

APPENDIX D

a report to the

Washington County Library System

Assessment of Current Library Environment
September 15, 2015
DRAFT



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Washington County Library System Strategic Plan – 2015 Assessment of Current Library Environment

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Executive Summary

This report was commissioned to examine and assess the current Washington County Library environment as part of the Washington County Library strategic planning process.

Methodology

This report relies on interviews, content analysis, ratio and benchmarking analysis as the core methods to reach findings and draw conclusions.

Key Findings

Washington County Library excels in several strategic areas. The Library is highly efficient. The staff, fulfilling County values, are extremely sound stewards of the resources entrusted to them by taxpayers. The Library has a strong commitment to the residents of Washington County and accomplishes its mission through a dedication to customer service.

Many resident surveys indicate strong satisfaction with services and resources provided by the Library. Lastly, the Library has made great progress in achieving its 2010 strategic plan. The priorities outlined in that plan were: engage young readers, provide entry to the online world, promote informed, knowledgeable users, and inspire curiosity.

Overall, Washington County Library ranks 5th on average compared to the other nine libraries reviewed in this report. In other words, Washington County Library is an average or good library. Washington County Library's average performance – as opposed to excellent or superior - is primarily the result of being under-resourced, both financially and in the availability of staff.

Two groups of libraries are used for comparison – nationwide peers per capita, and area members of Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA), excluding Hennepin County and City of Saint Paul. The investigation revealed that Washington County Library is funded at a rate of \$77,000 less than peer libraries and a rate of \$410,000 less than area

libraries. As a result, the Library's staffing level falls short of averages of peer and area libraries.

The funding and staffing levels lead Washington County Library to perform at below average levels in some benchmarking areas compared to peer and area libraries. Of note, the Library has the lowest cardholder penetration in the area, and ranks low in terms of programs, adult program attendance and visits compared to other libraries. However, the Library performs very well in terms of circulation and staff efficiency compared to the same libraries.

An examination of the Library through a SWOT analysis, as well as a mission, vision, values and strategic objectives inspection uncover a variety of issues. The analysis revealed some very positive strengths, however there is a lack of clarity around the mission and vision of the Library. These guiding documents are meant to inform decision making of Washington County Library. There are opportunities for improvement for the Library to explore in this arena.

SWOT Analysis

Anthony Molaro, a consultant with Library Strategies, interviewed selected staff and management of Washington County Library on June 11 and June 17, 2015. Each session lasted approximately 3.5 hours in length. Both groups were asked identical questions to gather information on the library's current mission, vision, values, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

<p style="text-align: center;">Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong stewardship of taxpayer dollars • Strong customer service focus 	<p style="text-align: center;">Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small staff size and high staff burnout • Lack of professional development and staff training opportunities • Lack of space • Communication challenges
<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify strategic partnerships • Expanding programming capacity • Improve outreach activities 	<p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Splintering off of city libraries and future implications for county services as a whole • Funding

Strengths

Strong stewardship of taxpayer dollars

The staff and management team highlighted their strong stewardship of the resources entrusted to them by the County. This is confirmed by efficiency ratios highlighted in the statistical comparison of the Library. This indicates that dollars invested in Washington County Libraries have a bigger return for the residents of Washington County than a similar investment in other library systems.

Strong customer service focus

The SWOT sessions uncovered a strong commitment and organizational focus on customer service. This is confirmed by residents' satisfaction as indicated in the 2013 *Washington County, Minnesota: Residential Survey* and the *Washington County Library 2014 Impact Survey Results*. Customer service seems to be enmeshed and engrained in the culture of the Library, and serves as its most important value.

Weaknesses

Small staff size and high staff burnout

Staff were unanimous in identifying staff shortages as the biggest weakness of Washington County Library. This is confirmed in the statistical comparative analysis. Using 2013 figures, Washington County Library staff per 1,000 residents is 20% less than metro libraries and 28% less than peer libraries. Current staffing levels hinder the nimbleness, flexibility and innovative ability of the Library. The strong commitment to service and passion for their work results in staff experiencing increased burnout.

