

LIBRARIANSHIP IN COLORADO PUBLIC LIBRARIES

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In a recent LRS study, *Retirement, Retention, and Recruitment: The Future of Librarianship in Colorado* (3Rs), 1,241 respondents from all types of libraries were asked about their careers, their workplaces, and their attitudes about librarianship. This issue of Fast Facts explores the responses from the 245 public librarian respondents – defined as librarians with a Master of Library Science degree (MLS) or equivalent library credential and working in a Colorado public library.

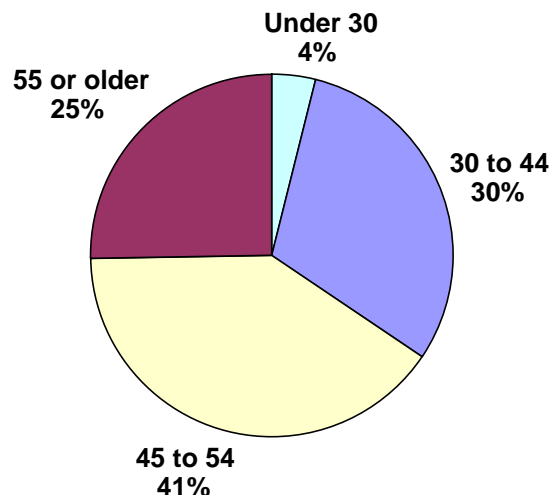
Predictably, the respondents' geographic distribution followed the general population distribution in the state. Public library respondents were predominately from metropolitan areas and the Front Range. More than 4 out of 5 public librarians (84%) indicated they resided in a metropolitan area. Moreover, 81 percent live along the Front Range and 18 percent live in the Mountains or on the Western Slope, leaving only 1 percent residing on the Eastern Plains.

Highlights from Public Librarian Respondents

- 1 in 7 said they plan to retire in the next five years.
- 1 in 4 was 55 or older, within 10 years of the traditional retirement age of 65.
- Nearly 2 in 3 indicated "service to others" as a leading factor in making librarianship an attractive profession.
- 4 out of 5 said "low financial compensation" was the leading factor discouraging potential librarians from pursuing a career in librarianship.
- Approximately 1 in 3 had their salary and/or benefits frozen or cut in the last year.
- More than 1 in 5 experienced staff cuts at their workplace.

The proverbial "graying of the profession" can be seen in the distribution by age of public library respondents. One in four respondents was 55 or older (25%), within 10 years of the traditional retirement age of 65. The largest percentage of respondents were 45 to 54 years of age (41%), with the 30 to 44 year olds making up the second largest group (30%). Barely registering is the youngest group with a mere 1 in 25 indicating they are under 30 (4%). (See Chart 1.)

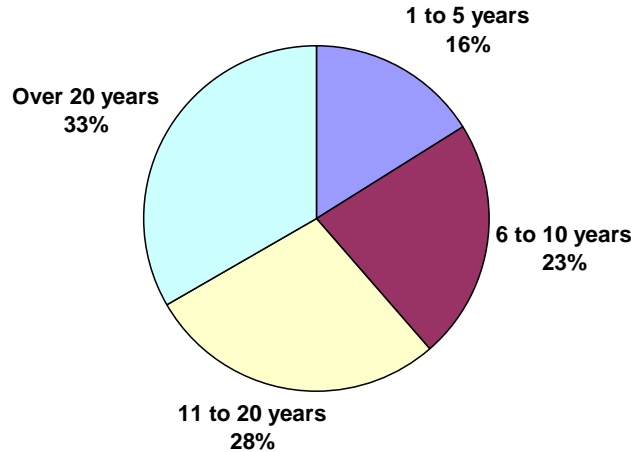
Chart 1
Colorado Public Librarian Respondents -
Distribution by Age



Of those public librarians responding to the survey, 1 in 7 said they plan to retire in the next five years (14%). Given the age distribution of respondents (two-thirds are 45 or older) and the fact that many workers retire before reaching 65, this could be just the tip of the iceberg in terms of retirements in the next 10 to 15 years.



