



## BRANCHES OF OPPORTUNITY

New York City's public libraries are serving more people in more ways than ever before, and have become an increasingly critical part of the city's human capital system; but they have been undervalued by policymakers and face growing threats in today's digital age

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## BRANCHES OF OPPORTUNITY

As more and more New Yorkers turn to digital books, Wikipedia and other online tools for information and entertainment, there is a growing sense that the age of the public library is over. But, in reality, New York City's public libraries are more essential than ever.

Far from becoming obsolete, the city's three public library systems—Brooklyn, Queens and New York, which encompasses the branches in Manhattan, the Bronx and Staten Island—have experienced a 40 percent spike in the number of people attending programs and a 59 percent increase in circulation over the past decade. During that time, 48 different branches citywide have at least doubled annual attendance at programs, ranging from computer literacy classes to workshops on entrepreneurship, while 18 have more than doubled their circulation.

These trends are grounded in the new realities of today's knowledge economy, where it is difficult to achieve economic success or enjoy a decent quality of life without a range of basic literacy, language and technological skills. A distressingly large segment of the city's population lacks these basic building blocks, but the public library has stepped in, becoming *the* second chance human capital institution. No other institution, public or private, does a better job of reaching people who have been left behind in today's economy, have failed to reach their potential in the city's public school system or who simply need help navigating an increasingly complex world.

Although they are often thought of as cultural institutions, the reality is that the public libraries are a key component of the city's human capital system. With roots in nearly every community across the five boroughs, New York's public libraries play a critical role in helping adults upgrade their skills and find jobs, assisting immigrants assimilate, fostering reading skills in young people and providing technology access for those who don't have a computer or an Internet connection at home.

The libraries also are uniquely positioned to help the city address several economic, demographic and social challenges that will impact New York in the decades ahead—from the rapid aging of the city's population (libraries are a go-to resource for seniors) and the continued growth in the number of foreign-born (libraries are the most trusted institution for immigrants) to the rise of the freelance economy (libraries are the original co-working spaces) and troubling increase in the number of disconnected youth (libraries are a safe haven for many teens and young adults).

Despite all of this, New York policymakers, social service leaders and economic officials have largely failed to see the public libraries as the critical 21st century resource that they are, and the libraries themselves have only begun to make the investments that will keep them relevant in today's digital age.

One way or another, New York needs to better leverage its libraries if it is to be economically competitive and remain a city of opportunity.



This report takes an in-depth look at the role that New York's public libraries play in the city's economy and quality of life and examines opportunities for libraries to make even greater contributions in the years ahead. In the course of our research, we visited more than a dozen library branches in every borough and interviewed well over 100 individuals, including advocates for immigrants and the elderly, librarians and library administrators, education experts, nonprofit social service providers, entrepreneurs, economic development leaders and library patrons. As part of the report, which was funded by the Charles H. Revson Foundation, we also reached out to innovative thinkers in the technology, publishing and design communities in order to better assess how libraries might leverage structural changes in the economy to innovate and improve.

The idea that the iPad or the Internet will come to replace the library as the dominant mode of accessing books and other information is a deeply intuitive one.<sup>1</sup> The Internet is without question the single biggest driver of economic growth and change in recent history, and the number of services that rely on it has grown exponentially in just a few years. E-book sales, which already comprise nearly a fifth of all book sales, are growing exponentially, and a number of prominent universities and non-profits are building out sophisticated online learning programs. With so many resources readily available online, it is not surprising that some question whether there is still a role for public libraries.

Our research suggests that this couldn't be further from the truth, just as the widespread claim in the early 1990s that telecommunications technologies would render cities obsolete has proved to be way off the mark. Indeed, we find that, in today's information economy, libraries have only gotten more important, not less.

"The libraries are much more important today than ever," says Mitchell Moss, a professor of urban policy and planning at NYU. "They get old people during the day and they get young people after school. [In many city neighborhoods] they are now the only institution where kids can go after school that is safe."

Data collected from the city's three public library systems certainly suggest that libraries are increasingly important in New Yorkers' lives. In Fiscal Year 2011, the city's 206 public library branches greeted over 40.5 million visitors, or more than all of the city's professional sports teams and major cultural institutions combined.<sup>2</sup> They offered more than 117,000 different public programs, a 24 percent increase since 2002. More tellingly, the number of attendees at those programs shot up by 40 percent, from 1.7 million in 2002 to 2.3 million in 2011. Although some have questioned the need for material collections, circulation is up 59 percent, going from 43 million materials at the beginning of the decade to 69 million—another record. Meanwhile, libraries answered 14.5 million reference queries in 2011, and library patrons logged 9.3 million sessions on library computers and 2.2 million sessions on their own computers over library WiFi networks.

In the Bronx, the borough with both the highest poverty rate and unemployment rate, 19 of the 35 branches at least doubled their attendance since 2002, while nine branches did the same with their circulation numbers. "The libraries are of critical importance to under-served youth and adults," says Denise Scott, the managing director of the New York City program for the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC).

Overall, high performing branches across the five boroughs include large regional libraries such as Brooklyn Central, Kings Highway, Mid-Manhattan, the Bronx Library Center and of course Flushing, which has one of the highest branch circulations in the U.S. But dozens of much smaller neighborhood branches across the city attract tens of thousands of patrons as well, including High Bridge, Forest Hills, Jackson Heights and McKinley Park. Despite having only 8,000 square feet, circulation at McKinley Park in Brooklyn last year topped out at over 950,000 materials, making it the seventh most popular branch for checkouts in the city.

In terms of basic user metrics like circulation and programming, New York's libraries compare favorably with other big city systems. Out of 25 large urban library systems that we consider in

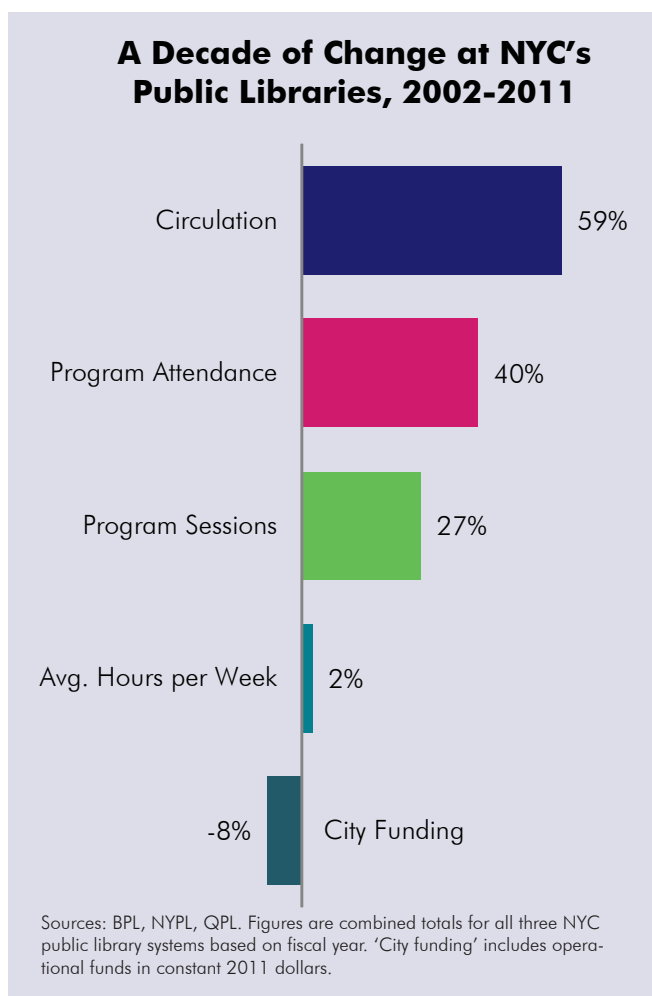
this report, Brooklyn ranks first, NYPL second and Queens third in total number of programs offered. And, on a per capita basis, only Columbus provides more programs than Brooklyn (ranked No. 2), while Queens and the NYPL rank No. 5 and No. 7 respectively.

Meanwhile, New York's three systems all experienced higher program attendance levels than any other system except Toronto. In fact, the program attendance at the city's top five branches in that category—Brooklyn Central, Kings Highway, Flushing, The Bronx Library Center and Forest Hills—was higher than the system-wide attendance in 12 other cities, including Charlotte, Detroit, Jacksonville, Baltimore, Boston and Phoenix. The New York systems do less well in terms of circulation per capita. Yet out of 25 systems, both Queens and NYPL are still in the top ten, while Brooklyn comes in at No. 11.

Although this report includes a host of new data demonstrating how New Yorkers use libraries, the importance of the libraries cannot be measured with numbers alone. Interviews with community-based leaders make it clear that public libraries have a unique strength: No other institution in New York serves so many different people in so many different ways.

For instance, at a time when 37 percent of the city's population is foreign born, around 60 percent of residents are either immigrants or children of immigrants and nearly a quarter of the population is less than totally fluent in English, the public libraries are an unmatched resource for assimilating these New Yorkers and giving them opportunities to succeed. Of the ten branches in the city with the highest circulation, six are in neighborhoods in which immigrants make up a disproportionate share of the population: Flushing, Queens Central (in Jamaica), Kings Highway, Elmhurst, McKinley Park and Fresh Meadows.

While nonprofit organizations and government offices also attempt to serve this population, libraries reach more of them and do it more effectively in large part because libraries are arguably the one institution that immigrants trust. Libraries offer English for those who are not native English speakers, preparation for the U.S. citizen-



ship test and computer literacy classes, many in foreign languages such as Spanish, Chinese and Urdu. In Midwood, Brooklyn, the popular Kings Highway branch has two Russian speaking librarians who not only field questions about books but help both recent and older immigrants learn basic computer skills.

"Libraries are an indispensable resource for immigrants," says Madhulika Khandelwal, director of the Asian/American Center at Queens College. "There have been many immigrant waves in America's history and many different institutions that helped them assimilate. In this age, I think libraries are the leading institution playing this role."

Libraries are also a singularly important resource for seniors, an essential role in a city where the number of residents over the age of 60 grew by 12.4 percent during the past decade (compared

to 0.2 percent for those under 60) and where the elderly population is expected to grow by 45 percent in the next 20 years. Older New Yorkers seem to be ever-present at branches across the city, in part because libraries provide a safe and convenient outlet for seniors to read the newspaper, send emails to relatives or just socialize in an environment that many see as more engaging than a senior center. Libraries are also increasingly the places where older adults go for resources they can't find elsewhere as branches offer specialized courses for older New Yorkers in everything from basic computer skills and electronic tax filing to defensive driving and "Facebook for Seniors."

"Libraries offer seniors the opportunity to flourish and stay active and engaged in their development," says Tom Kamber, executive director of Older Adults Technology Services (OATS). "At a time when the city is rapidly aging, there really isn't another institution that does that."

The public library system is an unparalleled portal to the Internet for the many New York-

ers still on the wrong side of the digital divide. An incredible 2.9 million city residents don't have broadband Internet access at home. Not surprisingly, there has been a huge increase in the number of New Yorkers who go to the city's public libraries to get connected. Since 2002, the city's three library systems have increased their total number of public access computers by 89 percent, with number of users rising just as fast or even faster.<sup>3</sup> In the last five years alone, the number of computer sessions logged at public computers in the city's libraries has grown by 62 percent, going from 5.8 million sessions in 2007 to over 9.3 million in 2011. At NYPL alone, attendance at technology programs nearly doubled from 2003 to 2012, going from 30,000 to 58,541.<sup>4</sup>

"Libraries are often the only access to digital resources that are available at no cost in low-income communities," says LISC's Scott.

The libraries serve job seekers and provide a range of workshops and services for those who need to bolster their skills for an economy that no longer produces large numbers of decently paying jobs for those with only a high school diploma (or less). The intensive literacy and pre-GED courses that the libraries offer—along with the many informal educational opportunities they provide—is critical in a city where nearly 30 percent of the working age population, or 1.6 million people, currently lack a high school diploma and which has one of the lowest GED attainment rates in the country.

Libraries also complement the city's public school system in a way that is often underappreciated. When school buildings are closed during the summer, on weekends and after the school day ends, the public libraries provide an alternative to the streets and offer a wide variety of programs for elementary and secondary school students, from early childhood reading sessions and reading groups to music lessons and one-on-one homework help. Libraries also have become a destination for students doing in-class research projects or simply looking for something to do after school. In Far Rockaway, for instance, a popular library center created to serve teens regularly teems with school-age kids who socialize after

"There have been many immigrant waves in America's history and many different institutions that helped them assimilate. In this age, I think libraries are the leading institution playing this role."

## THE PUBLIC LIBRARY LEGACY

Although all three New York libraries had already been founded as independent organizations, their modern incarnation as lending libraries with branches across the city, owes largely to a bequest made by Andrew Carnegie in the early 20th century. In 1901, the Carnegie Corporation agreed to provide the majority of the funds to build over 100 branches across all five boroughs. But, as with thousands of other municipalities across the country and world, it also required a firm commitment from the city to keep them open six days a week from at least nine in the morning to nine at night.<sup>5</sup>

Today, all three systems are independent 501(c)(3)s with boards that are, at least in part, appointed by the mayor, City Council speaker and borough presidents. Although all three libraries raise funds for programming from independent foundations and government agencies and receive some operating support from the state, they rely on the city for the majority of their annual operating budget and have to reduce hours and personnel every time cuts are made. According to the Institute of Museum and Library Services, 15 percent of the nation's 9,225 public libraries are independent non-profits, and although most of the big city libraries listed in our report are municipal corporations or agencies, Toronto's public library has a similar legal status and governing structure.<sup>6</sup>

school and receive job readiness advice from youth counselors.

Finally, at a time when entrepreneurship is becoming increasingly important to the city's economy, the libraries offer an array of useful resources for current and prospective business owners. Some branches, such as the Science and Business Library (SIBL) in Manhattan and the Business and Career Library (B&CL) in Brooklyn, provide free access to market research databases that would otherwise cost hundreds or thousands of dollars. Many branches operate as de facto incubators, providing a regular home to hundreds of businesses. And the libraries consistently offer programs that connect would-be entrepreneurs with small business assistance experts and mentors. Indeed, at least 250 small businesses have been launched by clients that were advised at SIBL by mentors from SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives).

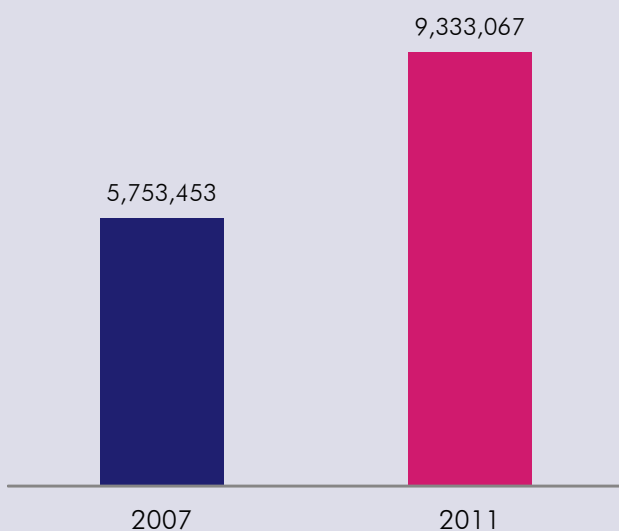
In the years ahead, New York will need to address a number of profound social, demographic and economic challenges—including a fast growing elderly population, an increasing immigrant population without the English skills to thrive and a large pool of people with limited educations at a time when employers in nearly every industry are demanding higher levels of literacy

and digital proficiency. Few institutions are better positioned than the city's public libraries to help the city meet these sorts of challenges. Unlike the vast majority of city agencies, libraries are embedded in nearly every neighborhood in New York and offer an uncommonly broad range of services. In addition, as more of the city's future population and economic growth occurs outside of the city's central business districts, libraries have the potential to be increasingly critical anchors for community and cultural development. Their physical presence in virtually every corner of the city makes them an important resource. And given societal trends such as the demise of book stores and the rise of freelancers, there may be a unique opportunity for some libraries to take on new roles in the economic, civic and social life of communities.

However, despite their growing importance, public libraries have been hugely undervalued by policymakers and are absent from most policy and planning discussions about the future of the city. Meanwhile, there has been insufficient thinking about the future sustainability of New York's libraries at a time when public resources for these institutions are diminishing and growing numbers of New Yorkers are shunning printed books



### Sessions on Public Access Computers at NYC Public Libraries, 2007-2011



Source: NYC IBO; Financial Management System. Figures based on fiscal year.

in favor of digital versions they can read on their iPad, Kindle or Nook.

Libraries offer more programs and circulate more materials than ever before, but these accomplishments have been achieved *despite* shrinking budgets and support from the city. Since 2008, NYPL has suffered a net \$28.2 million reduction in city funds, while Brooklyn and Queens have absorbed cuts worth \$18.1 million and \$17.5 million respectively.<sup>7</sup>

Due to these funding reductions, all three systems have had to reduce their hours of operation to an average of five days a week, down from six days a week in 2008. Even the Detroit public library system stays open longer. The three New York City public libraries are open 43 hours a week on average, compared to roughly 50 hours a week in Chicago and Boston, 55 in Toronto and 70 in Columbus.

The budget cuts have also forced the libraries in New York to curtail the amount they spend on books and other materials (QPL's materials acquisition budget has dropped from \$15 million to \$5 million over the past few years) and to lay off staff (the three systems have reduced staff by 24

percent, on average, since 2008). In Queens, circulation is down by 10 percent since the cuts started in 2008, a major turnaround after circulation had *increased* by 36 percent between 2004 and 2008.

Every year since 2008, the libraries have also had to fight off much larger proposed budget cuts during what has become an annual "budget dance," with the mayor proposing a huge reduction to libraries and the City Council restoring much of the funding. Although the vast majority of these proposed reductions were eventually restored when the official city budget was enacted, the process has severely hampered the libraries' ability to plan for the future and invest in innovative new services.

For this report, we asked the libraries what a modest increase in operating support would allow them to do. By the libraries' own calculations, an additional \$50 million a year in city operating funds would allow all three systems to stay open an average of 50 hours a week. And because more people would then be able to access their resources and services, they estimate that circulation would increase by an estimated 10 million materials and their program attendance by 500,000 people.<sup>8</sup> An increase of \$100 million in city funds would allow the libraries to stay open an average of 60 hours per week and put them in position to become the most utilized libraries in the country, if not the world.

"With over 200 branches across the city and only enough funding for them to stay open 40 hours a week, there's a lot of infrastructure here going unused," says Queens president Tom Galante.

However, a lack of operating funds is not the only financial challenge facing libraries. Because of the way capital projects are funded, dozens of branches across the five boroughs are confronting what more than one person in our interviews called "a maintenance crisis." The Brooklyn system currently faces over \$230 million in deferred maintenance costs, including \$8 million at a single branch in northern Brooklyn, according to Josh Nachowitz, the Brooklyn Public Library's vice president of government affairs. Even as several branches citywide—from the new Jamaica Central



Branch to the Bronx Library Center—have undergone much-needed renovations in recent years, a number remain in bad shape. “The Bronx Library Center is beautiful, but the local [branches] are struggling,” says one Bronx-based community leader. “They are short of books, look dull and dreary, and lack programming.”

We heard similar anecdotes in every borough, a major problem for the libraries since our research suggests there is a strong correlation between the condition of branches and the number of people using them.

As we detail in this report, Brooklyn has fallen far behind the other two systems in total capital funding. Of committed funds—a term city officials use to designate dollars spent rather than simply budgeted for a future project—NYPL raised \$215 million between Fiscal Year 2003 and Fiscal Year 2012; and Queens raised \$153 million during that time, while Brooklyn only brought in \$101 million.<sup>9</sup> Taking into account the relative population sizes of their service areas, that comes to \$62.41 per person for NYPL, \$68.79 per person for Queens and just \$40.50 per person for Brooklyn. When broken down by borough, branches located in Brooklyn and Staten Island have raised much less in capital funds than branches located in Queens, the Bronx and Manhattan. Staten Island branches have raised only \$6 million in funds in the last ten years, compared to \$97 million for Manhattan branches and \$107 million for Bronx branches.<sup>10</sup>

The libraries could also use additional funds and more financial security to address gaps in service and to make investments in technology that would help them stay relevant in an age where people are increasingly reading books digitally.