As the library proceeds with the strategic planning process, talent acquisition, management and personnel development should be addressed as potential strategic priorities moving forward. To align Washington County Library with area libraries, although it would still fall below the average for peer libraries, the Library should have a staff size of .35 FTE per 1,000 residents, or 74.5 FTE staff based on recent population size.

Lack of professional development and staff training opportunities

Washington County Library does not have a systematic or strategic talent development process. Libraries, so heavily reliant on information technology, digital media and the Internet, evolve at lightening speeds. Staff feels they have no way to learn new skills or learn new tools to improve efficiency or improve services to the public. This is evident in the *Washington County Employee Engagement Survey* conducted in 2013.

Lack of space

The common library standard used for square feet resident is from the *Kentucky Public Library Standards* which indicates three levels of space recommendations per resident: essential is .6; enhanced is .8 and exemplary is 1 square foot per resident.¹ Washington County Library has its own benchmark set forward in its *Master Facility Plan* which calls for .45 minimum with aspirations of .6 square feet per resident. The Library currently has .41 square feet of space per resident, which falls short of the .6 square feet per resident standard and the .45 square feet Washington County benchmark.

The lack of space is more challenging in a County with high population growth. Washington County grew 27.5% between 2000 and 2010 and is projected to grow another 24% between 2010 and 2020. The lack of space in general, as well as insufficient updates, presents challenges for current and future library services. For example, most of the Library facilities do not have space dedicated to teens nor classroom space to help foster a more informed and digitally savvy citizenry.

Communication

Staff and management discussed communication as a major issue for the library both internally and externally. The *Washington County Employee Engagement Survey* conducted in 2013 confirms this. Staff feel that they have no avenue to express ideas, provide cost saving suggestions, or improve services. Moreover, the issue of communication is more prevalent between the Library and the County. Staff and management often felt that communication between units (north, central, south) were especially challenging.

Opportunities

Identify strategic partnerships

Strategic partnerships should support the Library's mission and strategic goals as well as County-wide strategic objectives. Strong partnerships are necessary for a successful library to achieve its mission. Washington County Library does not have a systematic approach to identifying and forming partnerships within the County. There are partnerships, but they vary by branch and organization.

¹ Kentucky Public Library Association and Kentucky Department of Libraries and Archives. (2006). *Kentucky Public Library Standards: Direction and Service for the 21st Century*. 2nd Edition.

Expanding programming capacity

The time to view the library as primarily a distribution point for books is long past. Programming allows the Library to attract new users, educate the community, and foster a sense of community. Washington County Library does not allocate any resources for programming outside of Legacy dollars. Nor does Washington County Library have the staff or space to support a robust programming agenda. Focusing energy on programming and programming capacity will help Washington County be a great place to live, work and play. Libraries typically spend 1% of their levy budget on programming, which for the Washington County Library would mean allocating \$70,000 more to programming.

Improve outreach activities

Outreach differs dramatically from partnerships and programs. Outreach activities are designed to foster relationships with residents outside of library facilities. Outreach activities include things like delivering books, programs and services to area senior centers. Bookmobiles and at-home services are also examples of outreach activities. Outreach activities are designed to improve the lives of residents, particularly residents who have difficulty coming into a physical location. Washington County Library has not strategically or systematically engaged in outreach activities.

Threats

Splintering off of city libraries and future implications for county services

Washington County Library has the most complex organization of metro libraries. No other county in the metro area has as many city-operated libraries as Washington County. This threatens the efficiencies, economies of scale, and services for residents that a more fully coordinated system can provide.