Chart 2
Colorado Public Librarian Respondents -
Distribution by Years of Library Employment

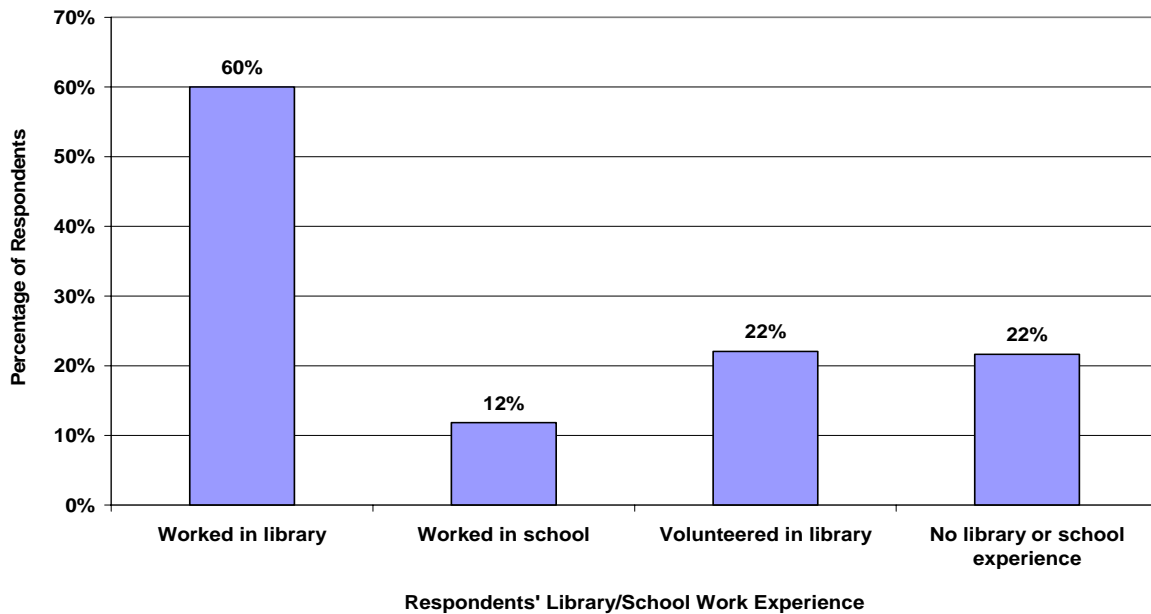


Colorado public librarians are an experienced lot – at least those responding to this study had considerable years of library employment. Three in five had more than 10 years of library experience. Almost a quarter had 6 to 10 years experience working in a library. The smallest group was the least experienced with about 1 in 6 having 5 years experience or less. (See Chart 2.)

More than three-quarters of respondents (78%) indicated they had worked or volunteered in a library and/or school prior to pursuing a library credential (i.e., 22% indicated no library or school

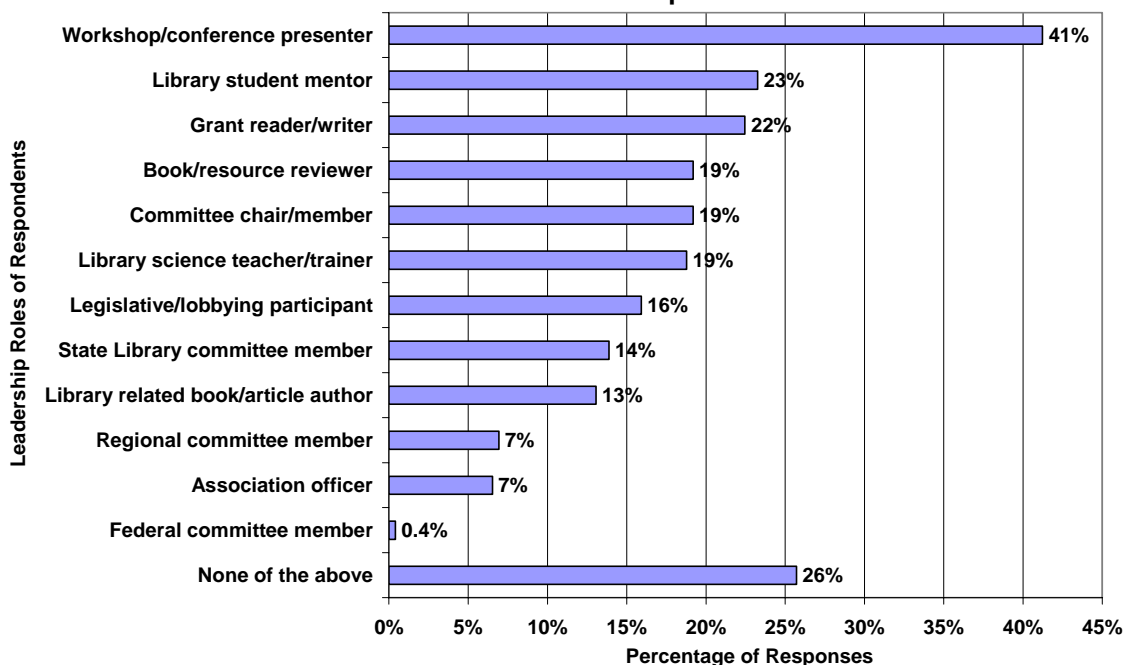
experience). Almost two-thirds of public librarians worked in a library before pursuing an MLS or equivalent credential (60%). Not surprisingly fewer public librarians had worked in schools (12%) than in libraries. This data supports the strategy of recruiting future public librarians from within the ranks of current library staff. (See Chart 3.)