Libraries in several neighborhoods with high levels of unemployment, high school dropouts and chronic illness often are underutilized by their communities. For example, the Red Hook, Brownsville, Stone Avenue and Walt Whitman branches in Brooklyn have struggled for years to attract patrons. In northern Manhattan, the 125th Street branch on the far east side remains badly underutilized, while in the South Bronx, Woodstock and West Farms have maintained relatively

low circulation numbers for years. Many of these branches are physically isolated, far from commercial districts. Safety also is often a big concern, as in Brownsville, where the main branch is far from the closest commercial center.

Next, public libraries currently can serve only a tiny fraction of the people who come to them for ESOL and pre-GED training. Because libraries aren’t eligible for the vast majority of state funding for adult literacy courses, they can afford to serve only 7,000 students citywide every year, despite long waiting lists for these services and having the physical space for at least double that number. Katherine Perry, director of adult literacy at the Flushing branch in Queens, says that the demand for ESOL in the neighborhood is so overwhelming that only 20 percent of the people on the library’s wait list end up getting a spot.



Another big challenge facing libraries is the need to build a virtual environment—and business model—to support the lending of electronic materials over the Internet, including e-books and audio files. Although almost everyone seems to agree that e-books are the wave of the future, many major book publishers have put up roadblocks to e-lending. Not only do e-books cost libraries considerably more than hardbacks or paperbacks, some publishers like HarperCollins only allow 26 checkouts for every e-book purchase, forcing the libraries to buy those books again when the limit is reached. Other publishers like Macmillan and Simon and Schuster won't sell e-books to libraries at all. Because checking out an e-book is so much easier than checking out a

Brooklyn and Queens they constitute less than 1 percent of the total.<sup>11</sup>

Beyond innovating in the digital realm, libraries have been examining new library typologies, mainly smaller, more flexible spaces in storefronts in busy commercial districts or transportation hubs such as Grand Central Terminal or JFK airport. They also have been looking at new partnerships and programming possibilities, such as turning some of the underutilized space in struggling branches into incubators for artists. But, because of funding constraints, the systems have barely begun to scratch the surface of possibilities.

For this report, we spoke to a number of designers, architects and technologists to discuss

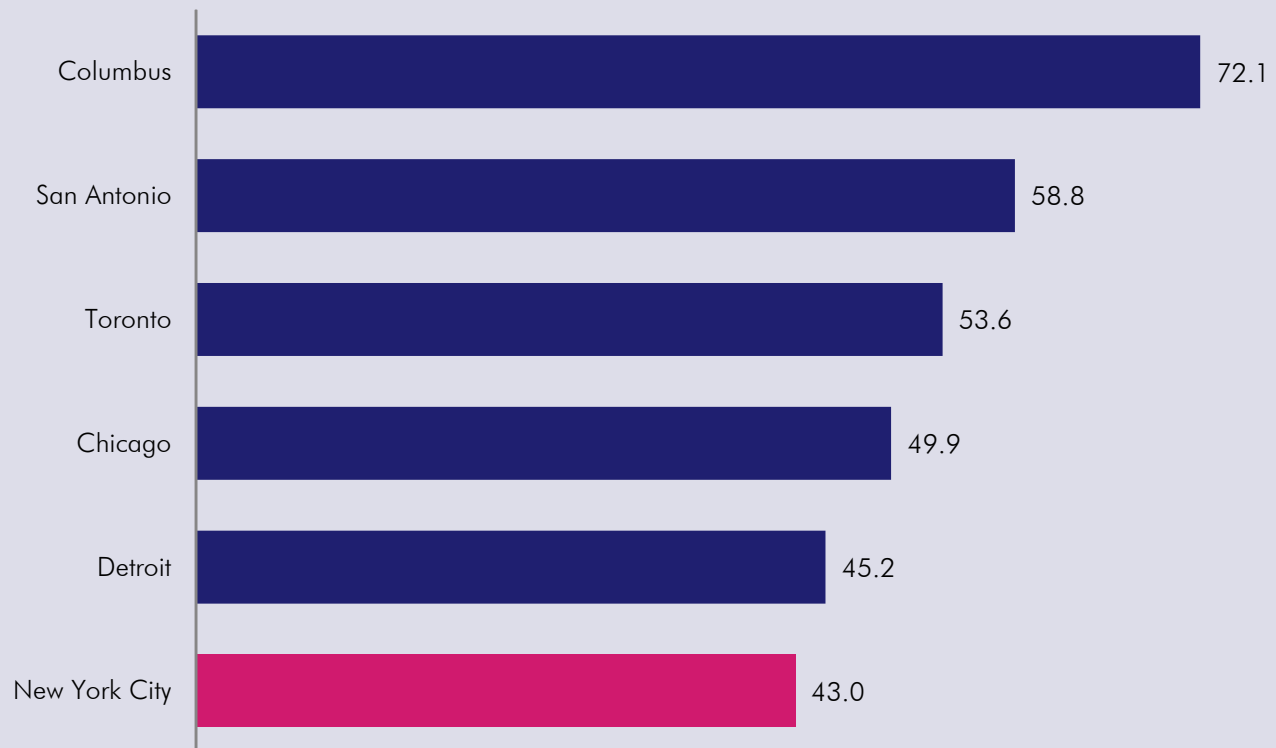
**“With over 200 branches across the city and only enough funding for them to stay open 40 hours a week, there’s a lot of infrastructure here going unused.”**

physical book—patrons can do it at any time of day without leaving the comfort of their home—publishers are worried the libraries will “cannibalize” sales.

Yet all three library systems have been marching ahead anyway. Between January 2011 and January 2012, e-book checkouts across all three systems rose 179 percent. The libraries have added new e-book platforms like the Amazon Kindle and a bunch of new titles, and have been working with the technology company Overdrive to build out their websites with more interactive capabilities and suggestion engines like those on Netflix or Amazon. Still, the three systems have a long way to go before e-lending becomes the norm. In NYPL's case, electronic checkouts account for only 5.5 percent of total circulation, and at both

how libraries might change for the better over the next few years, and we came up with a long list of tantalizing possibilities. For example, many of the innovators we spoke to said that the potential for new, neighborhood appropriate partnerships has never been greater in New York. Arts groups like Spaceworks, chashama and 3rd Ward are renovating underutilized spaces for art shows and work-share spaces. Non-profits like 826NYC are running successful storefronts that double as shops selling quirky, genre-inspired merchandise and locations for afterschool mentoring and tutoring. As one designer told us, there is no reason libraries can't build “super hero shops” or “pirate shops,” as 826NYC has done in Brooklyn and Pittsburgh respectively, on the ground floors of select library branches and work with these groups' extensive volunteer networks to put on creative writing

### Average Hours per Week, NYC vs Other Urban Library Systems (2011)



Sources: PLDS; Library Systems. Figures based on fiscal year.

programs for school children. Or how about partnering with Facebook, Google, Tumblr or one of the other tech companies in New York to build a library-based tech center that would provide access to new gadgets and basic software classes?

Absent a partnership, libraries could learn a lot from the Apple Store or, indeed, from many other private sector retailers and service providers. The bright sight lines in those stores, for example, create a sense of openness and dynamism. “You enter and you don’t feel like there’s a list of rules you have to decode,” says Albert Lee at the design firm IDEO. Moreover, with enough support to cover major upgrades, libraries could begin to tap new revenue possibilities. Library websites attract millions of visitors a month. If they could perfect an online browsing environment with recommendations and interactive capabilities, libraries could sell advertisements and user data

like any other digital media company. Knowing how a user landed on a particular book, for example, could be extremely valuable to publishers.

Libraries are without question at a crossroads. The business of making and distributing books is undergoing a tremendous upheaval as the Internet matures. At the same time libraries are experiencing an historic resurgence as community centers at exactly the same time that government support for them is waning. Circulation is at historic highs despite dwindling book budgets, and the number of programs on offer is greater and more diverse than ever before, even as staff levels have plateaued. This is a huge lost opportunity for New York. If libraries are going to fulfill their potential as engines of upward mobility and take advantage of opportunities afforded by the Internet, they will need far greater financial and institutional support than they have received so far.

## Branches of Opportunity

New York City's public libraries are serving more people in more ways than ever before; but they have been undervalued by policymakers and face growing threats in today's digital age

Funded by the  
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## OUT OF 25 URBAN LIBRARIES NATIONWIDE

In program sessions  
per 1,000 residents:

Brooklyn ranked  
**2nd**

NYPL ranked  
**6th**

Queens ranked  
**5th**

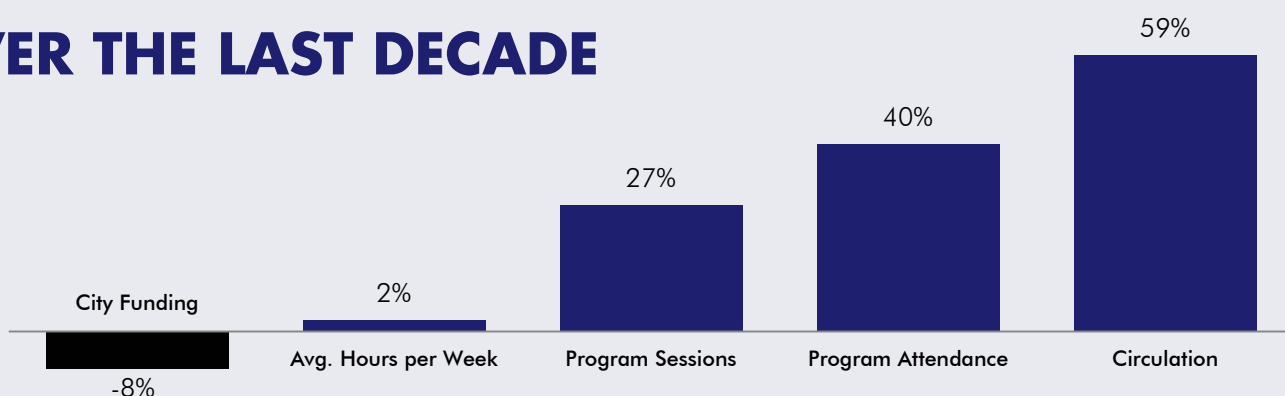
In average hours  
per week:

NYPL ranked  
**12th**

Brooklyn ranked  
**15th**

Queens ranked  
**20th**

## OVER THE LAST DECADE



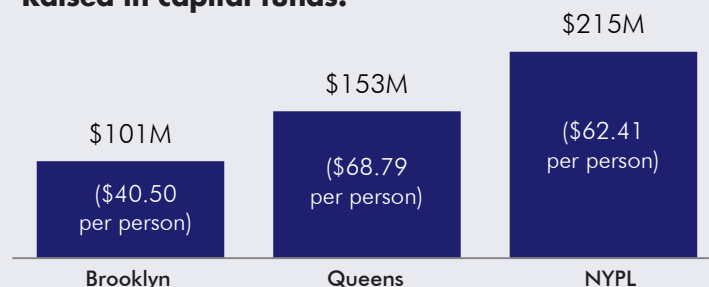
**48**

different branches  
citywide have at least  
**doubled** annual  
attendance at programs

**18**

different branches  
citywide have **more**  
than doubled their  
circulation

Raised in capital funds:



Since 2008, the libraries  
have seen city operating  
funds reduced by

**\$68M**

Because of the cuts, full  
time equivalent employ-  
ment has dropped

**24%**

## WITH ADDITIONAL \$50M IN FUNDS

Hours per week would  
increase from 43 to

**50**

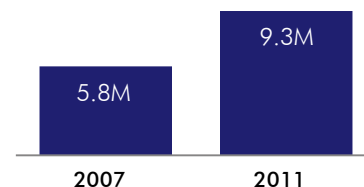
Program attendance  
would increase by

**500K**

Circulation  
would rise by

**10M**

Computer sessions at  
public libraries



In 2011, e-book  
checkouts across all  
three libraries rose

**179%**



# FOR IMMIGRANTS, A TRUSTED RESOURCE

Libraries serve as a magnet for many foreign-born New Yorkers, offering material in their native language and resources to help them adjust to life in their new country

Given the large numbers of foreign-born residents in New York (37 percent of the population overall and nearly half in Queens), it should come as no surprise that they account for a large percentage of library patrons. But the demographics alone don't explain the incredibly high performance numbers of libraries in immigrant neighborhoods or the apparently inexhaustible demand for library-based programs like ESOL, computer and software classes, coping workshops and more.

According to Fred Fu, founder of the Flushing Development Center, a Queens-based community group, libraries serve as a de facto school for immigrants. "Immigrants see the flag and the building, and [to them] it represents not just the city, but America—it is a symbol," he says.

Of the ten branches in New York with the highest circulation, six are in immigrant-dominated neighborhoods, including Flushing, Queens Central (in Jamaica), Kings Highway, Elmhurst, McKinley Park and Fresh Meadows. In Queens, the Flushing library serves New York's largest Chinese community and boasts a circulation of over 3 million materials a year, enough to put it among the top five branches in the entire U.S. in terms of annual circulation. The Elmhurst library, situated in a heavily South American neighborhood, has an annual circulation of just under 1 million. Within Brooklyn, the large Russian community surrounding the Kings Highway branch supports a circulation of 1.3 million, while the tiny storefront branch in McKinley Park, an area of Dyker Heights with a large and growing Chinese population, supports a circulation of 960,000.

Of course book borrowing is just one of many resources and services attracting immigrants to libraries. The librarian at the McKinley Park branch, for instance, says that its early childhood and young parenting programs are perpetually oversubscribed. And Katherine Perry, a staff

member at the Flushing branch, reports that the waiting lists are so long for their popular ESOL classes that only 20 percent of applicants get a spot. "You could quadruple the size of this place and you would still not meet the needs of the English learners in Flushing," she says.

Immigrants rely on libraries in part because these new New Yorkers are highly motivated to succeed and need help navigating a new system of services and requirements, including such basic things as how to apply for a driver's license or business permit. But according to many of the immigrant groups we spoke to for this report, trust is also a major part of the libraries' appeal. "[Immigrants] don't feel comfortable accessing basic government agencies," says Valerie Treves, the executive director of a Queens community-based organization serving immigrants. For example, Treves explains, despite fraud by lawyers, notaries, fake real estate agencies and even employment agencies purporting to serve immigrant communities, immigrants rarely report abuses to the appropriate authorities.

Libraries are safe and welcoming. They are situated in immigrant neighborhoods and are open most of the day. A lot of branches employ staff members who speak their mother language, and librarians are well-known, even among immigrants, for fiercely protecting personal privacy. Moreover, in New York, libraries are extremely proactive about their book acquisitions—they purchase tens of thousands of foreign language books and rotate them in and out of the appropriate neighborhood branches. In addition to their intensive ESOL classes and English conversation workshops, they partner with immigrant and community groups to put on a wide variety of events and classes, from financial literacy seminars to courses on how to use a foreign degree to find a job in the U.S.

Although all three New York City systems make an immense effort to cater to immigrant needs, the Queens Library's huge repertoire of immigrant programs and resources stands out and may well be unequaled anywhere in the world. QPL actually has its own demographer, who helps the system deploy resources for even the smallest immigrant groups. The borough has over 190 languages, and the library will provide a collection for any community with more than 3,000 speakers. For example, when it was discovered that the Nepali community near the Woodside branch had grown to over 5,000 people, the library began stocking the shelves with Nepali books and worked with a local organization to put on events and programs. Similar demographic research led to parenting programs targeting young Chinese and Bengali mothers, and cultural programs geared to Ecuadoreans and Guatemalans.

The library's New Americans Program (NAP) puts on about 80 cultural programs a year. Often done in partnership with local community groups, these programs include festivals, dance shows, music events, performances and much more. Entertainment, however, is far from the only outcome of these programs. Cultural shows spur diversity, enhance cultural understanding and introduce community members to the resources of the library. Beyond cultural programs, NAP also plans about 200 coping workshops per year. These are practical workshops that provide information about topics such as parenting, health and immigrant and tenant rights. In the last year and a half, coping workshops have been conducted in Arabic, Bengali, Chinese (Mandarin), Haitian-Creole, Korean, Nepali, Portuguese, Punjabi, Russian and Spanish.

Fred Gitner, assistant director for NAP, notes that partnering with the right community organization has been one huge key to the program's success. But it can take a while to find the appropriate organization and build a relationship, he warns, and not all immigrant communities have available partners. The borough's Chinese population has dozens of extremely active CBOs, but the Spanish speaking community has far fewer for its size.

Libraries have traditionally focused on immigrants with low education levels and rudimentary English skills, but many skilled immigrants lack the ability to fully utilize their skills and foreign degrees. Debbie Wibowo at Upwardly Global, an organization that works with educated immigrants, cites three main challenges that skilled immigrants face when seeking employment: lack of a professional network within the U.S.; lack of familiarity with U.S. culture and mannerisms; and licensing and certification difficulties due to their degrees from foreign universities and institutions. The ESOL and basic computer classes the libraries offer are a tremendous resource for many immigrants, she says, but they do not always meet the needs of more highly educated immigrants.

Top 20 Branches by Circulation: 2011

Rank	Borough	Branch	Circulation
1	Q	Flushing	3,038,089
2	M	Mid-Manhattan	2,801,300
3	BK	Brooklyn Central	2,788,773
4	Q	Queens Central	2,419,483
5	BK	Kings Highway	1,300,971
6	Q	Elmhurst	963,141
7	BK	McKinley Park	961,825
8	BK	New Utrecht	925,357
9	Q	Fresh Meadows	893,636
10	Q	Bayside	868,042
11	BK	Borough Park	712,472
12	Q	Forest Hills	680,394
13	Q	Jackson Heights	667,176
14	BX	Bronx Library Center	613,978
15	SI	Todt Hill-Westerleigh	607,281
16	BK	Mapleton	599,742
17	BK	Bay Ridge	587,069
18	M	Chatham Square	572,140
19	BK	Sunset Park	531,195
20	M	Seward Park	513,475

Sources: BPL, NYPL, QPL. Figures based on fiscal year.

# SENIOR CENTERS WITH A DIFFERENCE

With the population aging, older New Yorkers are likely to become increasingly important to the city's libraries, but a lack of resources hampers efforts to serve this key population

The city's public libraries have long played a special role in the lives of many older New Yorkers. But at a time when New York's population is rapidly aging and when so many older adults need help navigating new technologies, libraries have become truly indispensable to the city's seniors.

The number of New York City residents 60 or older increased by 12.4 percent over the last decade, compared to 2.1 percent for the total population and 0.2 percent for residents under 60. After miniscule increases during the 1980s and '90s, the city's elderly population is expected to grow 45 percent over the next 20 years, reaching an estimated 1.3 million by 2030.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, older residents are not only more likely to lack an Internet connection and sufficient computer skills, they are less likely to speak English than the rest of the population.<sup>13</sup>

With the city's network of senior centers serving less than five percent of older adults across the five boroughs, many elderly New Yorkers turn to the libraries for a variety of resources. They come to read newspapers or pick up forms for government programs; they participate in social activities like bridge or classes such as Tai Chi, one of several physical fitness classes that NYPL offers especially for seniors. But, just as important, seniors rely on libraries as public spaces where they can see and meet other people, something they may not be able to do where they live.

"Seniors use the library as a daytime outing," says Kamber, "a gathering place to meet with friends. [They] want opportunities to flourish and to stay active and engaged in their development. No other institution really serves this critical need."

For older people of all ethnicities and educational backgrounds, libraries also offer access to technology. Seniors are less likely to have Internet access or even a computer at home than

other New Yorkers, and digital literacy remains a big problem even for many who do. Like everyone else, seniors need to navigate the Internet in order to do basic everyday things, but many lack the skills to do so efficiently or effectively. Nearly all branch librarians say they constantly field questions from seniors wanting to know how to operate the computers, send an email or get rid of an error message. According to Judy Willig, the executive director of Heights and Hills, an organization that works with seniors, the constant availability of one-on-one help for such problems sets libraries apart from other neighborhood resources, including many senior centers. "Having someone there to answer questions and provide tech support is critical for older people," she says. In fact, Willig suggests that even when they do have computer access at home, many older adults prefer the library because of the help they can get there.

"We can achieve so much through the library channel but we don't invest enough ... A senior-focused library or senior resource center would be a huge help to seniors."