Funding

Washington County Library has low funding levels compared to both area and peer libraries. This low funding level hinders the Library's ability to offer effective services to area residents. Low funding levels have resulted in fewer hours of operation, which have implications for typical library metrics (gate count, circulation, etc...). Washington County Library is unique to both peer and area libraries in paying a rent to the County for facilities. A rent is when the County charges a Library for the space it occupies. This may include utilities, maintenance, or a fee for space. This artificially decreases the purchasing power of Washington County Library compared to other libraries examined because of resources they devote to rental fees. Moreover, this rent makes an apple-to-apple comparison difficult.

Assessment of Mission/Vision/Strategic Priorities

Mission

The mission of the Washington County Library is to enrich both the individual and the community by assisting people in their search for information, ideas, education and recreation. Mission statements are of fundamental importance to ensure an organization stays on track. When asked, neither the staff nor the management team could state or paraphrase the current mission of the Library.

Hennepin County Library uses its mission statement (nourish minds, transform lives, and build community together) to evaluate public programs and services. Washington County Library should consider adopting a similar evaluation metric, and to make other attempts to internalize the Library's mission into day-to-day operations.

Vision

It appears that the Library has adopted the County's vision statement as its own. That vision statement is *Washington County – a great place to live, to work and play – today and tomorrow!* While it is advisable that the Library's vision support the County's stated vision statement, the Library should adopt a vision statement of its own focused specifically on how the Library achieves community goals.

Both Andy Stanley and Bill Hybels have argued that vision “leaks”, meaning that employees forget the vision communicated to them within a few weeks of hearing it. Vision needs to be communicated frequently, and in multiple modes. Washington County Library should communicate its vision through all formal communications to the public and staff, including newsletters, on the website, at every meeting, and on promotional materials.

Tagline

The Library's slogan or tagline is *Read, Learn, Enjoy*. Some of the management team could identify the Library's tagline extemporaneously. However, taglines are generally more memorable and experience oriented than the Library's current tagline. For example, the *Happiest Place on Earth, Just Do It, Think Different, I'm Loving It, Can You Hear Me Now* are examples of memorable and experience oriented taglines. Most of the above taglines evoke the brand, company or feelings associated with the tagline.

Strategic Priorities

When asked, leadership could loosely identify some of the strategic priorities of Washington County Library. The current strategic priorities are: Engage young readers; Provide entry to the online world, Promote informed, knowledgeable users, and Inspire Curiosity. Mission, vision, and strategic planning are meant to underlay guiding documents and philosophy to inform the Library's decision-making process. Neither management nor staff have internalized most of these documents.

Statistical Comparisons

Below is a statistical comparison of Washington County Library to area libraries and peer libraries using 2013 data, as it is the most current data available on all libraries. After an extensive search, the following county libraries were selected as peers based on demographics (median income, ethnicity, poverty level, etc.), population, budget, and collection:

- Forsyth County, GA;
- Jackson County, OR;
- Mohave County, AZ; and
- St. Johns County, FL.

The management team of Washington County Library approved the peer comparisons libraries. The peer libraries used in this report differ from what the library has used for comparisons in the past, primarily identified for comparisons based on collections budgets. The peer libraries chosen for this report reflect an overall operations comparison. Each of the peer libraries is served by a regional or state library organization that facilitates resource sharing and joint purchasing. Note that none of the peer libraries have associate libraries.

