



Leadership. Advocacy. Communication.

Way Beyond Books: Florida's Public Libraries Efficiently Provide Services That are Vital to the Quality of Life in Every Community.

Florida's public libraries have always been more than mere collections of books. Libraries are vital to providing free access to essential information and other services that support schools through homework assistance and summer reading programs; offer access to and training for public computer and Internet use; and provide a public space for meetings and other programs. As we pay greater attention to where our public dollars go, let's take a closer look at what we expect from our libraries and how very well they exceed those expectations in the delivery of essential services to all Floridians.

FLORIDIANS VALUE THEIR PUBLIC LIBRARIES

- The majority – **51%** – of Floridians have library cards, according to the Florida Department of State and the State Library & Archives of Florida.
- They also report that Floridians visit public libraries more than **72 million times** each year, checking out more than **100 million books**.
- **2.7 million Florida youth** attend library-sponsored programs each year.
- More than half – **52%** – of respondents in a Public Agenda study for the American Libraries Association and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation reported a **willingness to pay higher taxes to assist libraries**.

LIBRARIES PROVIDE AN EXCELLENT RETURN ON INVESTMENT

- According to the National Center for Education Statistics, Florida libraries serve the public at an average cost of **\$26.59 per person annually**, which is **16 percent less than the national average for public library service**.
- A 2004 report by the Florida Department of State and the State Library & Archives of Florida found public libraries **return \$6.54 for every \$1.00 invested**, an exceptional rate of return and one of the most cost-effective investments of tax dollars.

- The Public Agenda study found that **71 percent of library users say libraries use public monies well**.

FUNDING PUBLIC LIBRARIES IS AN ONGOING CHALLENGE

- Despite their incredible value, funding for libraries is among the **first cut** and **last restored** by local government.
- Florida's public libraries are already experiencing shorter hours of operation, staff layoffs, hiring freezes and reduced materials.
- Library users now expect libraries to provide easy access to government services, despite a lack of additional funding or training.
- These new responsibilities without additional funding constitute an **unfunded mandate** by government.
- Additional cuts to library personnel, hours of services, book supplies, maintenance and outreach services, such as bookmobiles and visits to senior and community centers, are possible without sufficient funding.
- Any future funding cuts will only further jeopardize the ability of public libraries to serve the needs of Floridians.