

BUDGET CUTS SEVERELY REDUCE LIBRARY SERVICES FOR COLORADANS

ED3/110.10/No. 202

DECEMBER 29, 2003

The last year and a half has been grueling for Colorado libraries. Of the 83 academic, public, school, and special libraries responding to an autumn 2003 Library Research Service survey, 52 reported budget cuts since July 1, 2002, for a total of over \$11 million.

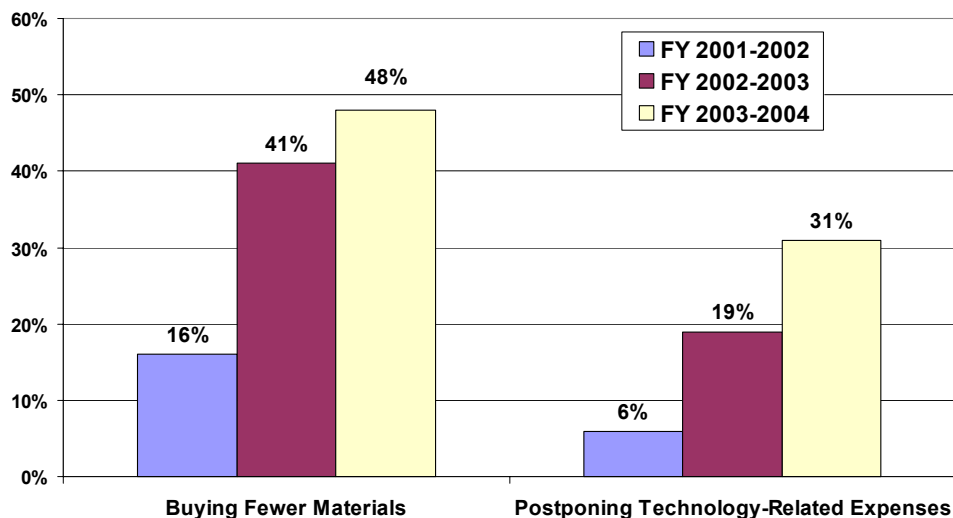
Forty-nine of the state's 115 (43%) *public library* jurisdictions responded to the survey, reporting a total of over \$6.5 million in cuts since July 1, 2002. These 49 public libraries serve approximately three million Coloradans – roughly two-thirds of the state population. If the public libraries that responded to this survey are representative of those across the state, total cuts have probably reached \$9.5 million for Colorado *public libraries alone*.

What does this mean for the residents of Colorado? More than likely, it means reduced service levels at libraries across the state. A series of questions on the survey asked libraries to identify strategies that they have used over the most recent three fiscal years to deal with their budget cut situation. All nineteen strategies listed in the survey were reported as being used more in FY 2003-04 than in FY 2001-02. Chart 1 shows an alarming rise in the use of two such measures that directly affect library users – buying fewer materials and postponing technology-related purchases. Nearly half (48%) of the libraries that responded to the survey will be buying fewer materials for fiscal year 2003-2004 than they had purchased in prior years, and nearly a third (31%) will postpone certain technology-related expenses. This means fewer books, videos, and computers for Coloradans to share.

Budget Cut Survey Highlights

- 52 Colorado libraries reported budget cuts of \$11,021,826
- 78% of academic libraries and 67% of public libraries reported budget cuts since July 1, 2002
- About half of Colorado's libraries are being forced to buy fewer materials – many have also needed to postpone technology-related expenses
- With fewer public service hours and staff, libraries will struggle to provide programs and learning opportunities

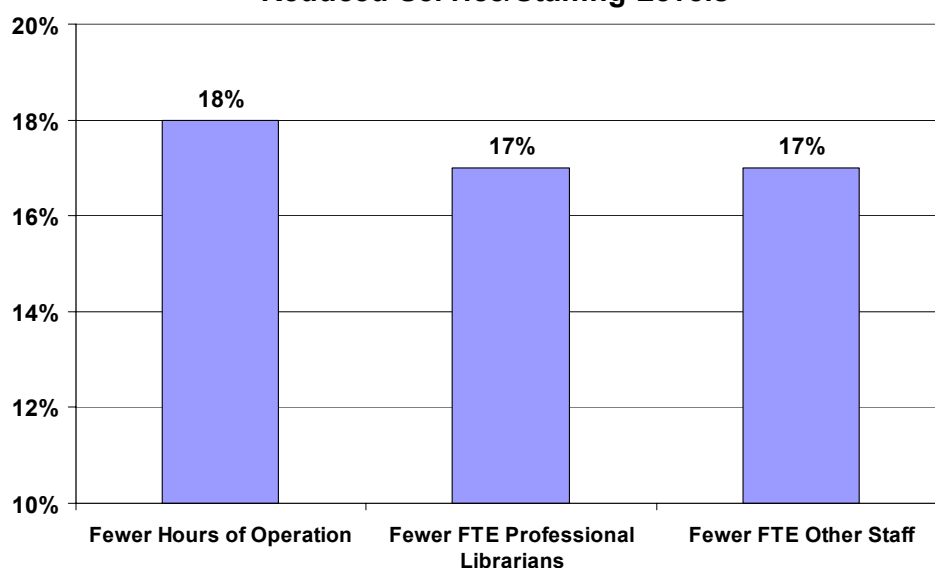
Chart 1: Percentage of Libraries Using Specific Budget-Cut Strategies



Libraries across the state are being forced to cut public service hours and staffing as well. Nearly one out of five libraries that responded to the Budget Cut Survey reported using the strategy of offering fewer hours of service as a means to help manage the budget crunch. Numerous libraries are also reducing their staffing levels – 17% of libraries reported reducing the hours of professional librarians. A similar number reported reducing the hours of non-professional staff. Libraries that need to close more often and that staff fewer qualified individuals will be hard-pressed to provide the high level of service to which Colorado library users have become accustomed. With fewer public service hours and smaller staffs, our libraries will be less able to provide important programs and learning opportunities such as story times, computer lessons, homework help, and meeting space.

Throughout the survey, *academic libraries* consistently reported being the hardest hit.

Chart 2: Percent of Libraries Reporting Specific Reduced Service/Staffing Levels



Results illustrating this include:

- At least one-third of responding academic libraries reported cuts in the number of hours of operation and in the number and hours worked by librarians and other staff.
- Nearly half (44%) of responding academic libraries reported having fewer non-librarians working than they had on July 1, 2002.

Libraries have long had a reputation for being able to stretch dollars, and numbers from the Budget Cut Survey suggest that they are still being pressured to do so. One can only guess how far libraries can stretch before being spread too thin.

Further analysis of the Budget Cut Survey is forthcoming as a Closer Look Report at <http://www.lrs.org/closer.asp>.

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