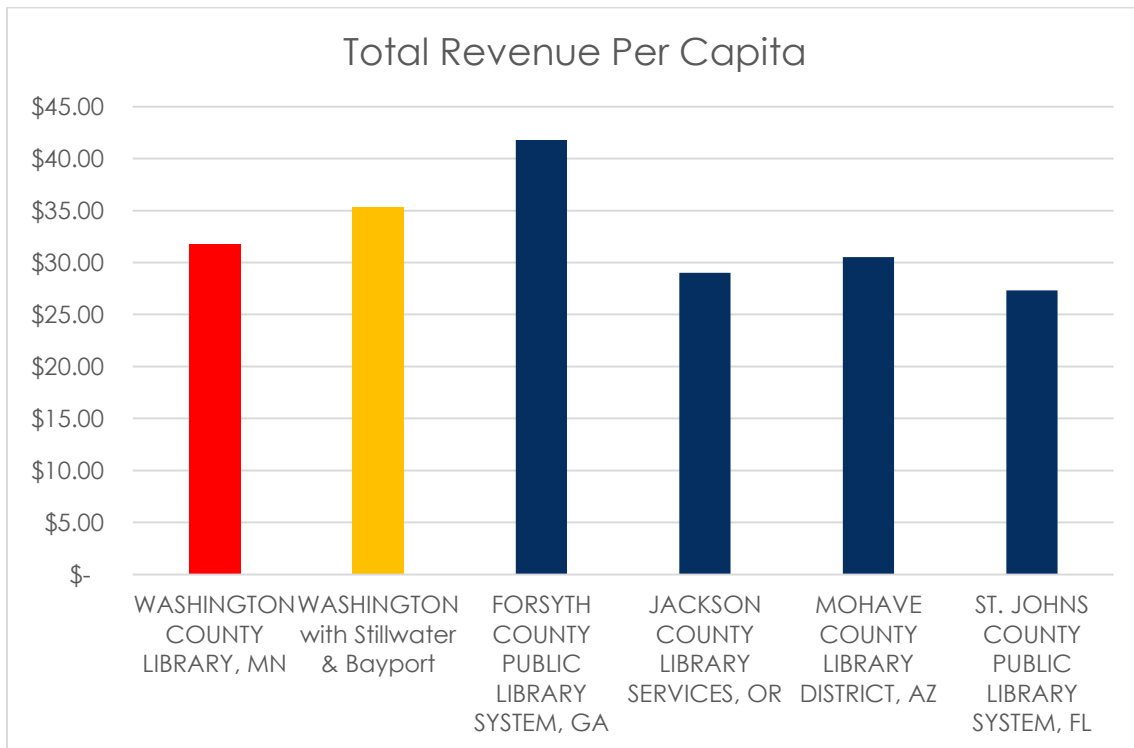
This associate library phenomenon is unique to Minnesota and particularly MELSA. Minnesota has 12 regional library systems. There are two types of regional library systems. The first type is a consolidated system. A consolidated system operates as a single library and typically spans multiple counties. There are six consolidated systems within Minnesota. A federated system, on the other hand, operates differently. Instead of actually running the libraries, a federated system basically offers support to the member libraries. MELSA is an example of a federated system. There are six federated library systems in Minnesota. The vast majority of members in the other five federated systems are city public libraries. As a result, they do not have associate members.

