

5 Things Community Leaders Should Know About Libraries and the Public*



Libraries Are Highly Valued.

Libraries received the best grades of any of the community institutions covered in a national survey. Nearly half the public gave libraries an “A” – higher than public schools, the police and the local news media. More than 6 in 10 “strongly agree” that public libraries are essential for “maintaining a productive community.”

1

Libraries Are Important 21st Century Resources.

The public considers having computers and Internet access in libraries essential, and many also want libraries to provide other multimedia resources. Almost two-thirds of Americans say that having enough computers and online services should be a high priority for libraries.

2

Voters Love Libraries.

Those who vote in nearly every local election, and who volunteer and donate to charities, are big fans of libraries. Nearly three-quarters have a local library card. Six in 10 of these civically-engaged folks would favor a tax increase to cover library needs, compared with about half of less-engaged citizens.

3

Libraries Use Tax Funds Wisely.

More than three-quarters of library users believe libraries spend tax dollars well. Even among non-users, 6 in 10 say they believe libraries use their funds wisely.

4

The Public Welcomes a Greater Role for Libraries.

Interviews with nearly three dozen national and community leaders and an in-depth public opinion survey highlighted four specific opportunities for public libraries to integrate themselves more fully into the life of their communities and to position themselves as positive “community players.” The four areas are:

5

- **A safe and engaging place for teens**

Nationwide, there are excellent examples of teen programming at public libraries, but funding is a challenge.

- **Literacy skills for a strong workforce**

Survey data about adult literacy and workforce development show a clear opportunity for synergy and community improvement. More than half of the public believes communities should emphasize job search assistance, and almost as many believe this should be a high priority for public libraries.

- **Center for community information**

The public sees an opportunity for libraries to fill a gap as a “hub” for improved access to government information and services, including making public documents and forms quickly and easily available.

- **Greater access to technology**

The public says this is a community need that is currently not being met and one it sees as a high priority for libraries.

*From a new public opinion research study, “Long Overdue: A Fresh Look at Public and Leadership Attitudes About Libraries in the 21st Century,” published by Public Agenda June 2006.