Chart 3
Colorado Public Librarian Respondents - Work Experience Prior to Pursuing a
Graduate Degree in Library Science or a School Library Media Endorsement



Public librarian respondents are very active in the professional community with 3 out of 4 indicating one or more leadership roles in the last five years (i.e., 26% indicated none of the above). More than 2 out of 5 were workshop and/or conference presenters (41%) and close to 1 in 4 were mentors (23%) and/or grant readers/writers (22%). (See Chart 4.)

Chart 4
Colorado Public Librarian Respondents -
Professional Leadership Roles



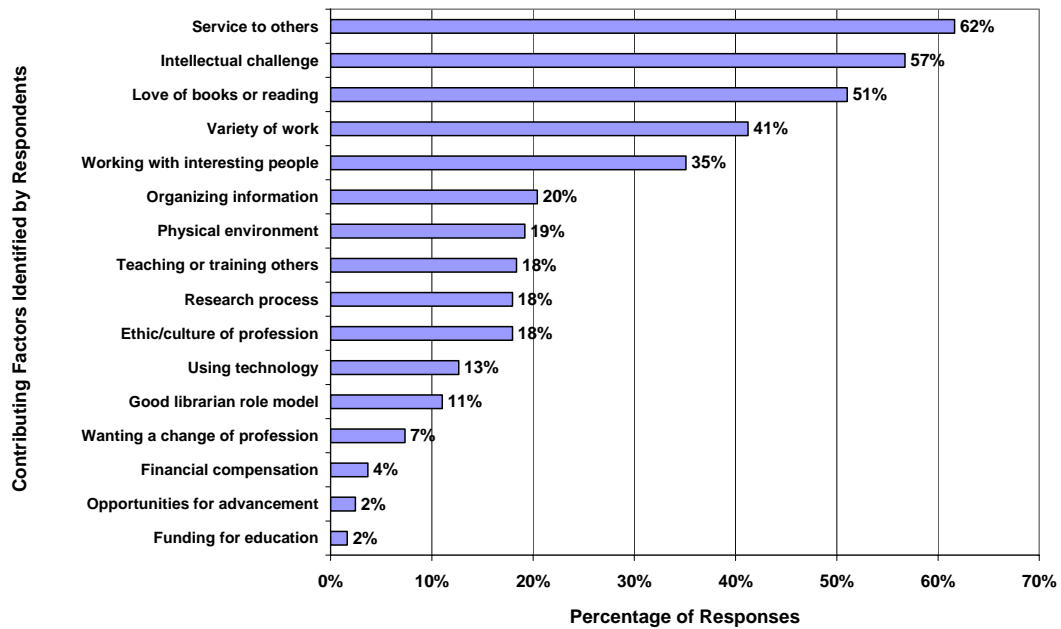
Public librarian respondents, like many of their colleagues in other types of libraries, indicated service to others as a leading factor in making librarianship an attractive profession (62%). Additionally, more than half of respondents chose intellectual challenge (57%) and love of books or reading (51%). Other leading factors include variety of work (41%) and working with interesting people (35%). At the bottom of the list is funding for education (2%), opportunities for advancement (2%), and financial compensation (4%). (See Chart 5.)