Beyond informal advice, all three library systems have expanded their basic computer classes aimed at seniors. For example, one class at NYPL called “Is This Thing On?” starts with how to use a mouse and moves on gradually to more complex tasks such as how to set up email and Facebook accounts; other courses cover the basics of online shopping, social media, software tools like Google chat and e-readers like the Kindle.

The Queens Library, meanwhile, is experimenting with a new technological component to their Mail-a-Book Program, a traditional program offered by all three systems that sends books and other media to homebound seniors in the mail. Queens’ homebound patrons can now participate in a program that uses Skype, a teleconferencing portal, to participate in discussions led by authors and other professionals.

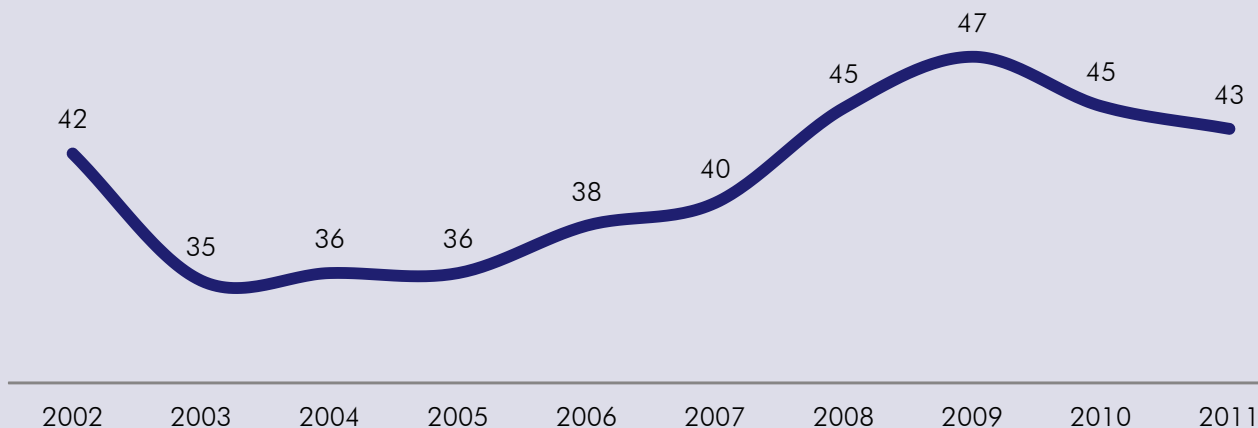
At some library branches, seniors don’t just benefit from services—they provide them as volunteers. A recent partnership between the Queens Library and ReServe, a national non-profit, places qualified seniors in volunteer positions at select branches. The seniors are paid \$10 an hour and work in a wide range of positions, from outreach coordinator to job counselor. According to direc-

tor Mary Bleiberg, so-called “ReServists” come from a wide variety of professional backgrounds, from social work to engineering, and the program tends to place them in positions where they can draw on their previous work experience. Bleiberg says that ReServe is even looking to get some of its volunteers certified as ESOL instructors, a move that, she believes, could greatly expand the classes at relatively low cost.

Whether they receive services or help deliver them, seniors will play an even larger role in the libraries’ future. Much more could be done to meet the needs of these New Yorkers, but a lack of resources has hampered efforts. For example, although over a dozen branches have developed teen centers over the last few years, not a single branch in the city has developed a senior center. “People are living longer and we have to figure out how to better serve that population,” notes Donna Ciampa, the head librarian at Flushing. “This is definitely something we are looking into and wish we had more resources for.”

“We can achieve so much through the library channel but we don’t invest enough,” agrees Tom Kamber. “A senior-focused library or senior resource center would be a huge help to seniors.”

**Average Hours per Week at NYC Libraries  
2002-2011**



Sources: PLDS; Library Systems. Figures based on fiscal year.



# GETTING READY FOR WORK

Unbeknownst to many affluent, educated New Yorkers, libraries play a key role in helping people develop job-related skills from basic literacy to technical savvy

If one had to choose the most underappreciated thing libraries do, skills building and career development—what we’re calling work readiness—would top the list. In the city budget, libraries are grouped with cultural institutions, not education providers or workforce development organizations, and most people—at least if they are middle class and well educated—seem to associate public libraries with children’s books, story time and little more. But for literally millions of New Yorkers libraries are the first place to go to pick up marketable skills, polish a resume or search for job openings online.

With the city’s unemployment rate hovering near 10 percent in recent years, public libraries across the five boroughs have been swarmed with people seeking help in finding a job. Nearly all the librarians we spoke to for this report said that job seekers made up a huge portion of their clientele. At the High Bridge branch in the Bronx, for instance, patrons come in and spend a whole day searching online job boards, according to the head librarian there. “I get questions about online job applications all the time,” she says. “Recently I helped a waitress apply for a job at a restaurant. Nowadays, no matter what kind of job you’re looking for, you need access to a computer.”

Libraries have been offering services to job seekers, particularly lower income job seekers with low levels of educational attainment, for decades, but over the last ten years both the diversity of their offerings and attendance levels have skyrocketed. Between Fiscal Year 2002 and 2011, attendance for all adult programs at the Queens Library grew 79 percent and young adult attendance doubled. NYPL’s adult attendance grew 110 percent in that time, while its young adult attendance jumped 77 percent. (Brooklyn’s program attendance data was not broken down by age group.)

While these numbers encompass a wide variety of events, including book clubs and movie nights, the core of these offerings are programs geared toward people who are looking to secure a job or advance in a career. Dozens of libraries across the city offer free intensive classes in adult literacy, computer literacy, GED preparation and English for non-native speakers. Most branches offer informal workshops on how to write a resume, how to improve a resume by adding basic skills such as Microsoft Office and how to present oneself in a job interview. Libraries also have begun to do a lot more outreach with teenagers and disconnected youth, providing career counseling and part-time volunteer opportunities. And, since last fall, four branches in the Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens have even begun to offer job placement services through the city’s Workforce1 Career Centers.

In addition to all the classes, workshops and tutoring sessions offered at branches throughout the city, 19 select branches have specialized adult learning centers. Brooklyn has five centers (a sixth in New Lots is under construction), Queens has seven and New York seven.

The Adult Learning Center at the Long Island City branch in Queens offers eight classes a week in pre-GED, ESOL, adult literacy, citizenship (geared for immigrants preparing for the citizenship test) and more recently an information technology course sponsored by CISCO systems. The programs are free and open to anyone, though students are required to take a test to assess what level they should be placed in, according to manager Marco Castillo. The center has computer terminals and laptops outfitted with learning programs for GED, math and literacy, and students are encouraged to use the programs as supplements to their course instruction.

When it comes to skills building and career counseling for adults and young adults, libraries have several important assets. Number one is accessibility: With 206 branches, the library systems have a footprint in almost every neighborhood in the city, and because they already serve a diverse population, they are able to reach people who don't know about or don't trust other service providers. Drop-in workshops are a critical resource for those who are too intimidated to walk into a Workforce1 Center or leave the neighborhood for a more formal class, according to Corinne Le-Tourneau of Community Solutions, a non-profit with several prominent initiatives in Brownsville. A number of librarians told us their one-on-one interactions with patrons were critical in getting them into the workshops in the first place. Because libraries are open most of the day, patrons can spend as much time as they need to seek out programs and other resources, something almost no other social service provider is in position to do.

Libraries also have the advantage of offering a range of resources and services to advance and support in-class instruction. Students in library-based classes are encouraged to supplement their learning with other library resources, whether it's checking out a laptop to take practice questions for the GED or working one-on-one with volunteer tutors. "Everything we have here makes you want to linger and put what you learned in class to work," notes Ken English, the director of adult literacy at NYPL.

Libraries play a particularly important role in adult literacy programs. Many library branches—and all branches with adult learning centers—carry books especially intended for adults who are learning to read or write; these are written at a fourth-grade reading level, say, but with adult content, an extremely important factor in engaging the students and reducing the sense of shame many feel about their reading and writing ability. (The fact that libraries are not schools also helps reduce shyness and shame, many educators say.) According to Ken English, tutors are also trained to emphasize so-called "literacy in action" by helping students with job applications and resumes,

Top 20 Branches by Program Attendance: 2011			
Rank	Borough	Branch	Circulation
1	B	Brooklyn Central	73,009
2	B	Kings Highway	49,732
3	Q	Flushing	45,689
4	Bx	Bronx Library Center	41,809
5	Q	Forest Hills	38,179
6	M	Mid-Manhattan Library	33,782
7	Q	Long Island City	32,183
8	B	Leonard	28,144
9	B	Windsor Terrace	26,547
10	Q	Queens Central	*26,057
11	B	Bay Ridge	25,924
12	Bx	Parkchester	25,531
13	Bx	Clason's Point	24,031
14	Q	Corona	22,000
15	M	Seward Park	20,368
16	B	New Utrecht	19,370
17	Q	Elmhurst	19,058
18	Q	Ridgewood	*18,521
19	Q	Jackson Heights	18,401
20	Bx	Grand Concourse	18,364

Sources: BPL, NYPL, QPL. Figures based on fiscal year. \*Branch underwent renovations for part of the year.

filling out forms and interpreting formal letters. He says that a lot of literacy students first come to the library in order to solve a specific problem, like deciphering a letter from their landlord or taking care of a parking ticket. The one-on-one tutoring allows them to continue solving these kinds of problems, while improving their skills at the same time.

In their literacy courses, libraries tend to focus on learners reading at sixth-grade reading level and below. They are among the few education providers in the city that will accept non-readers. Tara Colton, managing director of the New York City Office of Human Capital Development, sees libraries as being on the "cutting-edge" for new reader instruction, mainly because of their one-on-one tutoring and small classes. "I can defini-

## CROSSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

In this day and age, the Internet is a necessary part of running one's life. Despite that, the number of New York City residents who don't have broadband Internet access at home remains alarmingly high.

A 2010 study by the Center for Technology and Government at SUNY Albany found that 2.9 million New York City residents, or 36 percent of the total population, lack broadband access in their homes. Low-income people, public housing residents and seniors represent the biggest demographic groups in this digital divide. According to NYCHA, only 25 percent of public housing residents have broadband access—and for seniors in this group the number drops to just 5 percent.<sup>14</sup>

While many of these people can get on the Internet through a slower dial-up connection, broadband has become essential for accessing many resources and tools for upward mobility. Almost all employers, including Home Depot, Target and McDonald's, now require online applications even for non-technology positions. Many government agencies also strongly encourage online applications to receive services such as unemployment benefits and Medicaid. Since the 1990s, the IRS has encouraged online tax filing, because the error rate for electronic submissions is so much lower than for paper. At the same time, email and the Internet have become essential platforms for communicating with colleagues and an ever-widening array of service providers, including education and health care organizations.

Libraries are the single largest providers of free broadband service in the city, and a lifeline for many of those who lack access at home. A 2008 broadband study found only 310 public access points in the entire city, and two thirds of those (212) were libraries.<sup>15</sup> Libraries not only provide free WiFi and public access computers, they offer one-on-one help and free courses for patrons with a range of skills. Seniors learn the basics of email and the Internet through introductory computers classes, while job seekers are introduced to job searching techniques and school kids are taught how to evaluate the trustworthiness of Internet resources.<sup>16</sup>

tively say that the adult education system is stronger because the libraries exist," she says. "They have some flexibility to expand in ways that other programs don't, and they can recruit additional volunteers. Being embedded in the community is a great advantage for that."

The Bloomberg administration has made several moves that have dramatically improved the libraries' adult and young adult offerings. First, in partnership with the Center for Economic Opportunity and the mayor's Young Men's Initiative, all three library systems have received additional funding to expand their literacy programs geared toward so-called disconnected youth, or young people aged 17 to 24 who are neither working nor in school. The programs offer reading and writing instruction as well as counseling on a wide variety of topics, including what to do if you're stopped by the police and how to present yourself in job interviews. Students have the opportunity to move up to pre-GED classes after 20 hours of instruction, says Elizabeth Lewis, the literacy director at the Brooklyn Public Library.

Second, the Department of Small Business Services (SBS), the city's chief workforce development agency, has started placing Workforce1 Career Centers in several branches across the city, including Sunset Park and Grand Army Plaza in Brooklyn, Flushing in Queens and Francis Martin in the Bronx. According to deputy SBS commissioner Mathew White, the library-based job centers have allowed the operators to connect with formerly hard-to-reach populations. For example, he says, the new centers in Sunset Park and Flushing should help bring services to immigrant communities that the centers had not been reaching previously. "A lot of the traffic we're seeing in the libraries is coming from people who haven't heard of us before," White says. "They're coming to the library first and only then learning about our services."

The library-based job centers also have allowed SBS to put 100 percent of its workforce dollars into service delivery, a huge benefit at a time when federal support for workforce development has been dramatically shrinking.

# OUT OF THE CLASSROOM, INTO THE LIBRARY

The city's public schools and its libraries are stepping up efforts to bring students to libraries to improve their skills, do research and pursue their own interests

New York City's educational challenges are no secret. At a time when a postsecondary education is more important than ever, nearly 30 percent of residents don't even have a high school diploma, and just 23 percent of those who graduate from city schools are prepared for college-level coursework. At the city's community colleges, three quarters of incoming freshmen have to enroll in remedial reading, writing and math classes, and nearly one quarter need to do remedial work in all three subjects.<sup>17</sup> The city's public education system—with over 1.1 million students—is implementing widespread instructional changes to address this frighteningly large skills gap. But according to the educators and policy experts we spoke to for this report, the schools can't do it on their own—and with three of the largest public library systems in the world at their disposal, they shouldn't have to.

In addition to providing age-appropriate books and materials for in-class research projects, public libraries have offered story time and afterschool homework help to generations of school kids. By 3:30 pm every weekday, library branches across the city are overrun with kids who come in to play games on the computers or do homework. Most branches have at least one volunteer homework helper who comes in once or twice a week, and many have several. More recently, libraries have begun to expand their K-12 offerings, providing materials and programs once considered taboo. Whole shelves are now dedicated to graphic novels, for instance, and both web surfing and video gaming are actively encouraged. Common afterschool programs include chess and checkers, music lessons, video games, robotics, knitting and arts-and-crafts. The traditional summer reading program has also received a big makeover recently. Toward the end of the school year, librarians still fan out across the city to introduce local students to the summer reading

list for their grade, as they seemingly always have, but students can now go to [SummerReading.org](http://SummerReading.org), a portal used by all three systems, to log their progress, comment on the books and keep abreast of summer reading events at their local branch. This year, all three systems instituted “fresh start” programs, and Queens' version allows students to “read down their fines” by commenting on the books they read.

“Our neighborhood library branch, the Arlington Branch, is a mecca for kids after school, and their libraries have partnered with our early childhood, after school and summer camp programs,” says Michelle Neugebauer, executive director of the Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation. “The librarians come into our programs, read to the children, distribute library cards, do introductory tours at the library and loan us collections for the programs.”

Two recent—and enormously important—educational reforms will likely make the libraries even more important to the city's public schools. One, the implementation of the Common Core curriculum, which, among other things, stresses the use of non-fiction primary and secondary materials over traditional textbooks, will compel student to rely on libraries to find those books, articles and other materials.

“With the Common Core the emphasis is on non-fiction books, not textbooks, which means you need access to a huge amount of current materials,” says Barbara Stripling, the former director of library services at the city's Department of Education. Stripling says that school-based libraries have an instructional value all their own, but under the new teaching guidelines, “They will never have enough resources to fulfill the needs of all the classes. For that we need to be able to draw on the vast reservoir of resources at the public libraries.”



**“It’s in the libraries where students uncover knowledge rather than just cover it in class for a test ... But the libraries have been pushed to the side—they’re seen as an add-on.”**

Two, as the increasing emphasis on testing in English and math has squeezed other subjects and activities from the school day, many students have looked to libraries to fill that gap. Lucy Friedman, the founder and executive director of the After-School Corporation (TASC), a non-profit dedicated to improving after-school opportunities for kids, says public libraries have become extremely important resources for extracurricular learning, including structured activities like music lessons and unstructured ones like reading or just surfing the web. “The six-hour school day is not enough,” says Friedman. “Lots of the activities schools used to offer have stopped, so these kids need to make use of other local resources. A big part of the thinking behind the expanded day is to offer new ways of learning.”

As more and more research begins to show how much extracurricular learning, including reading for pleasure, can improve academic performance, most educators are starting to view the library as a critical supplement to the public school system. However, many also think that it has been a traditionally undervalued component of that system and that not nearly enough school age children and teenagers take advantage of it. “It’s in the libraries where students uncover knowledge rather than just cover it in class for a test,” says the Community Service Society’s Lazar Treschan. “But the libraries have been pushed to the side—they’re seen as an add-on.”

“The libraries are not on [most school kids’] radar by and large,” agrees Lucy Friedman. “There

are a million public school students in New York and just a small fraction have library cards.”

In partnership with TASC, the Thurgood Marshall Academy Lower School on 151st Street in Harlem recently began taking students on weekly visits to the Macomb’s Bridge branch in order to introduce them to library resources and get them in the habit of checking out books and learning on the computers. “When we first started going, there weren’t a lot of kids who had library cards,” says fourth grade teacher Pamela Moore, “but after we started exposing parents and kids to all these resources, it opened up a whole new world for them.” On one visit last spring, nearly all the students toted books as they walked two blocks to Macomb’s Bridge, a tiny one-room library housed in a Housing Authority building. A few of the fourth graders had six or seven science books, one on the natural history of oil. Two students said they sometimes bring their parents to the library on the weekend, and, according to Moore, some of the boys go to the gaming sessions on Wednesdays.

Like many public schools across New York, the Thurgood Marshall Academy Lower School doesn’t have its own library. Although all primary and secondary public schools are required to have a library—secondary schools are supposed to have trained librarians as well—budget constraints have caused many schools to either close their libraries altogether or reassign the librarians that run them, which can dramatically reduce the library’s effectiveness. The State Department of Education didn’t answer requests for information

## THE LIBRARY AS TEEN CENTER

Teens have long posed a challenge for most libraries and librarians. Traditionally, they either haven't been interested in visiting at all, or, when they did visit, disrupted other patrons. But young adult attendance has increased by 77 percent at NYPL and 100 percent at QPL since 2002 in large part because libraries here—and in other cities across the country—have started designing specialized rooms and programs geared specifically toward teens.<sup>18</sup>

In 2007, for example, the Queens Library leased a storefront in the commercial district of Far Rockaway, and filled it with 40 computers, ten printers, couches, work tables, 80 different magazines, several gaming devices and a \$70,000 recording studio. Today, about 100 teens come through the door on a typical afterschool day. A staff of five youth counselors supervise everything from homework help and college counseling to fashion shows and gaming sessions. More importantly, the youth counselors serve as mentors in a community with few programs for teens.

Roy, now 20 years old, serves as a teen lead mentor at the center, a role reserved for former teen patrons who wish to remain active in the center. Roy hopes to become a correction officer and plans to attend community college next year, a goal he saw as unattainable before he started going to the teen center. "The teen center has given me people skills," says Roy, "and I have learned how to talk with people and present myself."

The teen library in Far Rockaway was built in order to alleviate some of the teen crowds at the neighborhood's regular branch, but other libraries served few teenagers until specialized teen rooms and teen programs were offered.

The Flushing Library, for example, built an in-house teen room designed for 80 people in 2009, and it took very little time for the space to overflow. Susan Miller was a young adult librarian before the creation of the teen room. "We never saw them in the library before the teen room," she recalls. "Once the room was built though, we didn't even need to advertise it. All we had to do was put a sign downstairs pointing to where the teen room is and hundreds came." Most of the teens are first-generation immigrants who take English as a Second Language classes in school; they come to the room to work, get homework help or play computer games.

