

Colorado's Public Libraries Offer Literacy Activities Despite Economic Difficulties

Many of Colorado's public libraries contribute significant resources to family and adult literacy activities, despite the difficult budget climate they currently face. The federal government no longer provides direct funding for adult literacy activities in public libraries and Colorado's public libraries have faced significant budget cuts in the last two years. But a survey conducted by the Library Research Service in August 2003 found that 33% of Colorado's public libraries still offer family and/or adult literacy activities. Family literacy activities go beyond children's story time to teach parents how to help children read and to provide opportunities for children and parents to interact in reading activities together. Adult literacy activities help adult students with GED high school equivalency diploma test skills, English as a Second Language (ESL), or basic reading. Chart 1 indicates 38 of Colorado's 115 public libraries reported providing adult and/or family literacy activities.

Chart 1: Colorado Public Libraries with Adult and/or Family Literacy Activities

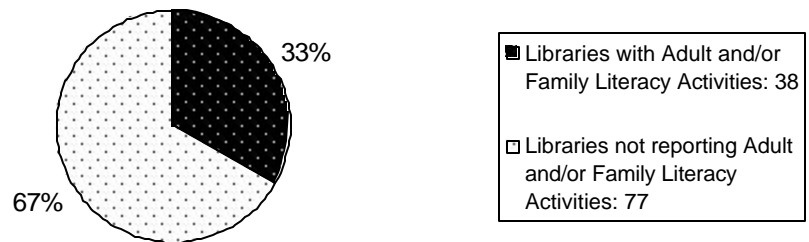
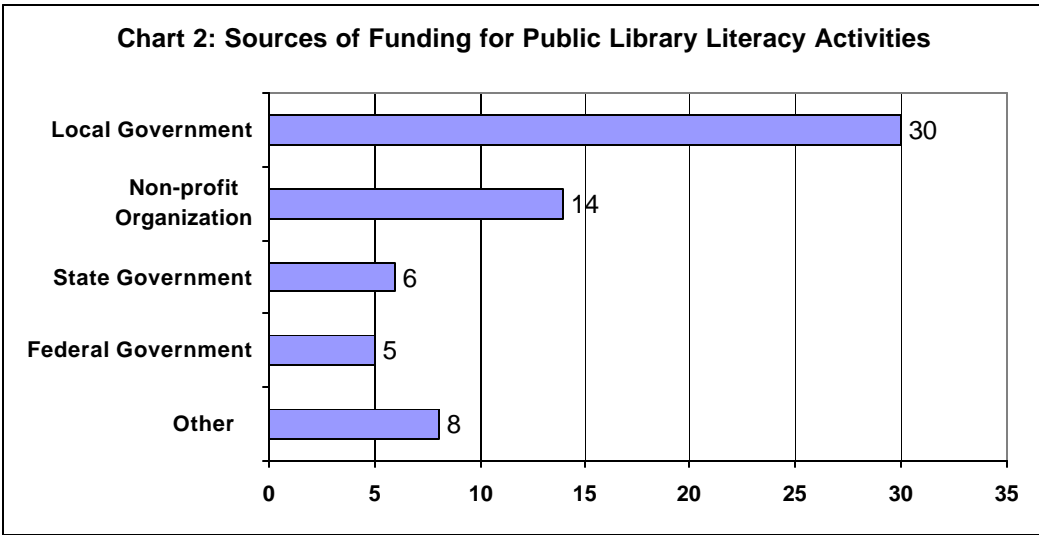


Table 1: Colorado Public Libraries Offering Adult and/or Family Literacy Activities by size of Legal Service Area Population

| Legal Service Area Population Group | Number of libraries in Colorado | Number offering adult and/or family literacy activities | Percent offering adult and/or family literacy activities |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|--|
| Over 100,000 | 12 | 11 | 92% |
| 25,000-99,999 | 11 | 4 | 36% |
| 10,000-24,999 | 13 | 6 | 46% |
| 5,000-9,999 | 16 | 7 | 44% |
| 2,500-4,999 | 20 | 1 | 5% |
| 1,000-2,499 | 21 | 1 | 5% |
| Fewer than 1,000 | 10 | 1 | 10% |
| Resort libraries | 12 | 7 | 58% |

