, e-journals, streaming music/videos, etc. | 36% | 43% |
| Use the computer/Internet to send or receive e-mail | 35% | 44% |
| Research health or wellness topics | 32% | 40% |
| Check out books and other materials in languages other than English | 30% | 41% |
| Obtain access to online or print government information or resources | 29% | 37% |
| Do homework/study | 29% | 37% |
| Do research for personal investing or general financial topics | 28% | 38% |
| Attend English as a second language classes | 27% | 35% |
| Get legal help or information | 23% | 31% |
| Research your genealogy | 22% | 31% |
| Get support for starting or growing your own business (by taking classes, conducting research, etc.) | 22% | 29% |
| Check out laptops, tablets, mobile hotspots, or other computer hardware | 20% | 31% |
| Use maker equipment such as 3D printers, Arduino boards, etc. | 21% | 27% |
| Use digital labs for coding or music making | 19% | 27% |
| Get tutoring (for example, adult literacy, homework, classes, etc.) | 19% | 28% |

Voters 70 years and older

To compare 2018 voter perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors to 2008, the panel used to generate the summary analysis included in *From Awareness to Funding 2018* matched that of the original survey panel; i.e., voters between the ages of 18 and 69 who live in communities of fewer than 300,000 residents. For the 2018 study, an additional survey panel of 200 voters age 70 and older (from communities with populations both smaller and larger than 300,000) was also analyzed. These results were then compared to those of the 18- to 69-year-olds from both the main panel and the supplemental panel of voters from larger communities.

Demographics

Here are the key demographics of the 70+ group in comparison to total voters and to those 18- to 69 years old. Percentages with a square are statistically higher than the US total, and those with a circle are statistically lower.

TABLE 2. Key Demographics of the 70+ Group Compared to Age 18-69 Group

| Key Demographics | Total U.S. Voters (18+) | Age 70+ | Age 18-69 |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|---------|-----------|
| % female | 50% | 59% | 49% |
| < \$50K household income | 35% | 40% | 35% |
| \$50K-100K household income | 32% | 34% | 32% |
| \$100K+ household income | 33% | 26% | 34% |
| High school or less education | 28% | 34% | 27% |
| Some of college / 2-year degree | 31% | 26% | 32% |
| 4-year college degree or more | 41% | 41% | 42% |
| White / Non-Hispanic | 68% | 85% | 65% |
| Black / African American | 14% | 10% | 15% |
| Retired | 35% | 88% | 15% |
| Own home | 73% | 86% | 71% |

Visits and use

The 70+ crowd visit the library about the same amount as the average voter: 66% have visited in past 12 months (compared to 70% of those age 18 to 69), with a similar average number of visits during that time. However, they are much less likely to have visited the library's website during that time: 39% vs. 54%. While at the library, the services most commonly used by this group include checking out print books and DVDs, attending meetings and public programs, and getting a librarian's assistance with research.

Ratings of libraries and librarians

The 70+ population has an overall higher perception of the library: two-thirds (67%) give strong ratings (compared to 60% of the voters 18 to 69 years old). They also hold a positive impression of the library's staff, with 63% giving high ratings (vs. 54% of the 18 to 69 group). They agree that convenience factors are the most important: getting to the library (81% vs 65%); its hours of operation (75% vs. 64%); having free access to materials (80% vs 65%) and computers and Internet (75% vs. 64%); and offering quiet areas for doing work or research (76% vs. 66%).

This group of older voters places a high value on the role of libraries; 67% feel it is important to have a strong public library system, compared to 59% of voters age 18 to 69. And, 62% feel that if the library closed, it would affect the community (compared to 58%). This group is significantly more likely to agree that "for some people, the library is the only place to access computers or the Internet" (77% vs. 62%); that "if the library in my community were to shut down, something essential and important would be lost, affecting the whole community" (65% vs. 55%); and, "having an excellent public library is a source of pride for a community" (65% vs. 53%). They also see the impact of the library on the community: 59% agree that "the library enhances the quality of life in a community" (vs. 51% of those aged 18 to 69), and 56% acknowledge that "the public library stimulates growth and development in a community" (vs. 48%).

Funding support

Similar to the voters age 18 to 69, 29% of older voters would "definitely" vote for library referendum on the ballot; and 35% would be willing to pay more in local taxes for library funding. However, significantly more of the 70+ group (45% vs. 34%) are willing to support tax increases that will improve the community; and significantly more (41% vs. 28%) have donated to voluntary fundraising groups. Many more agree (69% vs. 56%) that local support can make a big difference in the quality of the library.