"I believe librarianship is alive and well, despite the economy... We've survived other bad times; we'll survive these..."
 – Public Librarian

"I'm optimistic! I see a continued role for libraries in some form or other. The profession is keeping me because it's ever-changing and challenging. People still love their library! Even though most folks get into the profession because of love of books or other misguided preconceptions (we do NOT 'get to read books all day'), we all end up staying because it's just good work to get to do."
 – Public Librarian



Chart 5
Colorado Public Librarian Respondents -
Factors That Make Librarianship an Attractive Profession



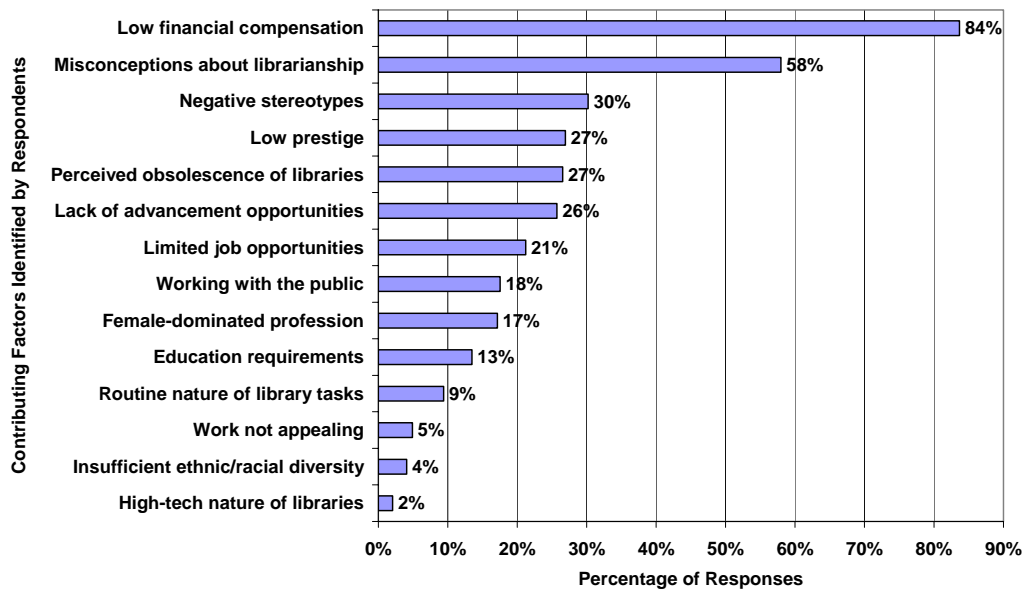
Overwhelmingly, public librarian respondents indicated low financial compensation as the leading factor discouraging a career in librarianship (84%). A distant second was misconceptions about librarianship (58%). Negative stereotypes (30%), low prestige (27%), and perceived obsolescence of libraries (27%) round out the top five factors. It is interesting to note that all but the top reason—low financial compensation—relates to the perception of librarians and libraries. (See Chart 6.)

“Decreasing pay and increasing workloads will continue to make this profession undesirable to students looking for a promising career.”
– Public Librarian

“Many administrators/management-level staff will be retiring in the next ten to 15 years and it will be a challenge to replace them. When we have school visits, students are reluctant to pursue library degrees due to the length of the educational process compared to the salary they might hope to receive in their first job. Our jobs are not as attractive as those in other field of study which pay more for an advanced degree.”
– Public Librarian



Chart 6
Colorado Public Librarian Respondents -
Factors that Discourage a Career in Librarianship



Half of public librarians indicated the downturn in the economy had no effect on their career plans (50%). In addition, over a third said they decided to stay in their current library job (39%). Significantly fewer respondents said they would retire later (14%) and even fewer chose to seek another library job (7%). So although the current economic climate has had a negative effect on many libraries in Colorado, it has not significantly impacted the career plans of the majority of public librarian respondents. (See Table 1.)