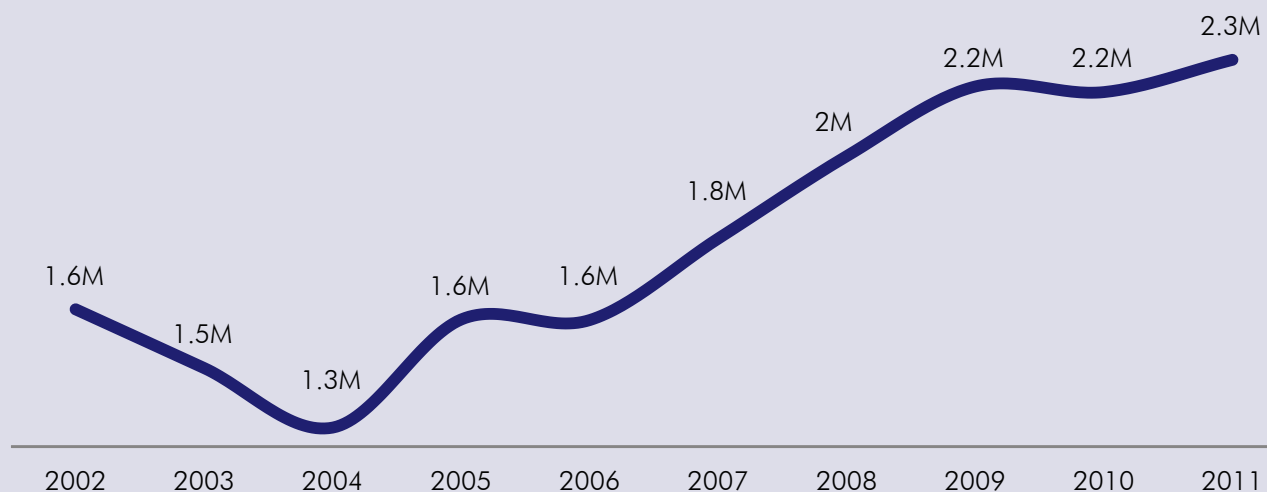
Although NYPL and Brooklyn haven't yet built a teen center as ambitious as the recording studio in Far Rockaway, all three systems have been adding new rooms and programs for their teenage patrons. "Growing Dollars and Cents" is a popular Brooklyn program, for instance, that teaches teenagers how to manage their money. At NYPL, "Plant Smart!" introduces teens to the basics of urban gardening including issues in garden chemistry and microclimates.

Beyond programming, the libraries are together the largest employer of teenagers in the city. Every year, all three hire thousands of teenagers to do part-time work at branches throughout the city, either as participants in the city's Summer Youth Employment Program or independently. Among other things, teens commonly provide bilingual services and tech help to patrons.

on the official number of school-based libraries and librarians in New York City, but many former and current city DOE officials and teachers say that the ranks have been shrinking. "There's no financial support for [school libraries], it's completely discretionary," says Cheryl Wolf, a librarian at PS 63 in Manhattan. "There are increasingly fewer libraries. I've seen and heard about libraries closing as long as I've been in this business, about eight years."

The city DOE and NYPL have spearheaded an innovative new program that promises to dramatically deepen the relationship between New York's public libraries and public schools. Last year, the library launched a five-month pilot project to make its catalog available to public elementary, junior high and high schools, so that students could search for books on computers at their schools and arrange to pick up any book in the system at their closest branch. Teachers could order up to 100 items at a time, including

### Program Attendance at NYC Public Libraries, 2002-2011



Sources: BPL, NYPL, QPL. Figures based on fiscal year.

30-book sets for the whole class to use, and then have them delivered to their classroom. “Delivery will make a huge difference to teachers,” says Barbara Stripling, one of the architects of the new program. “Traditionally, teachers have to go gather up the resources and hand-carry them back to their class; that’s problematic in a city where most teachers are dependent on public transportation.”

The pilot program—which library officials call BiblioCommons, after the name of the web-based catalog interface—was a huge hit. As part of the program, 65,000 students at 83 different schools in the Bronx, Manhattan and Staten Island received library cards and went on to check out over 72,000 items, including at least one in every branch in the NYPL system. Most impressive of all, students at the participating schools were three times more likely to take out a book than their peers at other schools.

This year, the BiblioCommons program—or what the Bloomberg administration is now calling the MyLibraryNYC Initiative—will be expanded to 250,000 students and 400 public schools across the city. By 2015, every public school in New York is expected to participate, including dozens that don’t currently have libraries on campus. The ex-

panded version of the program will draw on over 17 million titles at all three public library systems.

With this new partnership, Stripling believes that students will be able to take the independent learning skills that are so central to the Common Core and put them to use in the library. “There are lots of opportunities for kids to use the skills they’re learning in school, but on projects that they’re interested in,” she says. “They could be developing their own newsletters or learning digital tools or writing book reviews.”

“Not only will every public school student in New York benefit from the largest circulating system in the world, with additional books purchased as they demand them,” says NYPL President Anthony Marx, “we will preprint 1.1 million library cards and give them to every student in this town. Have we noticed that we are locking in the next generation of library users? Yeah, we probably have.”

# GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS

Many successful New York businesses got their start at the local library, while the city's two business libraries offer more specialized information and run start-up competitions that have helped inspire a broader entrepreneurial culture

As they are for job seekers, libraries are often the first stop for entrepreneurs or would-be business owners taking those first tentative steps toward outlining a business plan. Libraries provide space to work in, opportunities to connect with mentors and small business assistance counselors, and access to invaluable resources for market research, many of which would otherwise be well out of the price range of the average entrepreneur. In addition, entrepreneurs often benefit from the librarians themselves, many of whom have a rich knowledge of neighborhood dynamics.

"Culturally, libraries have many staff in different languages, and this is really key," says Seth Bornstein, the director of the Queens Economic Development Corporation (QEDC). "All the librarians know a lot about their communities, and this is the first line of defense for someone trying to start a business, as they need to do neighborhood research."

When Denise Adusei was mapping out plans for the Pear Tree Preschool in Harlem, for example, her local branch librarian and reference librarians at the larger Science, Industry and Business Library (SIBL) on 34th Street helped her track down demographic data, market analyses, sample business plans and even zoning information. "I don't think there is anything I didn't use the library for," she says.

Although dozens of branches across the city can provide current and prospective business owners with invaluable research tools, SIBL is undoubtedly the hub for serious, in-depth business research. Business owners often see the library as a second office, using private conference rooms for business meetings and interviews. They also take advantage of the library's subscriptions to a host of extremely expensive databases. Shirley Leung, the owner of NYC2020, a consult-

ing firm, uses about five to six SIBL databases a month, including *Galante's Venture Capital & Private Equity Directory*, *Zephyr* and *Factiva*. Leung estimates that subscriptions to these and other databases could cost her up to \$25,000 per month. "Without SIBL, I wouldn't be able to run my business because I couldn't do the investment side of my work," she says.

For those who don't know about these resources, SIBL offers practical classes and one-on-one tutoring sessions with research librarians on how they work and what they can do. Just ask Sean Sabol, who launched Detail Devils, a company that sells kits for cleaning motorcycles, at SIBL. "The patience and hands on assistance [of the SIBL staff] made me more comfortable with, and effective at, exploiting information tools such as online databases to do what had to be done to start my business venture," says Sabol. "I learned how to use the *Thomas Register* to resource the materials to manufacture my motorcycle detailing kit, I used the *Reference USA* database to identify companies with good credit ratings to distribute my product and create a mailing list. I used the *Galante's Directory of Venture Capitalists* to research backers and funders which led me to American Bank Note Company. I also took many of the 22 classes SIBL offered on topics like mail list creation and trademarks and market research."

Although much smaller, the Business and Career Library (B&CL) in Brooklyn Heights also offers a number of important business databases, such as *Local Market Audience Analyst*, which provides demographic, segmentation and targeting data for media planners and consumer markets, and *New York State Contract Reporter*, which lists all contracts greater than \$15,000 that are up for bid in New York State.



# The libraries' business plan competitions have proved hugely successful over the last few years, not only in seeding promising companies but in creating a broader entrepreneurial culture and promulgating best practices.

In addition to research tools, all three library systems run a wide array of workshops and lectures on topics ranging from marketing and intellectual property to business plan development. Recent classes at SIBL have included “Low Cost/No Cost Marketing,” “Forward-thinking Fashion” and “Business Legal Structures.” Prospective business owners can learn directly from seasoned entrepreneurs as a part of the Brooklyn B&CL’s Technology and Entrepreneur Series. The library also hosts one-on-one tutorials offered by SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives), a national non-profit that offers business advice by retired professionals, and by the Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, which offers financial counseling. Officials from SCORE estimates roughly 250 small businesses were launched by clients that were advised at SIBL by SCORE mentors.

Although the Queens Public Library doesn’t have an official business library, it too runs a number of entrepreneurship classes geared especially toward immigrants and lower-income entrepreneurs at select branches. For instance, the Jackson Heights branch recently offered “How to Start and Run a Small Business” in both Spanish and English, and the Central branch offers training workshops leading up to a business plan competition called Queens StartUP! that it co-sponsors with the QEDC.

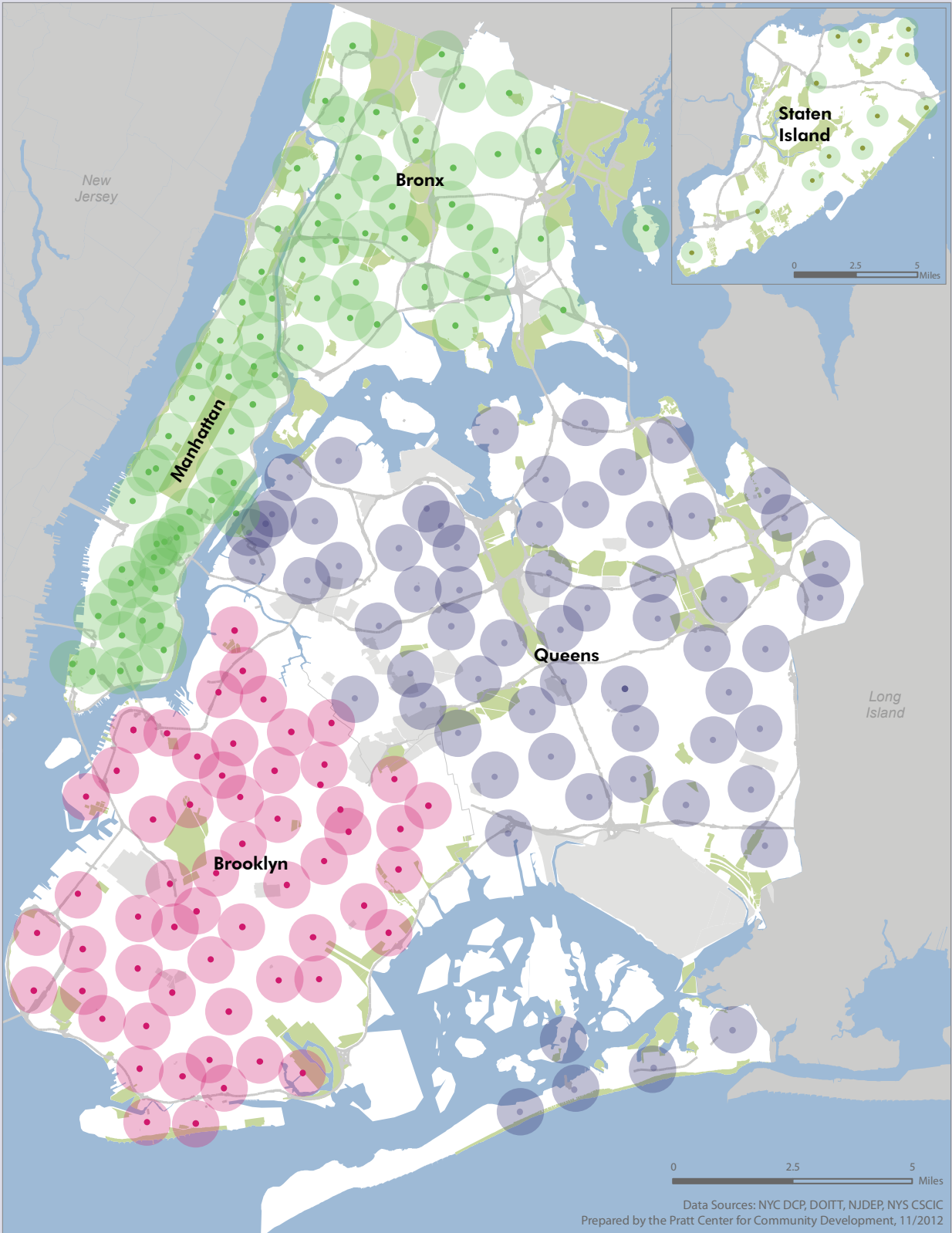
The libraries’ business plan competitions have proved hugely successful over the last few

years, not only in seeding promising companies but in creating a broader entrepreneurial culture and promulgating best practices. Like the Queens competition, B&CL’s PowerUp! and SIBL’s NYStartUp! competitions have made concerted efforts to reach underserved communities and, partially as a result, have enrolled hundreds of people in their outreach and mentoring sessions. In Brooklyn’s case, 25 percent of the participants are immigrants, 29 percent are unemployed or underemployed, and over 50 percent have a household income below the median in New York City.

Brooklyn initiated its business plan competition nine years ago as part of a larger effort to revamp the business library’s services and offerings. At the time, a business competition was a unique and courageous undertaking for a library. Sponsored by the Citi Foundation, the competition requires participants to attend business classes and meet with mentors to develop a business plan. Entrants are judged by a collection of community leaders, and the winners take home between \$500 and \$15,000 in startup capital. “Even if they don’t end up submitting or winning they still gain immensely from the process,” one library staff member says. NYPL’s NYStartUp! Competition was founded in 2010 and has much the same structure. In just two years, the competition has had 350 participants and received a total of 88 business plans.

# MAPPING NYC'S PUBLIC LIBRARIES

The map below shows where New York City's 206 public library branches are located. The shaded circles, with a radius of a half mile, indicate walking distances to these branches.



# WHERE THE GROWTH IS

Although library usage has risen dramatically overall since 2002, not all the boroughs have benefited equally

Although all three New York systems have gone a long way toward refashioning their branches as important community hubs, the growth in library use has not been spread evenly across the city. When broken down by borough, branches based in the Bronx saw by far the largest bump in users. The Bronx's 35 branches—part of the NYPL system, which also includes 40 branches in Manhattan (in addition to four research libraries) and 12 branches in Staten Island—have experienced a 102 percent increase in circulation and a 134 percent increase in program attendance since 2002.<sup>19</sup> At Manhattan branches, circulation rose 85 percent and program attendance 48 percent, while Staten Island branches saw a rise of 21 percent in circulation and 6 percent in program attendance during the same period.

Meanwhile, the Brooklyn Public Library's 58 branches experienced a 77 percent jump in circulation and a 41 percent rise in attendance, while the Queens Public Library's 61 branches saw 25 percent and 13 percent increases respectively.

A number of important factors drive user growth at libraries and contribute to disparities in where that growth occurs. Service hours, the comfort and usability of the branch building, and the size and quality of a branch's staff all play an enormous role. The St. Agnes branch on the Upper West Side, for instance, experienced a big spike in circulation after major building renovations were completed in 2010, while the Forest Hills branch in Queens saw big program attendance increases that library officials attribute to the local librarians and their strong relationships with community groups. All things being equal, an understaffed branch is not going to have the same capacity to put on programs and build relationships with community groups as a branch that has more money. And of course the effectiveness

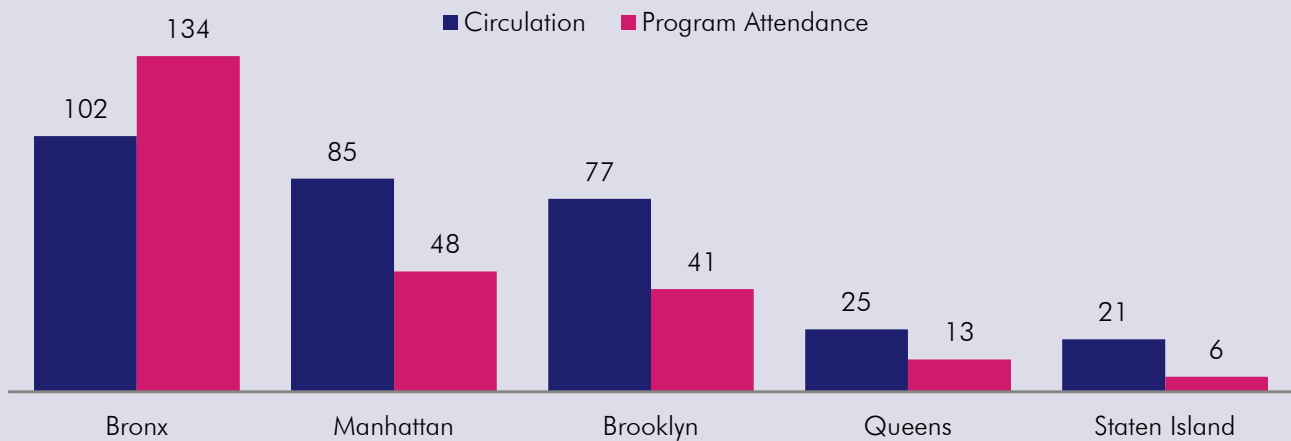
of the community groups themselves are another critical factor.

Growth figures alone do not tell the whole story. Although the Queens Public Library saw less usage growth over the last ten years than the other two systems, it started out the decade at a much higher level, especially in terms of circulation. Despite serving a smaller population than the other systems, Queens' 2002 circulation of 16.5 million was 1.4 million more than NYPL and 5 million more than Brooklyn. Meanwhile, the system's program attendance that year was almost identical to that of the much larger NYPL system and not far below Brooklyn's. Moreover, unlike the other two systems, Queens reached a high point in circulation in 2009. Since then funding cuts have caused the Queens Library to dramatically reduce both service hours and book acquisitions.

Still, several Queens branches have experienced enormous gains in users over the last decade. For example, the Forest Hills branch has increased its program attendance by nearly 300 percent and its circulation by 74 percent since 2002, while Queens Central in Jamaica saw a 62 percent increase in program attendance and a 26 percent increase in circulation even while undergoing renovations over the last two years. Even many Queens branches that have experienced relatively little growth continue to attract a high number of users. Queens can boast of six of the city's top ten branches by annual circulation and four of the top ten by program attendance. Several of those high performers, like Jackson Heights, have experienced little growth since 2002.

By contrast, Bronx-based library branches were relatively poor performers at the beginning of the decade; collectively, they circulated just 2.3 books per person in 2002, compared to 7.4 in Queens, 6 in Manhattan, 5.1 in Staten Island and

### Percentage Growth in Program Attendance and Circulation at NYC Public Libraries by Borough, 2002-2011



Sources: BPL, NYPL, QPL. Figures based on fiscal year.

4.7 in Brooklyn. Bronx-based branches also offered comparatively few programs and attracted a fraction of the number of attendees. But things have turned around dramatically in the Bronx since then. NYPL has dramatically increased its programming and, despite budget cuts, has managed to maintain relatively long service hours. With strong support from the Bronx borough president, City Council and mayor, NYPL has invested nearly \$110 million in new buildings and major renovations in the Bronx since the beginning of the decade, more than the amount spent on branches in Manhattan (\$97 million) and Staten Island (\$6 million) combined.<sup>20</sup> For example, the Bronx Library Center, which moved into an impressive new five-story building near Fordham Road in 2006 (a \$40 million project), tripled its yearly circulation numbers and more than doubled its program attendance. After renovations were finished on the Grand Concourse branch in 2003, program attendance grew from about 4,000 per year to well over 18,000, and circulation rose 113 percent. A new High Bridge branch opened in 2010, and immediately circulation shot up 170 percent, while program attendance rose 275 percent.<sup>21</sup>

Driving some of Manhattan's gains over the last decade were entirely new branches in Battery Park City, Grand Central Terminal and Mulberry Street and a new children's library at 42nd Street, although the Donnell Library Center, a major branch in Midtown, also closed during that period. As in the Bronx, many of Manhattan's fastest growing branches were underperformers ten years ago, including St. Agnes, Macomb's Bridge and Hamilton Grange in northern Manhattan, Muhlenberg in Chelsea, and Ottendorfer in the East Village. NYPL's largest circulating branch, the Mid-Manhattan, experienced a 301 percent growth in program attendance during this period, but did so by improving on relatively low numbers in the early part of the decade.<sup>22</sup>

With just a 6 percent increase in program attendance and a 21 percent rise in circulation, Staten Island branches have not, by and large, experienced the kind of increases that branches in the Bronx, Manhattan and Brooklyn have—and didn't start the decade with the high performance numbers that Queens branches had. Although the Todt-Hill Westerleigh branch on Victory Boulevard has maintained an unusually high circulation over the years, and both Totten-



ville and Dongan Hills on the South Shore have attracted significantly more program attendants, only South Beach (also on the South Shore) has made major gains in both areas.