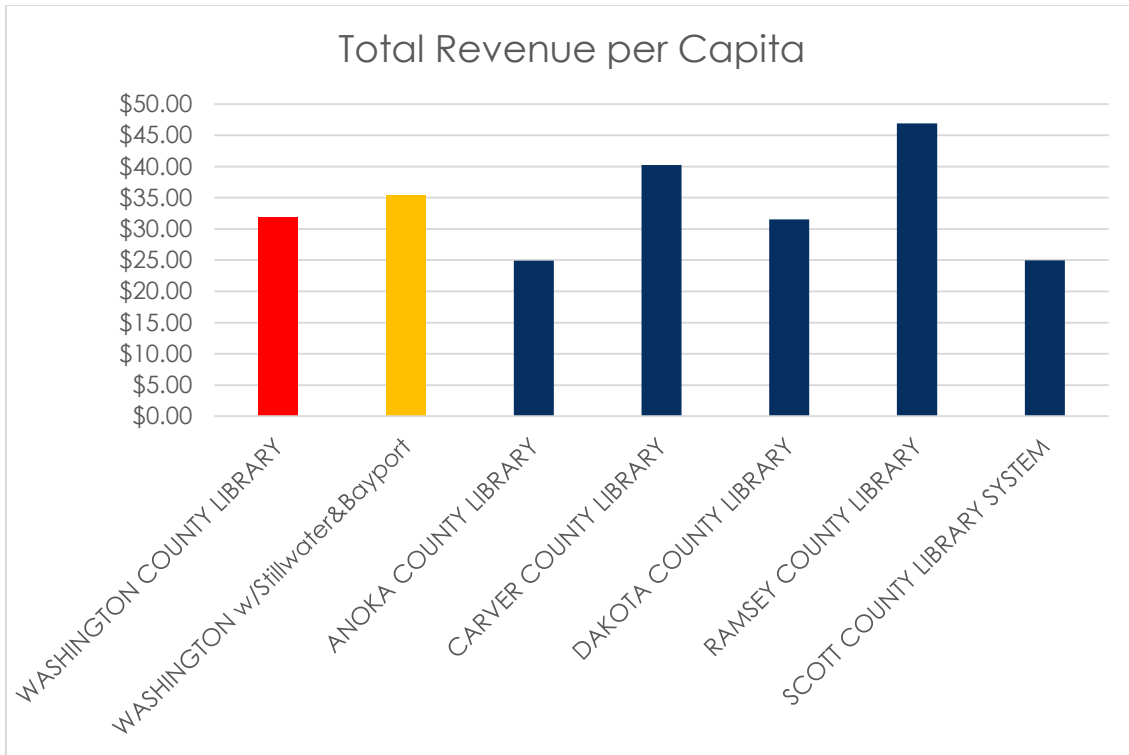
For MELSA comparison area libraries, five county libraries are included: Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Ramsey, and Scott. Both St. Paul and Hennepin County are excluded as their size, and more intense urban populations, makes comparisons relatively useless.

Comparisons between Washington County Library and other libraries reflect data without Stillwater, Bayport or Lake Elmo. Washington County Library has been reporting the Law Library in its statistics to the State Library Services, but it is such a small library it has a negligible impact on the data. Unless otherwise indicated, the data contained herein is compiled from the *Public Libraries in the United State Survey* gathered annually by the federal agency, Institute of Museum and Library Services using 2013 data.

Revenue

Washington County Library revenue is \$31.80 per capita, which is below the average \$32.16 of peer libraries and is \$1.92 short of the \$33.72 metro average. This level of investment negatively impacts many of the metrics, such as circulation and number of library visits, used to evaluate the Washington County Library. Cost of living differences impact the per capita revenue and expenses of the library.