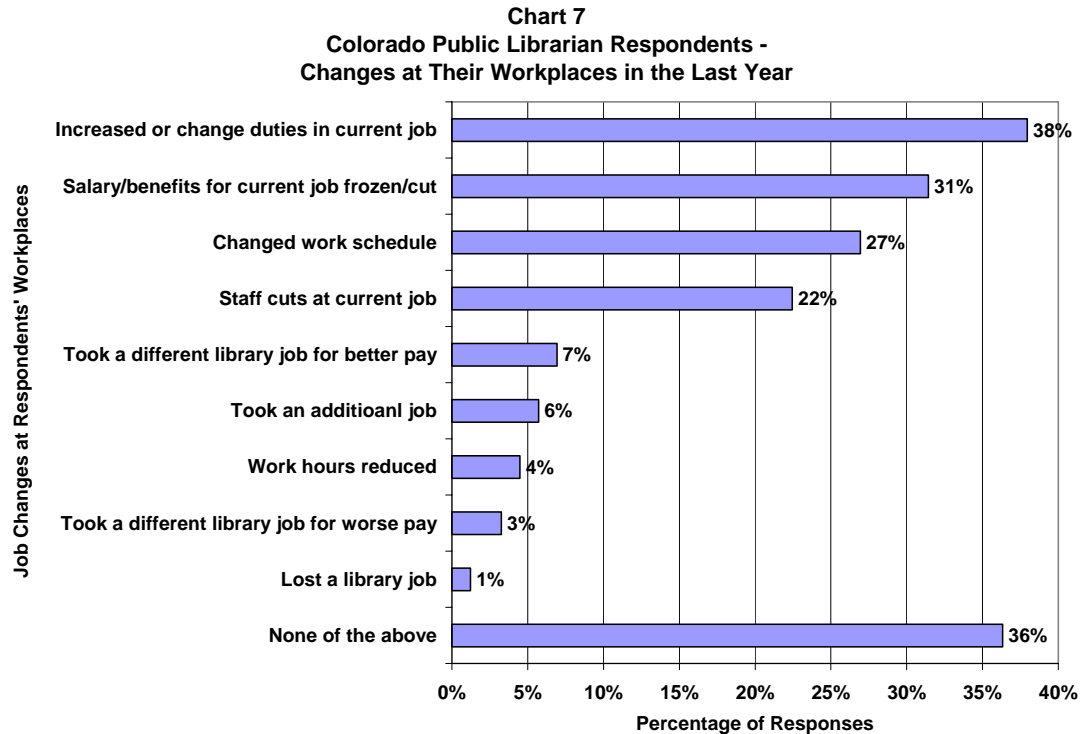
Table 1
Colorado Public Libraries
Affects of the Economic Downturn on Respondents' Career Plans

No change of plans	50%
Stay in current library job	39%
Retire later	14%
Seek another library job	7%
Retire earlier	4%
Leave the library field	3%
Retrain in different library specialty	2%
Return to school for non-library degree	2%
Return for MLS or media endorsement	2%

When asked about the changes in their workplaces in the last year, more than one-third of public librarians responding to the survey did not experience any of the changes listed. However, more than a third experienced an increase or change in duties at their current job (38%). Slightly fewer had their salary and/or benefits frozen or cut (31%). Around 1 in 4 had a change in their work



schedule (27%) and more than 1 in 5 experienced staff cuts at their job (22%). Presumably many of these changes can be attributed to economic pressures, however, some may be due to management decisions other than those related to financial considerations. (See Chart 7.)



By all accounts, librarianship is a graying profession and Colorado will undoubtedly feel the effects in the next 5 to 10 years. The average public librarian who responded to the 3Rs survey was over 45, had more than 10 years library work experience, and was active in her profession. She indicated she values the service to others aspect of librarianship and felt that potential librarians are discouraged by low pay and misconceptions about librarianship and librarians.

With 1 in 7 librarians planning to retire in the next five years and many more reaching retirement age in the next 10 -15 years, who will replace them? It seems clear that many future librarians may be found already working or volunteering in libraries and schools. It is also evident that better pay would motivate more potential librarians to pursue an MLS or equivalent degree. In addition, correcting the misconceptions about librarianship and librarian stereotypes would aid in the recruiting new librarians.

The complete report, *Retirement, Retention, and Recruitment: The Future of Librarianship in Colorado*, can be found at LRS.org.

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