Despite a growing population of seniors and immigrants, branches on Staten Island's North Shore continue to underperform. Like the Bronx Library Center or Brooklyn's Central branch, the St. George Library Center is supposed to be a regional hub for library services, but it attracts a tiny fraction of the users and has not experienced anywhere near the growth of its sister branches in the other boroughs. The Port Richmond and West New Brighton branches have also done relatively poorly over the last decade—West New Brighton actually has seen significant decreases in both visits and program attendance during that period, as have Richmondtown and Huguenot Park in other parts of the borough. As we demonstrate in much more detail in Chapter VII, Staten Island's comparatively low numbers may be due to a lack of capital funding. Compared to Queens and the Bronx, Staten Island branches have received relatively little support from local representatives, which has hampered efforts to renovate branches. That said, there are two ambitious, North Shore projects currently underway: a new, long-awaited branch in Mariner's Harbor on the north-west shore and an ambitious addition to the Stapleton branch just south of St. George.

In Brooklyn, circulation and program attendance numbers have shot up at branches throughout the borough, though a clear majority of the gains in both categories came from branches located south of Atlantic Avenue and west of Flatbush Avenue. Carroll Gardens, Cortelyou, Bay Ridge and Kings Highway, for instance, all experienced huge jumps in users over the last decade; the tiny Cortelyou branch in Ditmas Park, which underwent renovations in Fiscal Year 2002, increased its circulation by 151 percent and its program attendance by 185 percent between Fiscal Years 2003 and 2011. In 2003, just over 6,000 people attended programs at the branch, but in 2011 nearly 17,300 people did. Meanwhile, with the notable exceptions of Clinton Hill, Crown Heights and Rugby on Utica Avenue, many branches in the

## Performance Numbers at NYC Public Libraries by Borough 2011

Borough	Program Attendance	PA per Capita	Circulation	Circ per Capita
Bronx	347,859	0.25	5,362,588	3.87
Brooklyn	855,713	0.34	20,280,000	8.1
Manhattan	424,361	0.27	14,084,146	8.88
Queens	597,896	0.27	20,609,180	9.24
Staten Island	98,602	0.21	2,445,213	5.22

Sources: BPL, NYPL, QPL. Figures based on fiscal year.

northern and eastern parts of the borough have struggled since 2002, including Brooklyn Heights, whose program attendance dropped 63 percent, Walt Whitman in Fort Green, Washington Irving in Bushwick and Brownsville.

Unlike the other two library systems, much of Brooklyn's programming centers around two regional branches, the Central branch at Grand Army Plaza and Kings Highway in Midwood. The Central branch was in many ways built to be Brooklyn's answer to 42nd Street, a grand palace for serious reading and research. Although it still has the system's largest collection and circulates over 2.7 million materials every year, it has since also become the largest provider of library programming in the city—by far. Over the last decade, Brooklyn Central's program attendance numbers have grown enormously for such a large branch, going from 35,000 annually in 2002 to 73,000 in 2011; at Kings Highway, attendance has increased from 19,000 to nearly 50,000. Both branches have undergone major renovations and improvements in recent years. In 2007, the Central branch unveiled a 189-seat basement auditorium and not long after reopened a dramatically redesigned public plaza at the front entrance. At the same time, Brooklyn Central has continued to add major new pieces to its already extensive repertoire of programs and services, including a Workforce1 Career Center, an on-demand book binding machine and a passport services office.

# THE CITY BUDGET MAZE

A lack of consistent funding for libraries has not only led to reduced services but a crisis in maintenance at many branches

Despite record attendance and circulation numbers, and a dramatically expanded list of programs and resources, New York City libraries face a number of serious challenges to their continued success—and number one, without a doubt, is funding. All three library systems have experienced funding cuts totaling tens of millions of dollars in recent years, but cuts aren't their only financial obstacle. In many ways, the lack of security afforded by the city's budget process has been at least as big a problem.

Although libraries depend on the city for the lion's share of their budgets, they are technically independent 501(c)(3) entities, not government agencies. Like spending for other non-profit cultural institutions and several city programs like the Summer Youth Employment Program, library budgets are often not completely accounted for in the mayor's Financial Plan, a document that balances expenditures with real and expected revenues over several years. Instead, when it comes time to enact a given year's budget, the City Council tends to negotiate higher funding levels for libraries than is called for in the Financial Plan. According to observers, this process gives the mayor more control over the final budget and lets council members look like heroes when they produce the inevitable restorations. However, the revenue sources both parties agree upon in order to provide library funding are guaranteed for only one year. The discrepancy between the libraries' ostensible budget as seen in the Financial Plan and their actual budget has tended to not only continue from year to year but widen even further.

In 2007, City Council Speaker Christine Quinn acknowledged the toll this annual Kabuki dance can take on an agency's effectiveness and, along with several other government supported organizations and programs, announced the city's intention to start "baselining" library budgets in the

Financial Plan.<sup>23</sup> That summer the city increased library funding by \$42 million, which enabled the libraries to extend hours and grow their user base, but the city never got around to correcting the accounting gimmick that shorts libraries in the Financial Plan.<sup>24</sup>

After the financial crisis in the fall of 2008, the gap between the libraries' ostensible budgets in the Financial Plan and their actual budgets grew so large that in 2011 they faced the prospect of a truly catastrophic \$100 million cut. Although the June budget deal once again restored the vast majority of that proposed cut, efforts to win back the funds ate up significant human and financial resources—resources that could have been deployed toward long-term planning and fund raising efforts.

"So much manpower is wasted on responding to cuts and threats of cuts," says Jimmy Van Bramer, chairman of the City Council's committee on libraries and cultural institutions. "You have to find ways to save funds, close floors, cut hours—the planning effort is immense." According to some library officials, the lack of a baseline also makes it difficult to fundraise from private sources, since some funders want to be assured that they're not just filling in a budget hole created by the city.

Moreover, as we have already seen, the libraries aren't held completely harmless in the end. Even though the yearly restorations tend to get framed by council members and the press as "wins" for the libraries, since Fiscal Year 2008, all three systems have in fact suffered significant cuts. Brooklyn and Queens have seen their budgets reduced by around \$15 million each since 2008, and NYPL has suffered a nearly \$24 million reduction, not counting a new round of mid-year cuts announced late last year.

All three systems have reduced their acquisition budgets and hours of service in response.

Queens' acquisitions budget is down to \$5 million per year, from a healthy \$15 million just a few years ago. Brooklyn and Queens are both struggling to keep their doors open an average of 40 hours per week, which, as several non-profit leaders mentioned in our interviews, puts a major strain on low-income working people who may be able to visit only late in the evening or on weekends. Finally, in response to reduced funds, fulltime equivalent employment (FTE) across all three systems has dropped 24 percent since 2008; NYPL's FTE employment has plummeted 33 percent in that time, more than any other system in our report except Dallas and Charlotte.<sup>25</sup>

Over all, as circulation and program attendance have both skyrocketed over the last decade, the city contribution to the libraries' operating budgets has actually decreased by 8 percent in inflation adjusted terms, going from \$296 million in 2002 to \$274 million in 2011.<sup>26</sup>

Even though libraries are essential public resources for both K-12 and adult education students and increasingly provide educational services themselves, elected officials do not view them as a part of the city's public education system. During the budget process, officials divide the budget into three broad categories, including uniformed services, education and all other agencies, and even while targeting cuts in the rest of the budget, they tend to hold firm on the first two categories. Since Fiscal Year 2007, the Department of Education's adopted budget has actually grown by 10 percent, going from approximately \$17.9 billion to \$19.7 billion. Had the libraries' budgets increased at the same rate during that period, they would have received an additional \$127 million in funds, or more than enough to provide 60 hours of service per week.

When compared to other city systems, New York's three public libraries are in the middle of the pack in terms of funding. In 2011, the Queens system received approximately \$39.30 per person in city funding (No. 8 out of 25), Brooklyn received \$33.70 per person (No. 11) and New York received \$31.90 per person (No. 13). Although all three are much higher than Houston's \$14.60 per person, they come in well below San Francisco (\$101 per person), Seattle (\$76.80 per person), Columbus (\$66 per person) and Toronto (\$65.30 per person).

Not coincidentally, those four highly funded libraries are also top performers in several important categories. The Columbus, Ohio, system, for instance, can afford to stay open an average of 72.1 hours per week, has extremely high circulation given the city's size, and offers far and away the most public programs per capita in our report. (See "How they stack up" on p. 43 for these and other comparative statistics.) Seattle and Toronto also have high performing systems. After major new investments at the end of the 1990s, the Seattle Public Library is now a national leader in circulation and visits. Between 2005, just after the system's ambitious new central branch was completed, and 2011, Seattle's circulation rose 50 percent and visits increased by 22 percent.<sup>27</sup> Toronto, meanwhile, can boast of an abnormally high number of branches (98) as well as the highest total program attendance among the 25 systems considered in this report.

The city's budget process also has made it more challenging for the libraries to secure enough money for capital projects. Unlike operating budgets, which tend to get pegged to real needs (including the number of branches and the size of the system's service area), capital costs are considered in a highly discretionary process that gives a lot of leeway to individual councilmembers and borough presidents in addition to the mayor.

Typically, the libraries work with local elected officials to assemble funds for specific projects, a new children's room for NYPL's Fort Washington branch in northern Manhattan, for instance, or a new heating and cooling system for Brooklyn's Cortelyou branch in Ditmas Park. Occasionally, the systems will piece together enough funds for a major renovation or an entirely new branch, as NYPL recently did for the High Bridge branch in the Bronx and Queens is now doing in Elmhurst. But finding enough money can be a complex and time-consuming endeavor, and serious maintenance issues can fester for months and even years while the libraries shop around for funds. As an analysis of the last ten years of capital funding shows, a lot can ride on the willingness and interest of local leaders and representatives.

Between Fiscal Year 2003 and Fiscal Year 2012, NYPL and Queens have both significant-

ly outraised Brooklyn in city capital funds that have already been committed to specific projects. NYPL has brought in \$215 million and Queens \$153 million, while Brooklyn has only raised \$101 million.<sup>28</sup> Taking into account the relative population sizes of their service areas, that comes to \$62.41 per person for NYPL, \$68.79 per person for Queens and just \$40.50 per person for Brooklyn.<sup>29</sup>

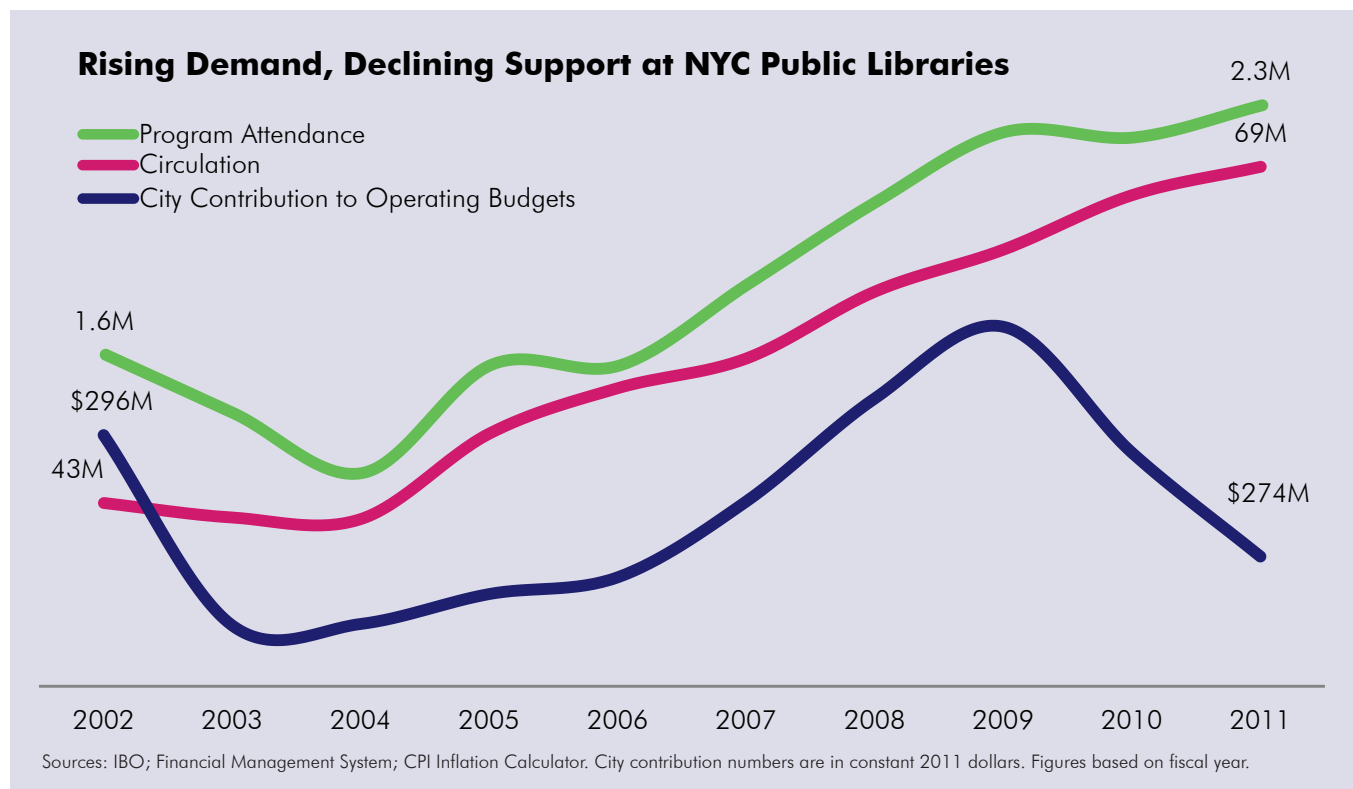
Queens has succeeded in large part because the libraries have been a priority for local elected officials, especially the borough president. Over the last decade, Queens Borough President Helen Marshall has steered more money toward library projects in her borough than the other four borough presidents combined. Between 2003 and 2012, she spent more than \$54 million or \$24.33 per person on libraries.<sup>30</sup> During this same period, the Bronx borough president spent \$14.37 per person on libraries, while the Brooklyn, Manhattan and Staten Island borough presidents all spent less than \$8 per person.<sup>31</sup>

In recent years, the Queens BP has provided the majority of support for over a half dozen major library projects, including, according to the library's own figures, \$15 million for a new children's library at the Central Branch in Jamaica

and \$21 million toward a new branch in Elmhurst. She has contributed \$22 million to new branches in Kew Gardens, Rego Park, Hunters Point, Long Island City and East Elmhurst. Even more recently, Marshall has promised \$19 million for a new branch in Far Rockaway. Of these seven new projects, four went through a program at the Department of Design and Construction that recruits top-line architects to build important public buildings. All four feature exciting new design ideas, incorporating glass and light, for instance, while emphasizing interactive spaces suitable for programming rather than just reading or storing books.

In terms of capital funding, NYPL has managed to keep up with Queens in large part by tapping huge sums from the mayor's discretionary budget. Over the last decade, NYPL's branch libraries have received nearly \$115 million in capital funds, or \$33.30 per capita, from the mayor, compared to \$18.26 per capita for Brooklyn and \$21.22 per capita for Queens.<sup>32</sup>

Major projects have included the \$46 million Bronx Library Center near Fordham Road, an enormous regional branch consisting of five floors and 75,000 square feet; and new neighborhood branches in Kingsbridge, High Bridge,





### Capital Funds to Public Libraries from Borough Presidents (per Capita), 2003-2012



Sources: IBO; Financial Management System. Figures based on fiscal year. These are committed funds only. If borough presidents earmarked funds for projects that have not yet started, they may not show up in this analysis.

Grand Central, SoHo and Battery Park (yet another new branch in Mariner's Harbor on Staten Island is currently under construction).

Brooklyn recently completed a major new renovation of the popular Kings Highway branch and late last year opened a new LEED-certified branch in Kensington, the first completely new branch built in Brooklyn in more than 15 years. Meanwhile, the system has struggled mightily to upgrade or even repair many of its buildings. Dozens of branches suffer from festering maintenance issues, including the Pacific branch on 4th Avenue in Boerum Hill, Walt Whitman, Brownsville, Brooklyn Heights, and Red Hook. According to Josh Nachowitz, the Brooklyn library's vice president of government and community relations, the system is currently burdened by over \$230 million in deferred maintenance costs, mostly invisible infrastructure problems that haven't been adequately addressed, such as leaky roofs and broken elevators. For example, Nachowitz says the Brooklyn Heights branch is in desperate need of a new \$3 million heating and cooling sys-

tem, while Pacific requires over \$8 million in renovations and new mechanical equipment. And of course solving these basic maintenance problems doesn't even begin to address important design issues like the need for a revamped children's room or teen center or the extreme space shortage at popular branches like McKinley Park. "It's hard to justify replacing buildings when there are so many ongoing maintenance issues throughout the system," says Nachowitz. And yet, in an ironic Catch-22, new buildings are precisely the projects that local elected officials would be more inclined to support.

Although NYPL has had a lot more success raising capital funds overall, not all of its branches—or regions—have benefited equally. By and large, Staten Island branches have received much lower levels of support than branches in Manhattan and the Bronx. Among the system's completed capital projects in the last ten years, only \$6 million has been spent on Staten Island branches, compared to \$97 million for Manhattan branches and \$107 million for Bronx branches. Accounting for the relative sizes of the boroughs, that comes to \$0.5 million per branch in Staten Island, \$2.6 million per branch in Manhattan, and \$3.1 million per branch in the Bronx.

These discrepancies aren't the result of deliberate planning on the part of the libraries, since the decision on capital funds lies largely with individual elected officials. If the library can't interest a borough president or local City Council member in a particular project, there's not much more it can do, in other words. Other high performing public library systems like San Francisco's or Seattle's get around this problem by using dedicated funding streams, often levied through property taxes, for ongoing capital costs. In New York, increasing the libraries' general allocation of capital funds and baselining it in the Financial Plan would introduce a measure of stability and allow all three systems to better allocate resources. City officials could also help the libraries create a long-term capital plan involving a bond issue, as Seattle did in 1998.

# CHARM OF THE OLD, LURE OF THE NEW

From geographically isolated branches and outmoded buildings to a confusing technical and legal landscape surrounding e-lending, New York's public libraries face several other serious challenges

Additional funding and a more stable funding process are without question the two main challenges facing public libraries in New York, but there are several other important obstacles as well. They include:

## **Isolated and Outmoded Buildings**

Many of the branches, especially in the Brooklyn and NYPL systems, were built in the first half of the 20th century and placed in sections of the city that look very different today than they did a hundred years ago. These so-called Carnegie branches—named for Andrew Carnegie who made the initial bequest upon which all three branch systems were founded—can be extremely charming architecturally, but they're often stuck in low-traffic and hard-to-reach areas. "Our Williamsburg branch is not in the part of Williamsburg everybody has heard about," says BPL chief librarian, Richard Reyes-Gavilan. In fact, most of the neighborhood is cut off from the library by the Brooklyn Queens Expressway, and much of the immediately surrounding area is underdeveloped and hard to navigate.

Other branches have been left stranded between Robert-Moses era superblocks with little of the density or commercial activity of the older, more traditional neighborhoods. For example, in Brooklyn, some of the branches with the lowest circulation and program attendance levels are surrounded by large New York City Housing Authority complexes, including the Red Hook, Brownsville, Stone Avenue and Walt Whitman branches. Stone Avenue and Brownsville are especially problematic cases: Although many view the buildings themselves as architectural treasures from an earlier era, both sit at the intersection of several towering NYCHA complexes with very little surrounding commercial development or foot traffic. The Brownsville branch, in particu-

lar, has experienced declining numbers for years: While circulation has remained low, program attendance has dropped precipitously, going from nearly 16,000 in 2002 to just 3,000 in 2011.

Gerald Thomas of the Brownsville Partnership, a project of Community Solutions, cites safety as a huge concern in the area, which, he says, has "warring teen gangs tied to different housing developments." He says the two library branches are not only far from the neighborhood's few commercial districts, but also have been left out of the NYPD's safety corridor program, which tends to stick close to those same commercial areas.