The group of public libraries serving populations of over 100,000 has the highest percentage with adult and/or family literacy activities. Table 1 indicates that 11 of 12 public libraries in this group, about 92%, reported offering literacy activities. This may be because the diverse populations in the larger communities have both greater need for literacy activities and the resources to offer them. The group with the next highest percentage of public libraries offering literacy activities is in resort communities where seven out of twelve, about 58%, reported offering adult and/or family literacy activities. This may reflect need for ESL and family literacy activities among low-wage workers in these communities.

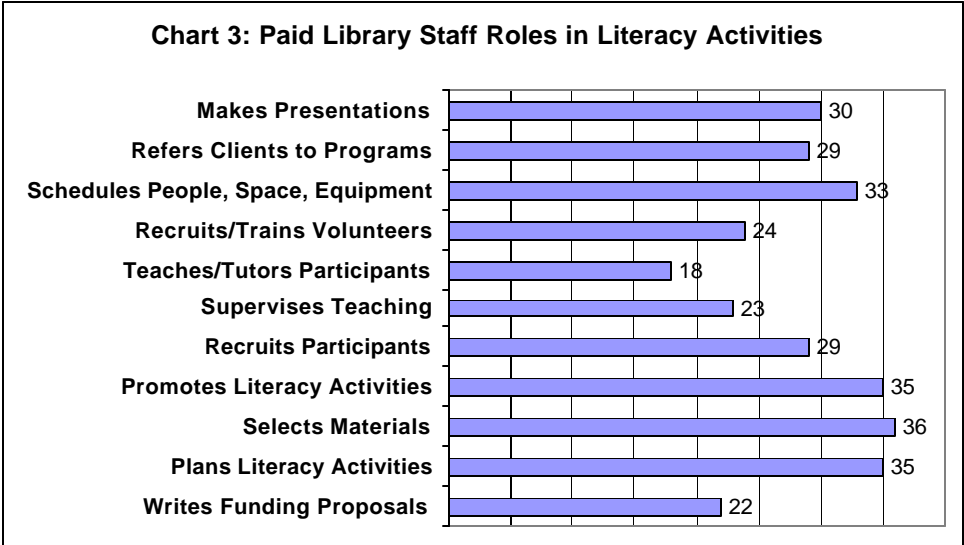
Many libraries reported several sources of funding for their literacy activities, an indication that they must combine resources to support these activities. Chart 2 shows the funding sources for adult and/or family literacy activities reported by the libraries in the survey.



Local government is the most commonly reported funding source. Local communities can readily identify local needs for literacy programs and respond directly with funding for activities in their public libraries. Non-profit organizations are the

next most-common source of funding. Only five libraries reported federal sources of funding for their literacy activities. The “Other” category includes funding from businesses, individuals, and corporations.

The public libraries in the survey commit library facilities, collection funds, volunteers, and paid staff time to adult and/or family literacy activities. Finding funding for the literacy activities is only one important way in which paid staff contributes. Twenty-two libraries indicated they have paid library staff writing funding proposals for adult and/or family literacy activities. Chart 3 shows this and the other contributions paid library staff make to adult and/or family literacy activities in the libraries.



The LRS survey’s findings show that many of Colorado’s public libraries are working to serve Coloradans who need literacy activities. But some responding libraries’ comments reveal that they will have to consider cutting back or even discontinuing family and adult literacy activities altogether if their budgets do not improve. Libraries and literacy activities are natural partners and closure or reduction of any library literacy programs would be a real loss for the library patrons who use and benefit from them.

Source: Library Research Service. *Adult and Family Literacy Activities in Colorado Public Libraries*, November 2003. Available online at <http://www.lrs.org>

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