

PUBLIC USE AND SUPPORT SKYROCKET WHEN NEW LIBRARIES ARE BUILT

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Most library directors and trustees probably believe the “Field of Dreams” dictum: “build it and they will come.” While there is little formal research on this issue, the impact of new facilities on the resources and services of most public libraries is so overwhelming that this assertion is regarded as a truism.

Seven single-outlet libraries built new facilities between 2000 and 2003. They include the Broomfield, Cortez (pictured, upper right), Englewood, and Wellington public libraries and the Estes Valley, San Miguel #1 (Telluride), and West Routt (Hayden, pictured lower right) library districts. To measure the change in resources and services associated with the opening of those new buildings, data for selected input and output measures were compiled for each library for the year before and the year after the reported year of completion for their new buildings. (In other words, if a library reported building a new facility in 2001, data for 2000 and 2002 were utilized.) For each library, the percentage change in each measure between the pre-building year and the post-building year was calculated. The resulting figures were compared with the average annual percent change in the same measures for all Colorado public libraries.



Local Operating Income

When new public libraries are built, increases in local tax support are imperative to cover increased costs of operation. Single-outlet libraries with new buildings received increases in excess of 25 percent from the year before to the year after opening a new building, compared with just over seven percent for all Colorado public libraries. Thus, these stand-alone libraries receive three and a half times as large proportional increases in local government funding as libraries statewide.

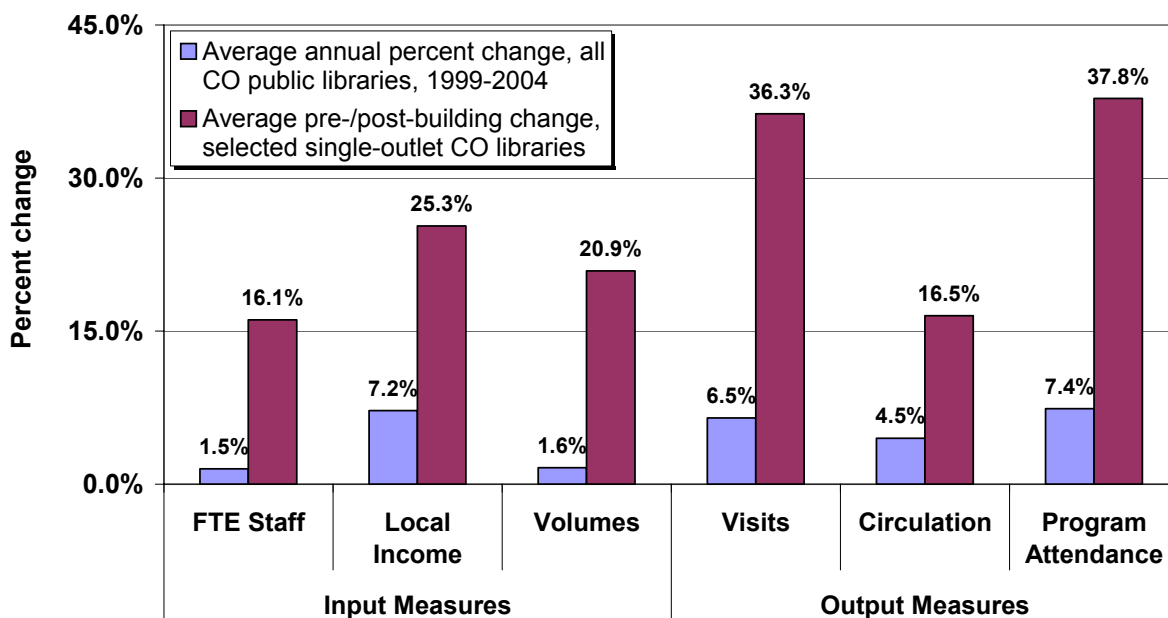


Staff and Volumes

When new public libraries are built, there is room for larger collections and additional staff are required to serve members of the public who wish to use the library's facilities and collections. On average, staff associated with single-outlet libraries with new buildings increased by more than 16 percent from the year before to the year after a new facility opened, compared with 1.5 percent for all Colorado public libraries.



Comparison of Selected Inputs & Outputs for State Norms with Single-Outlet Libraries with New Facilities, 1999-2004



That is a proportional increase in additional staffing of more than 10 times. Similarly, the number of print book and serial volumes found in these newly housed libraries rose by more than 25 percent from pre- to post-building years, compared with just over seven percent for all Colorado libraries. That is a proportional increase in print collections of 13 times.

Visits and Program Attendance

When new libraries are built, visits and attendance at library programs increase most dramatically of the three output measures examined. On average, both the number of visits and program attendance for single-outlet libraries increased by more than 35 percent (36 percent for visits, 38 percent for program attendance) from pre- to post-building years, compared to seven percent for both visits and program attendance for all Colorado libraries. Those are proportional increases in additional visitors and program attendees of six times and five times, respectively.



Circulation

When new libraries are built, more items are checked out. On average, total circulation for single-outlet libraries increased by 16.5 percent for pre- to post-building years, compared to 4.5 percent for all Colorado libraries. That is a proportional increase of almost four times.



While the statistical differences between all Colorado libraries and the small group of single-outlet public libraries that built new facilities between 2000 and 2003 are impressive, they should not be taken as indicative of the likely size of input and output increases that could be expected by any given library. Nonetheless, the size of these differences supports a more general claim that new facilities are likely to lead to substantial increases in the resource inputs and service outputs of public libraries.

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