In the NYPL system, the 125th Street branch on the far east side of Harlem sits next to entrance and exits ramps for both the FDR Drive and Willis Avenue Bridge. At least partly as a result of the stifling vehicular traffic, the immediately surrounding area has fallen on hard times. The library is surrounded by abandoned tenements, vacant lots and auto-body shops; directly across the street is an enormous parking lot for commercial trucks. Like the Brownsville branch, the three-story building itself is large and attractive, built in a neoclassical style in 1904 when that part of Harlem was more vibrant. Now, though, the branch attracts few users. Just 3,000 people attended public programs there in 2011, and although circulation has climbed significantly over the last decade, due in part to the ease with which people can order books from other branches, at 80,000 materials per year it remains well below average, especially for such a physically large branch.

A related problem with the Carnegie libraries is their outmoded, interior configurations. The Carnegie buildings were built as palaces for reading in, with row upon row of shelves and thick walls dividing up the space into separate rooms. Few have the kind of dynamic mixing spaces and

rooms for programming required by today's libraries. Moreover, dozens of these older branches still have five- and six-room living quarters for onsite custodians that are no longer needed, and in most cases—including a few in high demand areas like Muhlenberg in Chelsea—those apartments have sat empty for decades.

The value many people place on these older historic buildings, whatever their shortcomings in the 21st century, can pose a big problem of its own. In Queens, where Carnegie-era buildings are few and far between (there are currently only four in the whole borough), library officials have been able to replace underperforming branches with new buildings in different locations. In 2007, the Queens Library replaced two underperforming branches near the Ravenswood and Queensbridge Houses in Long Island City with a much larger and more advantageously situated branch in the same neighborhood. At more than 20,000 square feet, the new Long Island City branch, built along a commercial corridor almost equidistant from the two large NYCHA complexes, comfortably houses a new Reading and Writing Center and many more computers. Today, the new branch's circulation and program attendance numbers are more than double what they were at the two older branches: In 2011, it welcomed over 32,000 people to its public programs, compared to just 12,000 (a 2003 high) at Queensbridge and Ravenswood combined.

If the charm factor of the older Carnegie buildings didn't prove to be too big an obstacle, a similar consolidation strategy might work in parts of the Brooklyn and NYPL systems as well. Or the libraries might take the opposite route and look to replace some of their buildings with multiple smaller spaces in high traffic retail corridors. In addition to offering much easier access, the smaller storefront branches would be easier to staff and cheaper to run than the larger facilities. A few of the older buildings—at least in select neighborhoods—might also generate a significant amount of money if sold to developers.

### **Business and Legal Issues around E-Lending**

Yet another, completely different challenge for

libraries revolves around the rise of digital content. Although almost everyone seems to agree that digitization of content is the future, a number of complications have so far made it hard for libraries to take advantage.

The technological ecosystem that supports e-lending is still extremely clunky and confusing to many users. E-materials, including not only e-books but downloadable video and audio files, are offered in several different competing formats. Until recently, libraries bought WMA-based audio files. They then switched to MP3s when that became the dominant format, requiring libraries to repurchase of all of those materials. In the case of e-books, libraries need to buy both EPUB files and Kindle files, since the former works on Barnes & Noble, Apple and Sony devices, among others, but not on the market leading Amazon Kindle, which uses a proprietary format all its own. In order to offer all of these options, library websites, most supported by a single Cleveland-based technology company called Overdrive, are chock full of icons, buttons and links to instructions, which confuses and alienates many users.

Meanwhile, publishers have created another set of obstacles. Wary of the ease and convenience of electronic checkouts, five of the six major American publishing houses have put up serious roadblocks to e-lending. HarperCollins, for example, not only charges libraries significantly more to license e-book titles than to purchase hard copies but also requires that libraries repurchase the book after only 26 checkouts, and neither Macmillan nor Simon and Schuster will release their e-book titles to libraries at all. NYPL has begun to reach out to the publishers individually in order to create e-lending models they will accept—Penguin recently opened up access to some of its titles after a new distributor was tapped, for instance—but there is still little agreement among the publishers about what the most serious challenges are, much less the solutions. As a result, what works for one publisher doesn't always translate into success with another.

One publishing executive who spoke off the record suggested the libraries convene a meeting of publishers with anti-trust lawyers present. "A

facsimile of print in the digital world is not appropriate,” he says, “but in the library market the digital model is just replicating the print model.”

To publishers, e-books are a dramatically different beast than traditional bound books. They’re theoretically easier to copy and share (and therefore pirate), and unlike physical books, which require a trip to the brick-and-mortar library, patrons can stay at home or travel abroad and still check out e-book titles at any time of day or night. When it’s that easy, why purchase a book that is available for free at a library?

The virtual nature of e-lending also raises interesting questions about why all or even most local libraries should invest in the infrastructure to do it. Right now, all three New York Public library systems are aggressively promoting e-books, but in many ways NYPL has more natural advantages in this area. NYPL has more resources to experiment, and because its website has so much more to offer digitally, including one of the world’s largest archives of historical photographs and maps, it attracts many times more visitors than the websites of the other two systems. In the 2011 calendar year, NYPL circulated almost twice as many materials electronically than Brooklyn and Queens put together.<sup>33</sup> In the future, as NYPL builds out more and more content and research tools on its own website, it may want to take over from Overdrive and build a very different sort of online platform for its e-book collection. But, given the inherent expense of such a project, the other two systems may be better off staying with a mediator like Overdrive or opting for another arrangement entirely.

For instance, one can imagine a larger national library like the still nascent Digital Public Library of America (DPLA) emerging as the country’s chief e-book and electronic materials repository. If the DPLA or a similar organization were to invest in the digital infrastructure to support e-lending, local libraries could perhaps subscribe to a collection rather than purchasing it outright as they currently do with paper books. Either way, the technology and business model that support e-lending are still inchoate and hard-to-predict. Whatever model eventually emerges, it will like-

ly prove to be a very different sort of thing than what libraries have traditionally done with paper-based materials.

### **Inadequate Philanthropic and Government Support for Programs**

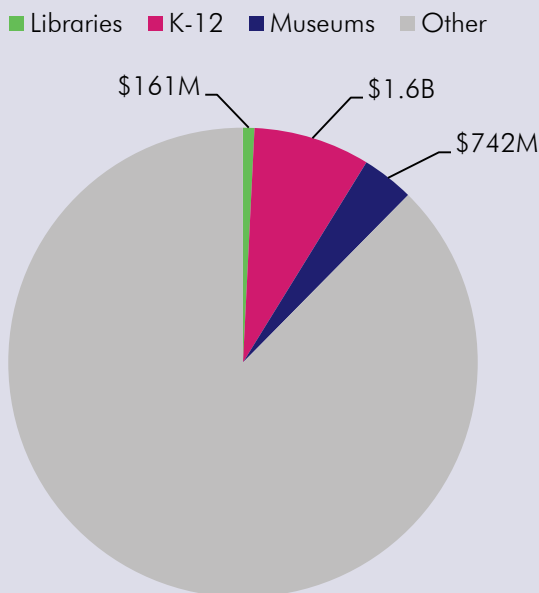
A final challenge facing libraries is the lack of recognition and understanding among governments and philanthropies of all the educational programming they do. At the state level, for instance, libraries are inexplicably excluded from the single largest source of funds dedicated to ESOL and adult literacy programs, the so-called Employment Preparation Education (EPE) funding stream. Currently, EPE grants can only go to the state’s school districts, BOCES and members of the Consortium for Worker Education, leaving libraries—and institutions such as community colleges and non-profits—fighting amongst themselves for the remaining few million in funds. In 2011, EPE distributed \$96 million in funds statewide, compared to just \$2 million for the other prominent funding stream that is open to non-profits, the Adult Literacy Education (ALE) program.

Despite being the premiere educational resource for immigrants in New York, with the limited funds available to them, library-based ESOL classes are barely scratching the surface of the demand. Unlike other programs, including the more informal English conversation workshops, the number of ESOL classes on offer has remained flat over the last ten years. The Queens Library, for example, has only been able to enroll between 2,400 and 2,600 ESOL students annually in that time, despite serving a borough where nearly half the population is foreign-born and 35 percent “speak English less than very well.” According to library president Tom Galante, the Queens system has enough physical space to more than double the number of students they serve in these intensive classes; the funding just isn’t there.<sup>34</sup>

In the last few years, the New York State Department of Education has been experimenting with so-called Literacy Zones in low-income neighborhoods around the state, and several library branches in New York City have been participating. Literacy Zones are designed to foster



## U.S. Foundation Grants by Subject Area 2010



Source: The Foundation Center

relationships between various agencies and organizations, so they can link support services to traditional ESOL classes. The initiative is without question bearing fruit, but total funding for the program is still a drop in the bucket compared to EPE (not to mention demand), and some providers say they have been hampered by the limited funding period. Marco Castillo, the director of the Adult Learning Center at the Long Island City branch in Queens, which is in its last year of Literacy Zone funding, says the three-year grant term makes it difficult to establish and build services. "It is always up in the air and there is a lot of uncertainty," he explains. "If we don't get the grant for next year our services would have to be drastically reduced or not offered at all."

Curiously, libraries are also excluded from accessing Out of School Time (OST) funds through the city's Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), even though they long have been among the chief providers of after-school programming in the city.

Similarly, with a few prominent exceptions, large philanthropies have not made major do-

nations to public libraries. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has been a high profile supporter of public libraries, which they see as assets in closing the digital divide; the Citi, Starr, Carnegie, Revson and Altman Foundations have made significant contributions to the systems in New York; more recently, the MacArthur Foundation launched an initiative to spur the creation of teen centers in public libraries. But few other philanthropic foundations have stepped into this space, certainly a tiny fraction of those working in K-12 education. For example, in 2010, according to the Foundation Center, libraries and library science received just 0.8 percent of philanthropic grants nationwide (\$161 million), compared to 3.6 percent for museums (\$742 million) and 8 percent for primary and secondary schools (\$1.7 billion).<sup>35</sup>

Libraries seem to be suffering from a peculiar invisibility and widespread misunderstanding about the kinds of services they provide. Although several national organizations, including the American Library Association (ALA) and the Urban Libraries Council, are charged with pushing the library agenda, so far they have not effectively spotlighted the vital role libraries play in communities across the country. The ALA has been extremely effective in elevating the importance of personal privacy and protecting library patrons from the threat of government surveillance, most recently in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, but it has been less successful in emphasizing the importance of library-based educational programs in the wake of draconian cuts to libraries across the U.S., including many that we consider in this report. "We have to make sure that libraries are transforming themselves, but we also have to get the word out that these are different places," says incoming ALA President Barbara Stripling. "Libraries are vital community assets, particularly now when the Internet makes it so hard for people to encounter other perspectives. But, you're right, they're taken for granted."

# THE LIBRARY OF THE FUTURE

With new needs and new technologies, libraries have to break out of their boxes and form creative partnerships offering different services in sometimes unconventional spaces

Libraries are rapidly evolving in two diametrically opposed directions: On the one hand, they're investing in technologies that facilitate virtual interactions over their websites, and on the other, as we have seen in great detail, they have become invaluable community hubs where neighbors can go to take a wide variety of classes and tutorials or access public services and technology. If New York's libraries are going to take full advantage of these two trends, they'll have to start investing in new kinds of branches and service models.

## New Buildings for a New Era

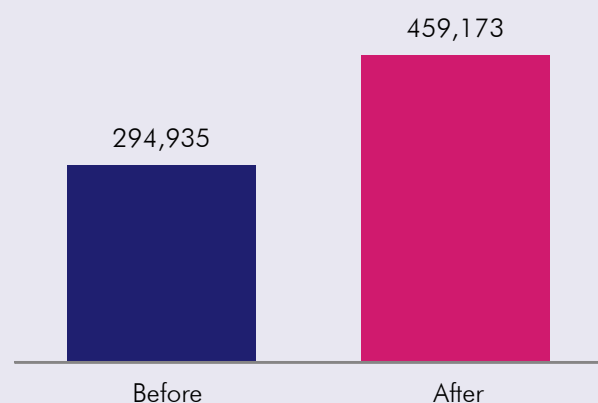
Traditional Carnegie-era branches and most of their descendants were built to meet the needs of solitary readers and researchers and therefore had no accommodations for different modes of work and leisure. In many of those branches, rows of open-stack shelves surround just one main reading room, forcing quiet solitary workers

to coexist with people working in groups or using relatively noisy instruments such as laptops, mobile devices and copy machines.

Successful newer buildings, by contrast, find ways to incorporate spaces for both loud and quiet activities. The main branch of the Salt Lake City Public Library, designed by Moshe Safdie in 1998, not only makes room for noisier group work areas and silent reading rooms; on the ground floor, in a dynamic space called "the urban room," one wall is lined with shops and cafes. The Seattle Central Library, designed by Rem Koolhaas in 2005, opens up into a ground floor "living room," where patrons can browse book shelves as if in a bookstore, work in groups at tables or sit down and enjoy a cup of coffee; on the top floor, the library has a grand, glass-canopied quiet room. The living room is meant to "orient patrons toward a more collaborative 'sounded' style of reading and working," writes Shannon Mattern, an academic who studies library design.<sup>36</sup>

At the same time, libraries could do far more to take advantage of the movement toward coworking and shared workspaces. Just as the number of coworking spaces have exploded in the past few years—there are nearly a dozen of these spaces in the city today—a growing number of New Yorkers are looking to the libraries as a natural "third place" to work. However, many branches have limited space to accommodate these laptop-toting patrons. Indeed, during the course of our research, we noticed branches where every available seat was being used by individuals working off of laptops while only one or two people were perusing the book shelves. "Why can't libraries become coworking spaces?" says Tony Bacigalupo, founder of New Work City, a coworking space in Manhattan. "They're already good at all this stuff. Really all they have to do is decide they are

**Before and After: Circulation at St. Agnes Branch Post Renovations**



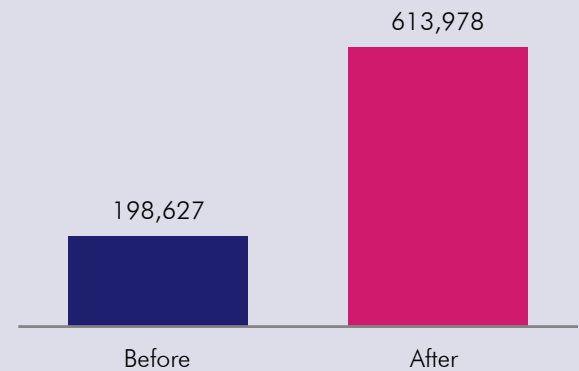
Source: NYPL. Figures are from FY2005 and FY2011.

coworking spaces and start to apply some of the principles of coworking.”

Similarly, although the benefactors of public libraries had originally sought to situate their branches in pastoral settings away from commercial strips, most of today’s most successful branches are located in high traffic pedestrian areas. Traditionally, these are retail corridors like Jackson Heights’ popular 82nd Street or Fordham Road in the Bronx, but more recently transit centers like JFK Airport and Grand Central Terminal are being considered as well. When located in high traffic areas, not all branches need to accommodate the whole range of services of a large neighborhood branch. On the contrary, smaller, specialized branches may be more appropriate in certain areas. In a captive retail market like JFK airport, for instance, a library wouldn’t necessarily need space for classes or computer terminals; instead it might make more sense for it to mimic a travel bookstore like Hudson Booksellers. On the other hand, a satellite location in a popular neighborhood retail corridor might focus solely on providing access to technology and programming. One could imagine locations even specializing in *kinds* of programs; for instance, in a naturally occurring retirement community, a storefront library could market itself as a “mind gym” for retirees, offering a mix of both cognitive and physical exercise classes.

Not all important physical design changes require entirely new buildings or locations. Lonni Tanner, a designer at the city’s Department of Design and Construction who was formerly with the Robin Hood Foundation, where she oversaw the creation and redesign of 33 school libraries, says that often relatively inexpensive changes can make a world of difference. She mentions creating an activity wall—one, say, that uses magnetic letters or shapes that kids can use to create words or pictures—and doing away with computer labs. “Computer labs are too siloed,” she says. “People don’t do computer work over here and non-computer work over there.” Replacing desktops with laptops could also help overcome some of the constraints of the Carnegie libraries, which tend

### Before and After: Circulation at Bronx Library Center Post New Construction



Source: NYPL. Figures are from FY2005 and FY2011.

to have too few spaces for functions and classes as it is.

Yet Tanner does mention one big obstacle to both more laptops and activity walls: Neither are eligible for capital funds, which generally go to bricks and mortar projects, making them sometimes paradoxically harder to finance.

### Creative Partnerships

To fully capitalize on the community hub model, libraries also need to explore creative new partnerships. New York is bursting at the seams with creative organizations offering programs and events in a wide variety of fields, from arts organizations like chashama, which builds out gallery and event spaces, to 826NYC, an organization that creates creative storefronts where children ages 6 to 18 can participate in afterschool creative writing classes. “I think in a city like New York there are so many amazing opportunities to partner with creative organizations,” says IDEO designer Beth Viner.

For example, in Brooklyn, 826NYC (an affiliate of 826 Valencia in San Francisco) opened a functioning store—the Super Hero Supply Company—that sells capes, grappling hooks, masks, tights, deflector bracelets, bottles of anti-gravity

# The libraries should look to tech companies—from giants like Apple, Microsoft, Google and Facebook to startups like General Assembly, Code Academy and Tumblr— as partners in the creation of technology learning centers.

and secret identity kits, among other things. But in a “secret lair” behind the shop, the non-profit draws on over 1,000 volunteers, many them internationally recognized authors and journalists, to lead classes and provide one-on-one writing help to students. As Viner notes, a similar store in a library could be an exciting anchor for a wide variety of children’s programs. The libraries could work with 826NYC’s network of volunteers for writing programs and use the store to raise money and attract kids to other kinds of programs.

Similarly, the libraries should look to tech companies—from giants like Apple, Microsoft, Google and Facebook to startups like General Assembly, Code Academy and Tumblr—as partners in the creation of technology learning centers. Like the Apple Store—and more recently the copycat Microsoft Store—a library-based tech center could offer classes in everything from ba-

sic computer skills to more advance software like PowerPoint or Final Cut Pro, a film-editing program. Absent a full-fledged outlet of the Apple Store, the library tech centers could employ many of that company’s design and service strategies by creating wide open spaces with bright sight lines and stand-up computer stations, and they could draw on company volunteers to offer workshops and demonstrations in state-of-the-art technologies. “Libraries can provide a hub for collaborations, innovation and enlightenment,” says Andrew Rasiej, founder of Personal Democracy Media and chair of New York Tech Meetup. “But the institutions need to transition into places that teach people how to code and offer collaborative environments. Think of the Apple Store as the library of the future.”

A number of library branches have lots of underutilized space for these kinds of partnerships. Several, like Brooklyn’s Williamsburg branch and Manhattan’s Muhlenberg branch on 23rd Street, are warehousing entire floors that have been closed off due to funding cuts. Partnerships could reactivate these spaces and establish a powerful draw without requiring any additional library staff. In certain instances, the rooms could even be leased out as creative workshare spaces in exchange for volunteer hours from members; members of a tech-focused workshare organization, for example, might help library staff learn important tech skills.

Similarly, some branches might open up community rooms and other spaces that are vacant at least part of the week to artists and arts groups, many of whom struggle to find affordable places in the city to work, rehearse and perform. One organization, Spaceworks, is already exploring these types of partnerships with Brooklyn and NYPL. However, regulators in the Department of Buildings (DOB) and the Department of City Planning need to recognize that libraries are more than just repositories for books, in order for these sorts of projects to get off the ground. If library partners have to file a rehab project as a ‘new use’ with DOB, for example, the red tape and resulting costs could be too prohibitive for some groups.

## RE-IMAGINING A MASTERPIECE

Although exciting new library designs are slowly taking shape in all five boroughs, the city's most ambitious—and controversial—new library project is the plan for a new central library at NYPL's flagship 42nd Street location. While many of the design details are still being hashed out, the project's main goal is to consolidate the operations of three major Mid-town libraries—42nd Street, Mid-Manhattan and the Science, Industry and Business Library (SIBL)—by opening up previously closed off spaces in the landmarked 42nd Street building. The new central library would become NYPL's headquarters for both research and branch services.

According to NYPL, only 32 percent of the 42nd Street building—designed by Carrère and Hastings in the early 1900s—is currently open to the public, but renovations could make as much as 70 percent of the building available for public use. The key to such a dramatic transformation is a seven-story steel structure underneath the monumental Rose Reading Room on the library's top floor that both supports the reading room and serves as the research library's primary storage for books. That space, which takes up nearly a third of the building's floor plate on the West side, is closed off to the public by design. Staff members collect materials and deliver them to patrons in the reading room by way of elevators. By replacing it with a new structure—a building within a building, in effect—NYPL can free up enough space to comfortably house a large circulating library.

"We're doing the central library plan because it will let us serve every constituency we serve better," says NYPL President Anthony Marx. "The research library will get space for 400 writers, and on top of that we'll have four new floors for the largest circulating library in the world."

Sir Norman Foster, a British architect, was chosen to lead the project, in part because of his past work rehabbing famous landmarks such as the Reichstag in Berlin and the British Museum in London. As recently released renderings show, the renovations will free up space not only for open stack shelves but extensive programs for both branch and business library patrons. The financing package includes a city contribution of approximately \$150 million, and between \$100 and \$200 million that NYPL will raise from the sale of the Mid-Manhattan building on 5th Avenue and SIBL on 34th Street. According to Marx, the project will ultimately allow NYPL to grow their endowment even while saving \$10 to \$15 million per year in operating costs.

Still, influential preservationists and scholars have yet to be sold on the plan.<sup>37</sup> Preservationists see the closed stacks underneath the main reading room as essential to the original design, and scholars are worried that too much of the library's research collection will have to be sent to offsite storage. Two floors of climate controlled storage exists underneath neighboring Bryant Park, but even with a recent donation to complete the first floor there is only enough room for 3 million of the 4.2 million volumes stored in the original stacks, necessitating offsite storage for the remainder.

Other important partnerships should include government agencies. SBS's recent initiative to place four Workforce1 Centers in libraries around the city was a stroke of genius because it built on an important service that libraries were already providing, while giving the city's chief workforce agency access to previously under-represented regions and populations. As prominent access points to dozens of other government programs, from state health insurance programs like Child Health Plus to affordable housing lotteries, other city and state agencies should follow SBS's lead

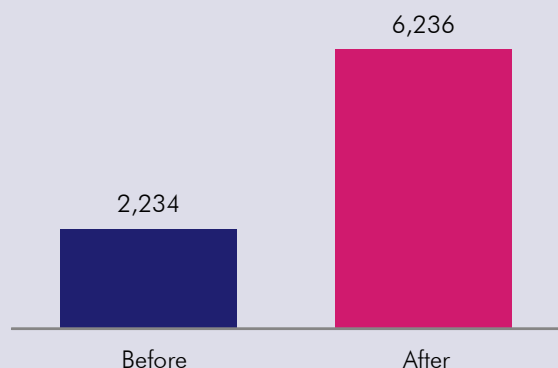
and consider how they can use the libraries to enhance their existing services. As Yasmin Fodil, a policy consultant who has worked on issues around public libraries, suggests, the mayor's office could even put out an official challenge to city agencies that would fund a library component to one or more of their existing services and programs.

### Expanded Website Capabilities

The libraries' growing websites present a whole other set of opportunities. As patrons in-



### Before and After: Program Attendance at High Bridge Branch Post Renovations



Source: NYPL. Figures are from FY2007 and FY2011.

creasingly take advantage of the ability to order books online and have them delivered to their closest branch (a convenience that may be a major factor in the libraries' skyrocketing circulation figures), visits to the libraries' websites have been growing rapidly over the last few years, particularly NYPL's, which now boast over half a million unique visits per month.

As a result of the increased traffic and interest in online services, all three libraries have started to integrate social networking features into their online catalogs. Users can now not only rate books they've read but review them as well. On NYPL's site, patrons can create and share lists of their favorite books and use a "same shelf" tool to discover other titles in the catalog.

Since 2005, NYPL has also been digitizing much of its research collection and making it available for online use. The library started by creating a vast gallery of historical photographs and adding metadata so that users could easily search them, but more recently the library has begun to experiment with more advanced online tools. According to Ben Vershbow, director of NYPL labs, NYPL is currently developing software that will not only make the library's vast collection of historical maps available online; all the geospatial

and reference data those maps contain are being rendered digitally to make them as navigable as Google Maps. Users will be able to zoom in and scroll across a map of Manhattan from the 1890s, for instance; eventually they may even be able to draw from other data sources, like Google users do when they can click to a review of a restaurant from its location on the map.

Yet, despite these advances, there is still much more to do on the digital front. In NYPL's case, various parts of the website—including information about branches, blogs written by librarians, the library catalog and the digital galleries—are all more or less separate entities operated by different groups inside and outside the library. The e-book catalog, for instance, is operated by an outside distributor and user searches will not always lead one to results in the physical book catalog or other related features on the website, such as author readings. As a result, the online environment isn't as seamless and easy to navigate as it ought to be.

This last year, NYPL spearheaded a movement to correct many of these issues. A petition at [readersfirst.org](http://readersfirst.org), with 192 North American libraries currently signed on, outlines basic standards that all e-book distributors must adhere to in order to serve the library community. Among other things, users must be able to browse a single comprehensive catalog that includes both e-books and physical books, as well as information about related programs, author engagements and even blog posts. Libraries must also have control over the content on all parts of the website, which is not currently the case with Overdrive.

However, according to Overdrive CEO Steve Potash, the distributor is definitely committed to working with libraries to build a better online user experience for their patrons, not least because he thinks it could help convince publishers to release more of their titles, particularly if the websites facilitated book purchases as well as checkouts.

"One of the first questions publishers ask us in our conversations with them is, 'Can someone buy the book as well as check out the book?'" says NYPL's Christopher Platt. "And that's some-

thing that public libraries are beginning to adapt to. The library discovery environment, that rich virtual space, including the catalog and all the promotions that we do around titles, needs to become an intellectual home for readers,” Platt says. “Whether or not visitors ultimately want to borrow a book or buy it, they should at least come to the library to find the titles they’re interested in.”

Tracking “click-throughs” like any other digital media company could be another important digital innovation. As the libraries attract more and more virtual visitors, they could start to sell valuable information on user behavior to publishers and book distributors (without sacrificing the anonymity of particular users of course). “Information on how users got to a particular book before checking it out or purchasing is gold to publishers,” notes Potash.

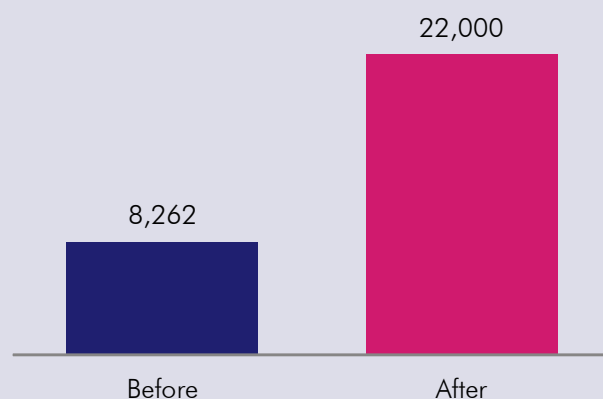
### Revenue Opportunities

In an era of tight budgets at the city, state and federal level, New York’s public libraries will need to do a better job of developing new sources of revenue. While many of the city’s leading cultural institutions have been very successful at this in recent years, the libraries—particularly the Brooklyn and Queens systems—have only begun to tap funding opportunities outside of government.

To be sure, libraries face fundraising challenges that do not exist for other non-profits. For one, many New Yorkers wrongly assume that libraries are government entities which receive all of their funding from the public sector. As a result, even while so many New Yorkers have a special place in their hearts for libraries, only a small share of those with means make individual donations to libraries.

The leaders of the three public library systems will need to change these perceptions in the years ahead, particularly if government funding continues to decline. Among other things, they might look to tap wealthy individuals and small business owners in Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx and Staten Island for support, bolster their boards of directors and expand “Friends of the Library” groups.

**Before and After: Program Attendance at Corona Branch Post Renovations**



Source: QPL. Figures are from FY2004 and FY2011.

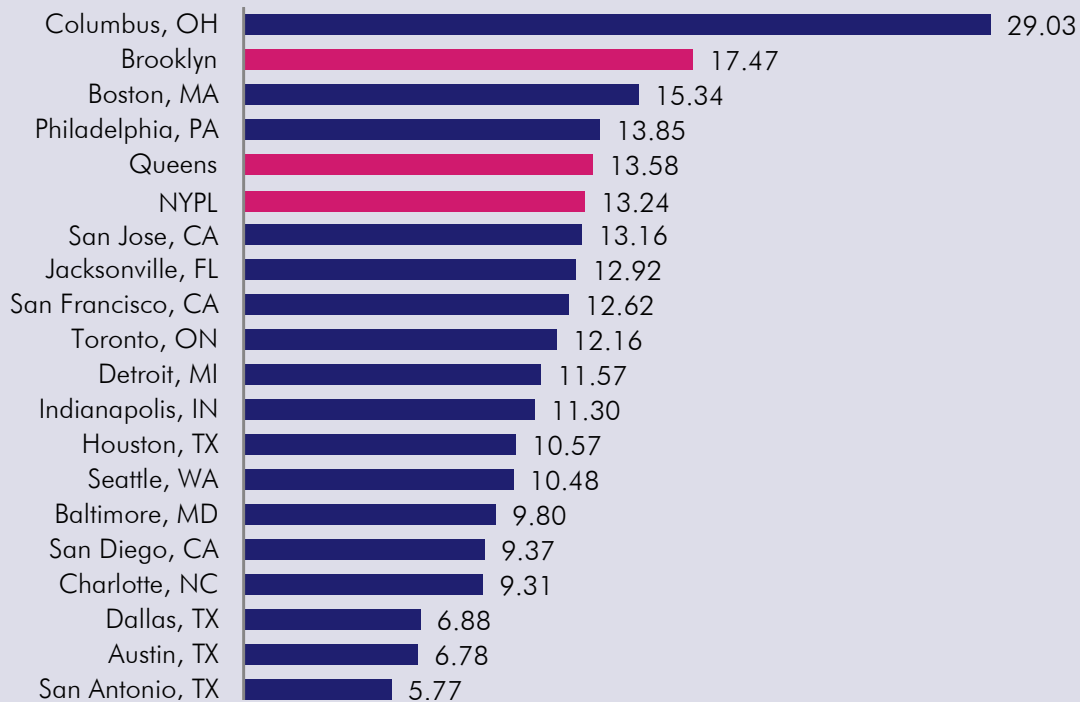
In at least a few cases, the libraries might consider selling older, underperforming branches that are valuable as real estate and then plow the profits back into the creation of new, more efficient branches in the same neighborhoods. Library administrators and city officials should also pursue the possibility of selling air rights to generate revenue for the systems. According to Vicki Been, co-director of the Furman Center for Real Estate, New York City libraries could be sitting on as much as 4.5 million square feet of transferable air-rights. The problem is that the process for selling and buying these rights would need to change. Right now, with only a few exceptions, air-rights can be sold only to developers who want to build on land within the same block, which dramatically limits the market for these rights and lowers their value. But the city could easily loosen those restrictions without any great harm to neighborhood character. It could designate a receiving zone like East Midtown, for example, and allow developers to purchase air-rights from landmarked buildings in the rest of Midtown or even all of Manhattan; or it could make it possible for air-rights to be transferred within larger designated areas, a four-block square in Manhattan, for instance, rather than a single block.

## HOW THEY STACK UP: NYC VS. OTHER MAJOR URBAN LIBRARIES

New York City's three public library systems perform better than their funding levels and average hours of operation might lead one to expect. Collectively, they offer 14.5 program sessions per 1,000 residents, which would put them at No. 3 on our list of 25 North American library systems if they constituted a single system. Individually, Brooklyn ranks No. 2 with 17.5 program sessions per 1,000 residents, while Queens ranks No. 5 with 13.6 and NYPL No. 7 with 13. Similarly, New York libraries collectively circulate 8.4 materials per capita, which again would put them in the top ten if they constituted a single system. Individually, Queens ranks No. 9 with 9.2 books per person, while NYPL ranks No. 10 with 8.1 and Brooklyn No. 11 with 8.

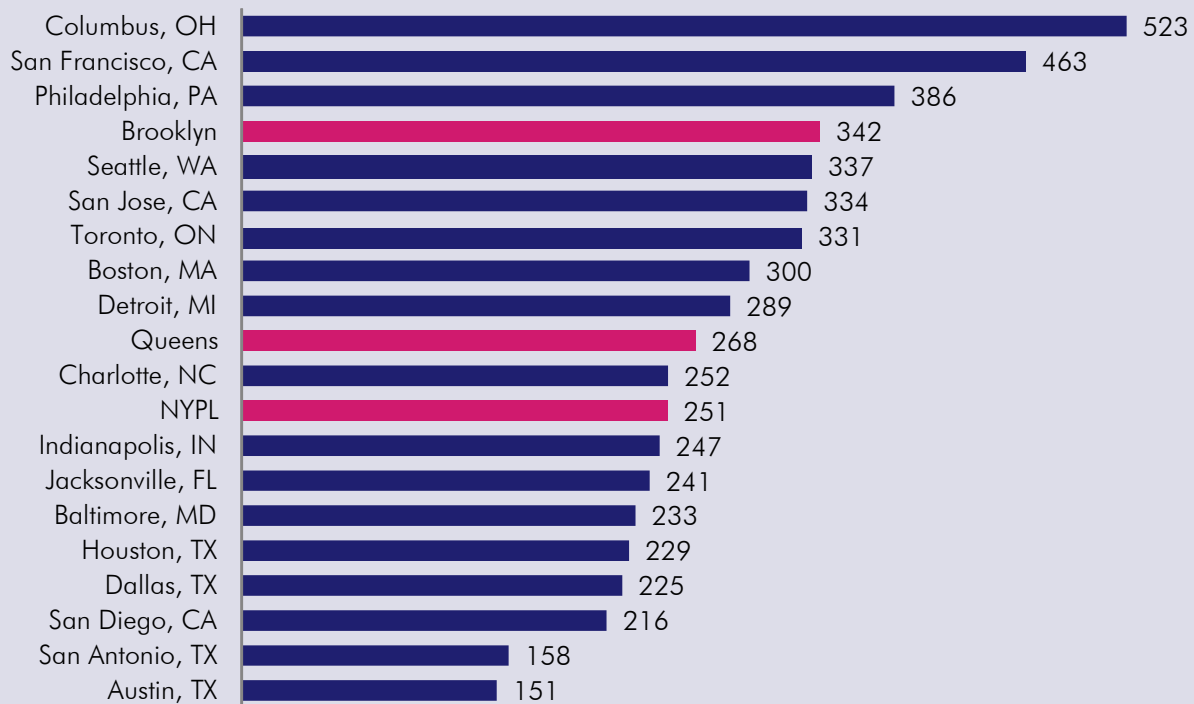
Meanwhile, New York libraries rank below the top ten in terms of local government funding and average hours of service per week, both major factors in performance. Collectively, the systems bring in \$34.50 per person (No. 11 on our list) and are open just 43.4 hours a week on average (No. 13). Individually Queens ranks No. 20 in terms of hours of service, with just 40.7 hours per week, while Brooklyn ranks No. 15 with 42.3 and NYPL No. 12 with 46.

### Program Sessions per 1,000 Residents (2011)



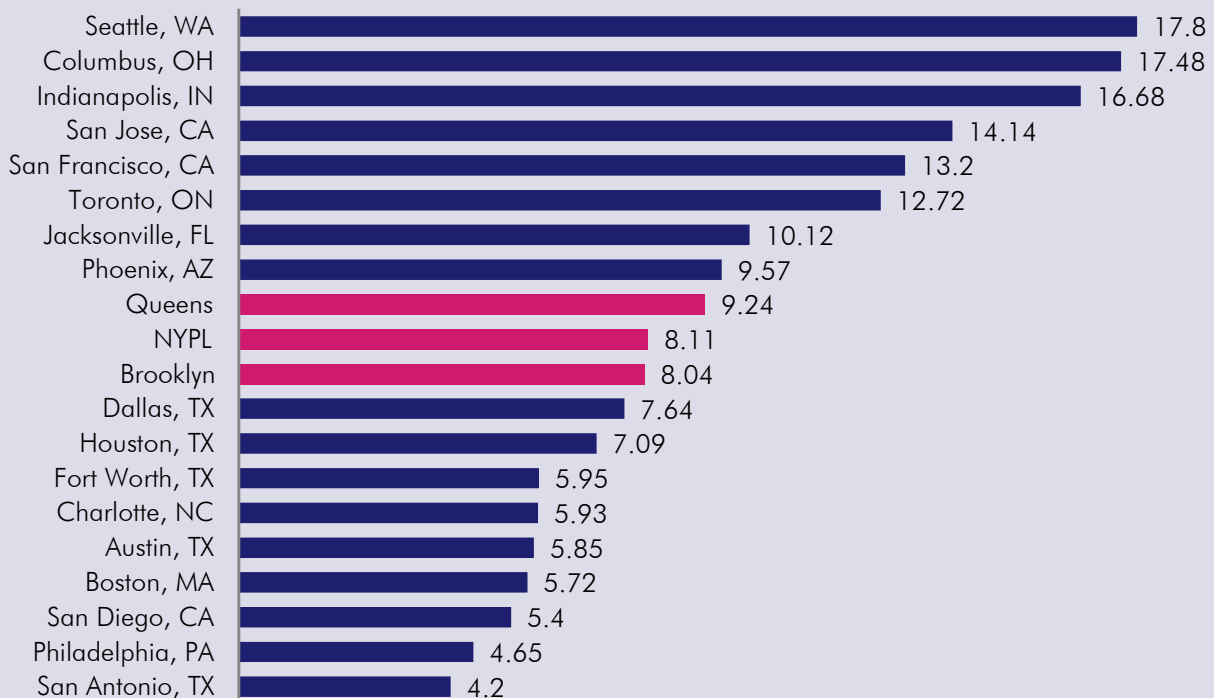
Source: Public Library Data Service: Chicago does not collect program information and is not included in this analysis. Program sessions at NYPL's four research libraries were added to PLDS's branch information; there were 1,529 sessions at those libraries in FY2011. Figures based on fiscal year.

## Program Attendance Per 1,000 Residents (2011)



Source: Public Library Data Service

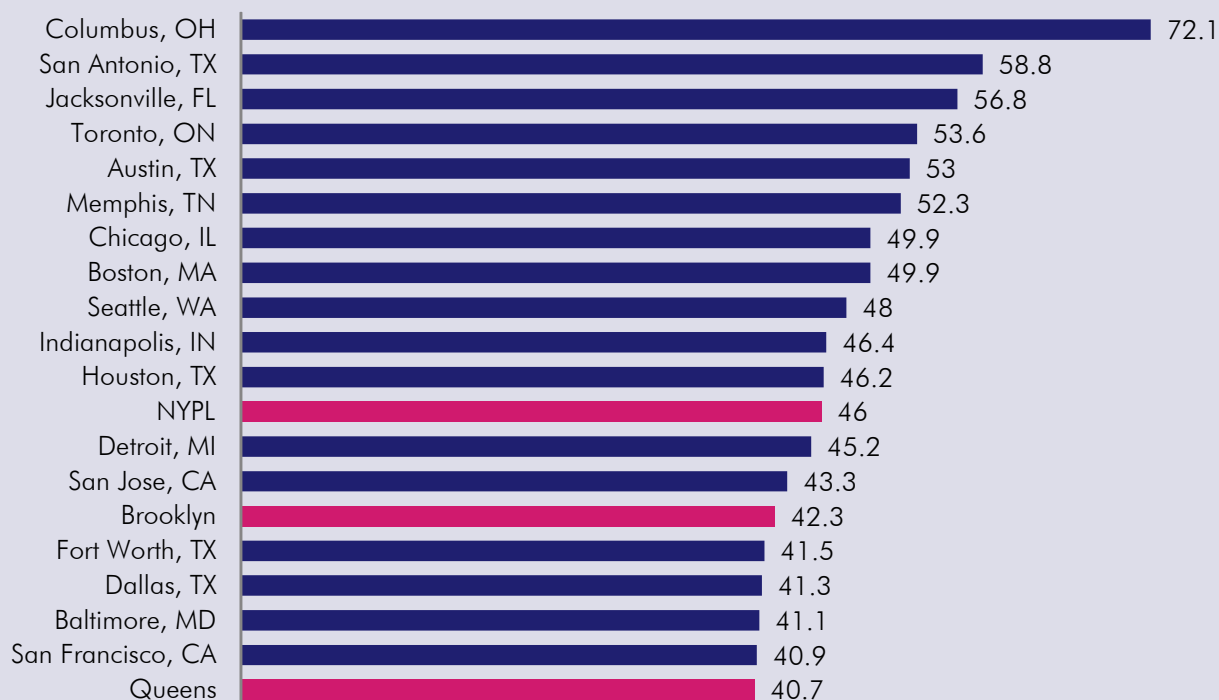
## Circulation per Capita (2011)



Source: Public Library Data Service: Chicago does not collect program information and is not included in this analysis. Program sessions at NYPL's four research libraries were added to PLDS's branch information; there were 1,529 sessions at those libraries in FY2011. Figures based on fiscal year.

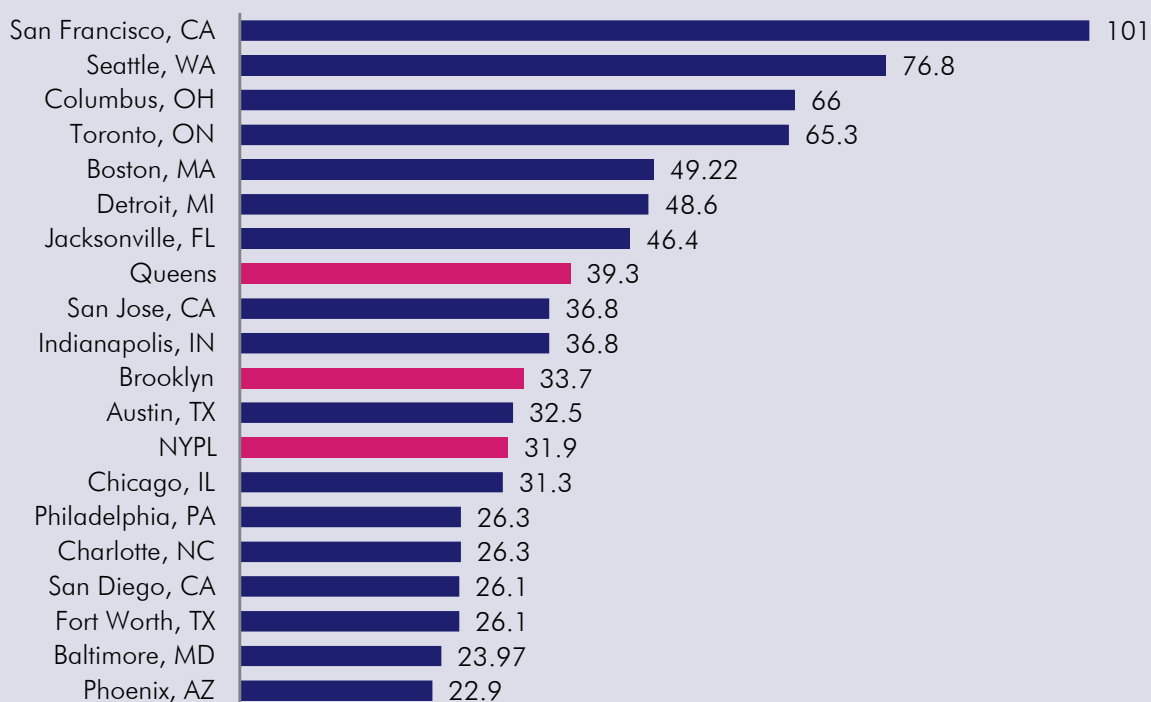


## Average Hours per Week (2011)



Source: Public Library Data Service; Chicago does not collect program information and is not included in this analysis. Program sessions at NYPL's four research libraries were added to PLDS's branch information; there were 1,529 sessions at those libraries in FY2011. Figures based on fiscal year.

## Local Government Contribution per Capita (2011)



Source: Public Library Data Service; Chicago does not collect program information and is not included in this analysis. Program sessions at NYPL's four research libraries were added to PLDS's branch information; there were 1,529 sessions at those libraries in FY2011. Figures based on fiscal year.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## **Increase and baseline library budgets in the city's Financial Plan**

At a time when libraries are serving more New Yorkers than ever and playing an increasingly important role in helping city residents build the skills to compete in today's knowledge economy, Mayor Bloomberg should put an end to the annual ritual of proposing steep cuts to the three public library systems. The mayor and the City Council should not only increase support to the libraries, they should give the libraries more stability in the budget process by setting an adequate baseline level of funding. Along with the budgets of a select group of other city agencies and programs, library operating budgets are extremely vulnerable to funding cuts because they are not accounted for in the city's multiyear Financial Plan. Over the last five years, the gap between the libraries' actual budgets and their ostensible budgets in the Financial Plan has been growing at an alarming rate. Last year the libraries faced a catastrophic cut of nearly \$100 million and already this spring they will be facing yet another potential cut of nearly \$35 million. Even though the lion's share of these looming cuts tend to get restored in the city's annual budget, the resulting "dance" between City Council members and the mayor takes away from the libraries' ability to plan for the future and fundraise from private sources. Moreover, although the yearly restorations tend to get framed in the press as "wins" for the libraries, all three systems have in fact received significant cuts over the last five years.

## **Enable libraries to increase their hours**

It's unacceptable for New York City's public libraries to be open barely 40 hours a week on average when there is such overwhelming demand for the programs and services they offer today. There's no reason why New York's librar-

ies shouldn't be open as many hours each week as the libraries in Detroit, Boston, Chicago, Memphis, Austin and so many other large cities. With an additional \$50 million in operating support from the city, the libraries could keep their doors open an average of 50 hours a week. That would allow them to get the most out of a growing roster of workshops and classes.

## **Reduce the libraries' dependence on individual elected officials for capital funding**

Far too much of the libraries' capital budget funding comes from appropriations from individual elected officials. This has led to wide discrepancies in capital funding among the three systems and left huge holes in the libraries' maintenance budgets. The libraries recently itemized over \$1.5 billion in construction needs across all five boroughs, including hundreds of millions in deferred maintenance costs, but they receive just a few million a year in general capital allocations to meet those needs.<sup>38</sup> For example, in 2010, Queens outlined \$647 million in capital needs across all 62 branches, and this year it received \$5 million in baseline capital funds from the city; everything else either goes unfunded or has to be pieced together with the funds individual elected officials have in their discretionary budgets. At a minimum, the city should raise the general capital allocation for the libraries. But officials should consider going a step further and help the libraries build an ambitious, long-term capital plan capable of meeting the enormous needs of the branches. The libraries could follow Seattle's lead, for example, and issue a \$500 million bond to fund projects across all five boroughs. This wouldn't be a replacement for increased capital allocations or even for the discretionary spending of individual elected officials, but it would allow the libraries to

begin the implementation of a long-term capital plan that is as ambitious as their needs.

### **Challenge city agencies to partner with libraries in delivering services and reaching new populations**

The Department of Small Business Services' (SBS) recent initiative to place four Workforce1 Centers in libraries around the city built on an important service that libraries were already providing and gave the city's chief workforce agency access to previously under-represented communities and populations. Other city and state agencies should follow suit. In order to promote more meaningful partnerships between library branches and city agencies, the mayor's office should issue an official challenge that would fund a library component to one or more of a given agency's existing services and programs.

### **Change state law to allow libraries to receive EPE funds for adult literacy programs**

Libraries are excluded from applying for the largest single pot of money for ESOL and adult literacy programs in New York State—the Employment Preparation Education (EPE) fund. As a result, the city's libraries are able to meet just a fraction of the demand for ESOL and other adult education classes.

### **Tap local sources of wealth for fundraising efforts**

Brooklyn and Queens have been much less successful than NYPL at raising funds from private donors. In part, that's because most of the city's wealth has traditionally been concentrated in Manhattan, where NYPL's central library has been a major landmark for decades. However, Brooklyn and Queens have been growing much wealthier themselves over the last few years and have a lot more potential donors than they once did. Major non-profits like universities, hospitals and cultural organizations have long expected their board members to help fundraise in their communities. With help from the city officials who appoint library board members, including

the mayor and City Council speaker, Brooklyn and Queens could do the same.

### **Ramp up outside advocacy on behalf of libraries**

Although several national organizations, including the American Library Association (ALA) and the Urban Libraries Council, are charged with promoting the library agenda, they have not effectively spotlighted the vital role libraries are playing in communities across the country. The ALA has been extremely effective in raising the issue of personal privacy and protecting library patrons from the threat of government surveillance, most recently in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, but it has been less successful in emphasizing the importance of library-based educational programs in the wake of draconian cuts to libraries across the U.S., including many that we consider in this report. In part because their educational role is so widely misunderstood and under-appreciated, libraries receive a tiny fraction of the government and philanthropic support that higher profile institutions, including K-12 schools and even museums, receive.

### **Build on collaborations taking place between the three library systems**

For the last two or three years, Brooklyn, NYPL and Queens have been partnering on groundbreaking new initiatives to reach new users while lowering costs. MyLibraryNYC, for example, will make the three systems' 17 million volumes readily available for use in public schools for the first time. Teachers will even be able to order 30-book sets and have them delivered to their classroom. The libraries could continue this tradition by unifying their distribution systems to make it possible for patrons to return their library books at any branch in the five boroughs.

### **Invest in new buildings and designs to match current library needs**

Today's most successful public library branches incorporate spaces for loud and quiet activities, group work and solitary work. They make room for a wide variety of public programs and even, where appropriate, commercial activities, cof-

fee shops and stores. Similarly, unlike traditional branches, today's branches thrive in dense urban settings, including retail corridors and transit centers. All three systems should aggressively pursue these sorts of spaces. In some cases, they should seek to relocate branches that are cut off from higher density areas by superblocks and expressways. And they should experiment with a variety of building types, including storefronts and locations that specialize in certain services, such as a library bookstore in the airport or a bookless "mind gym" for retirees.

### **Take advantage of the traditional neighborhood bookstore's demise**

As bookstores continue to disappear, neighborhoods across the city are being deprived of important platforms for dialogue and community engagement, but with some creative thinking the local library could be well positioned to fill the void. Libraries in other cities across the country have begun to mimic bookstores in the way they shelve materials and create spaces for browsing and conversation. Some have even added cafes and dramatically increased their author engagements. Given New York's neighborhood focus and strong literary history, the libraries here should be at the vanguard of this trend.

### **Establish new senior focused branches and resource centers**

New York's elderly population is its fastest growing demographic group, and right now the city's existing network of senior centers serve less than 5 percent of the current senior population. With help from city agencies and elected officials, the libraries need to think strategically about how they might best fill that gap. In the case of teenagers, all three systems have moved aggressively to develop not just teen-appropriate programs but teen centers and, in one case, an entire branch devoted to the needs of teens. They should do the same for the city's seniors.

### **Create a task force to figure out how to improve services in high needs neighborhoods**

Libraries should be huge resources in neighborhoods like Brownsville, East New York and Woodstock, where median family incomes are low and rates of chronic illness high, but for a variety of reasons they have struggled to break through. All three systems should collaborate with each other as well as with city agencies to look strategically at how their services could be improved in these areas. For example, NYCHA's recently unveiled economic opportunity zones could be an important framework for increased library-based services in these neighborhoods.

### **Pursue new revenue opportunities**

Although outside revenue streams will never be able to replace the last five years of city funding cuts, libraries do have a number of opportunities to raise revenue outside the usual channels. For example, all three library systems, but particularly Brooklyn and NYPL, should look into selling underperforming branches in neighborhoods where sales could generate big profits. NYPL is already committed to selling the Mid-Manhattan branch and the Science, Industry and Business Library as a part of their ambitious Central Library Plan, but there are almost certainly other good candidates. With help from the city, the libraries also could begin to sell valuable air-rights to developers in high density areas or areas where the city is looking to upzone, e.g. East Midtown. The Furman Center for Real Estate at NYU estimates that the libraries could be sitting on as much as 4.5 million square feet of transferable air-rights, if only the regulations governing the sale of these rights were loosened by city officials. Lastly, if the libraries can establish their websites as places for readers to discover new titles and not just borrow them—making them intellectual homes for readers, in effect—then they could begin to facilitate book purchases and provide valuable user information to publishers and book distributors.

### **Cultivate creative partnerships with both non- and for-profits**

To fully capitalize on the community hub model, libraries need to explore creative partnerships with New York-based organizations that



have a successful track record in attracting participants to educational programs, events and exhibitions. New York is bursting at the seams with arts organizations like chashama, which builds out gallery and event spaces, and 826NYC, which created a shop in Brooklyn where school-age kids can purchase capes and bottles of anti-gravity and participate in afterschool writing workshops. The libraries should not shy away from commercial partners, whether retail stores like the Super Hero Supply Company or a tech firms like Tumblr or Google, which could help set up library-based tech learning centers.

### Develop workshare and incubator spaces at appropriate branches

Workshare and business incubator spaces like General Assembly in the Flatiron district, not far from NYPL's Muhlenberg branch, or 3rd Ward in Bushwick, Brooklyn, have succeeded in creating dynamic communities around shared interests in the arts and technology. If the libraries worked

with EDC to tap into this dynamic trend, they could not only reactivate underutilized spaces but also recruit community members to provide volunteer service. A tech-oriented workshare space, in particular, could draw on members to provide much needed tutoring in tech skills to librarians and staff.

### Change the rules governing the disbursement of capital funds to include a wider array of interior projects

Through a quirk in the rules, libraries are allowed to use capital funds on major renovations and even desktop computers but not activity walls and laptops. Because library funds come from different sources within city government, this can make these kinds of projects harder to accomplish even though they may cost less. The city Office of Management and Budget should change the rules to allow more of these projects to qualify for capital funding.

## ENDNOTES

1. See David A. Bell, "The Bookless Library," *The New Republic*, July 12, 2012.
2. The 33 members of the Cultural Institutions Group received 18.9 million visitors in FY 2011, while NYC's major league sports teams, including the New Jersey-based New York Jets, Giants and Nets, greeted a combined 8.7 million visitors in the seasons overlapping with that time span.
3. The number of public access computers in FY 2002 and 2011 comes from the Mayor's Management Reports. Computer sessions logged was calculated using data from the individual libraries.
4. Data from Kristin McDonough, director of NYPL's Science, Industry and Business Library.
5. Abigail A Van Slyck, *Free To All: Carnegie Libraries and American Culture 1890-1920*, University of Chicago, 1995. Carnegie's bequest helped to fund 65 new branches in Manhattan, the Bronx and Staten Island, under NYPL's direction, and 42 branches in Brooklyn and Queens. See p. 113.
6. Institute of Museum and Library Services, "Public Libraries Survey Fiscal Year 2009," October 2011.
7. The mid-year cuts announced in November amounted to \$2.8 million for Brooklyn and Queens and \$4.5 million for NYPL. With this year's adopted FY2013 budget, NYPL has received \$23.7 million in cuts since 2008, while Brooklyn has received \$15.3 million in cuts and Queens \$14.7 million.
8. These estimated performance increases may require a year on year increase of the said amount, not a one-time infusion. Standard six day service would amount to an average of 50 hours per week, significantly higher than the current average of 43 hours per week.
9. When looking at budgeted capital funds rather than just committed funds, the discrepancy grows even larger. Between Fiscal Year 2003 and Fiscal Year 2012, for instance, Queens raised \$268 million in capital funds, compared to just \$137 million for Brooklyn.
10. There are three ongoing library capital projects now underway on Staten Island that were not reflected in these figures.
11. Based on figures from calendar year 2011. Electronic checkouts include more than just e-books; they include video and audio file downloads and specialized materials like Tumblebooks.
12. New York City Department for the Aging, "Census 2010: Changes in the Elderly Population of New York City, 2000 to 2010," July 2012.
13. For instance, according to the 2010 American Community Survey, 35 percent of Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens residents over the age of 60 have inad-

- equate English skills, compared to just 24 percent of the rest of the population.
14. Diamond Management and Technology Consultants, "New York City Broadband Landscape and Recommendations," July 2008.
15. Ibid.
16. For more information on the digital divide and the role of libraries and librarians in bridging that divide, see: Jessamyn West, *Without a Net: Librarians Bridging the Digital Divide*, Libraries Unlimited, 2011.
17. Lisa W. Foderaro, "CUNY Adjusts Amid Tide of Remedial Students," *The New York Times*, March 3, 2011.
18. Figures on young adult attendance for Brooklyn are not available.
19. For Manhattan, we include the children's library at the 42nd Street Research library and the Science, Industry, Business Library in our list of branches because they lend out books and offer educational programs like any other branch. SIBL, of course, is also a research library.
20. Bronx branches received approximately \$107.2 in capital funds going toward major construction projects between 2002 and 2011, compared to \$96.6 million for Manhattan branches and \$5.7 million for Staten Island branches. But these include only completed projects. In the last several years, more money has been raised for several unfinished projects in all three boroughs. According to NYPL, \$27 million in capital funds have been raised since 2007 for several ongoing projects on Staten Island, including a new branch in Mariner's Harbor and an ambitious addition at Stapleton.
21. These numbers were arrived at by comparing the first full year High Bridge was open to the public after the renovation was complete (FY2011) with the last full year the branch was open to the public before the renovation started (FY 2007).
22. Mid-Manhattan's program attendance rose from 8,423 in 2002 to 38,179 in 2011. The increase was larger than similarly sized branches in Brooklyn and Queens, but it started from a much lower position. Flushing's 2002 program attendance level was 42,715, for example, and Brooklyn Central's was 34,759.
23. New York City Council Speaker Christine Quinn, State of the City Address, February 15, 2007. <http://old.gothamgazette.com/article/search-light/20070215/203/2105>
24. Fiscal Years 2008 and 2009 (enacted in the summer of 2008) represented something of a high water mark in operational funds for the libraries. Collectively, in 2009, they brought in \$326 million in city funds and \$553 in total funds.
25. Sources: PLDS. Charlotte's library system laid off 50 percent of its staff during this period, while Dallas' system reduced employment by 40 percent. According to NYPL, some of this change in FTE reflects broader organizational restructuring rather than budget induced layoffs. The FTE reduction that comes from funding cuts alone, they say, amounts to 19 percent.
26. Sources: Independent Budget Office (IBO); Financial Management System; Consumer Price Index Inflation Calculator. Funds do not include NYPL's research libraries which received an additional \$23 million in 2002 (in 2011 dollars) and \$22 million in 2011.
27. See "The Library in the City: Changing Demands and a Challenging Future," The Pew Charitable Trusts, March 2012.
28. Sources: IBO; Financial Management System. Capital funding includes committed funds only, not budgeted funds.
29. Sources: IBO; Financial Management System; and 2010 Census.
30. When looking at funds that have been budgeted for projects (as opposed to spent), the Queens BP's numbers more than double. Between Fiscal Year 2003 and Fiscal Year 2012, Helen Marshall has given \$111 million in funds to library projects, many of which are still in the planning stages.
31. Ibid.
32. This does not include capital funds for NYPL's four research libraries. The research libraries have received another \$50 million from the Mayor during this period, and \$74 million overall from city government sources.
33. Between January 2011 and January 2012, NYPL circulated 642,586 materials, compared to 230,753 for Brooklyn and 110,999 for Queens.
34. For more on this topic see, Tom Hilliard, "Bad English," *The Center for an Urban Future*, January 2012. For years advocates, including the Center for an Urban Future, have championed opening up EPE to a range of other providers. See "Action Agenda for ESOL," *The Center for an Urban Future*, March 2010.
35. The Foundation Center, 2012. The data are based on all grants of \$10,000 or more awarded by a national sample of 1,330 larger U.S. foundations (including 800 of the 1,000 largest ranked by total giving.)
36. Shannon Mattern, "Resonant Texts: Sounds of the American Public Library," *Senses & Society*, Vol 2, Issue 3, 2007.
37. For criticism, see: Ada Louise Huxtable, "Under-taking its Destruction," *Wall Street Journal*, December 3, 2012. For a defense, see: Paul Goldberger, "Firestorm on Fifth Avenue," *Vanity Fair*, December 2012.
38. NYS Public Library Construction Needs 2010-2014, New York State Education Department (NYSED). <http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/libdev/construc/needs1014.htm#Queens> Accessed 12/5/2012



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