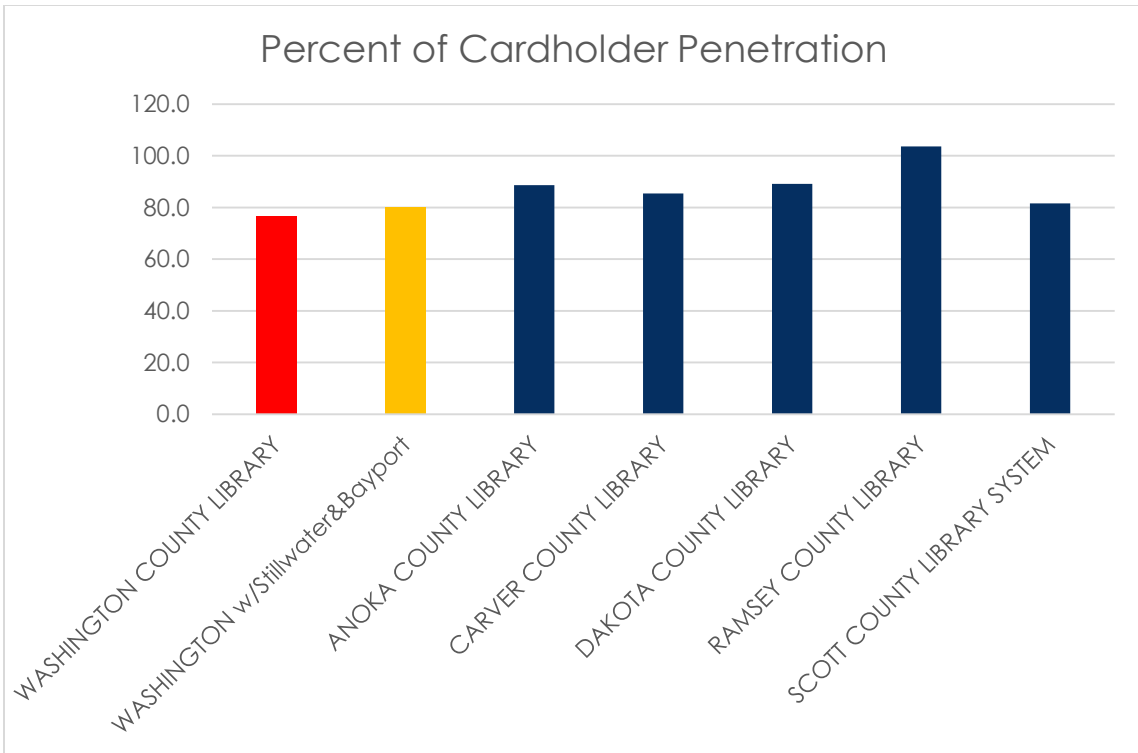


Basic Library Usage

Cardholder penetration

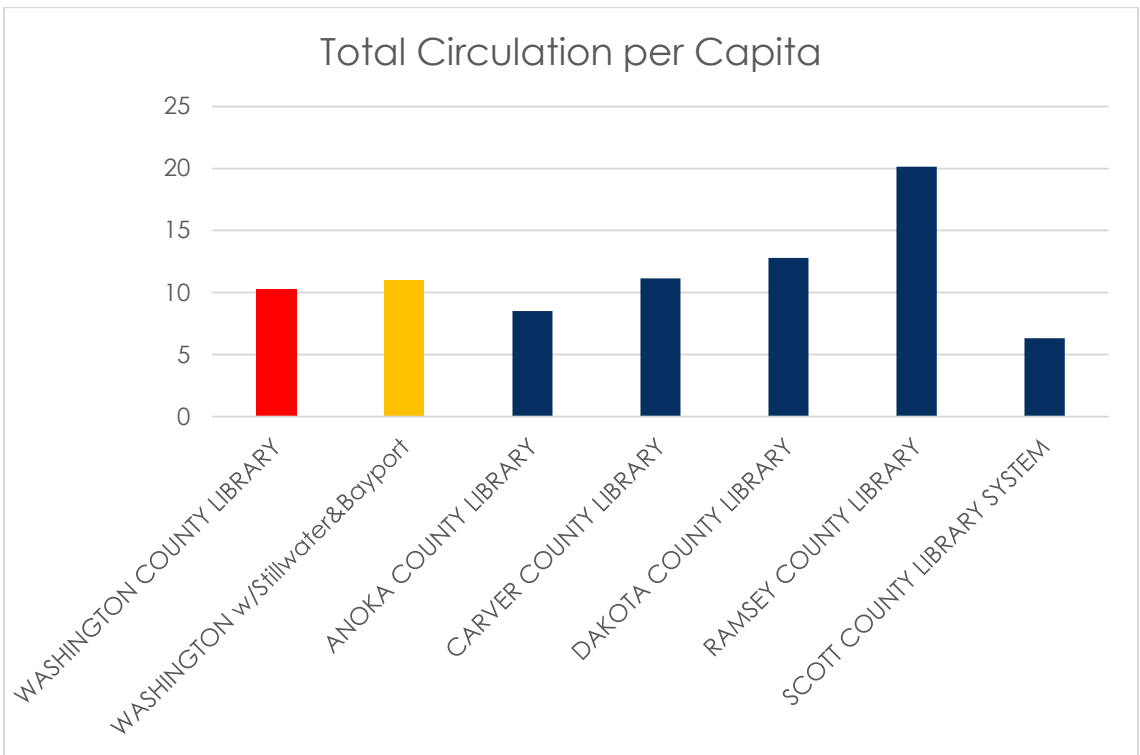
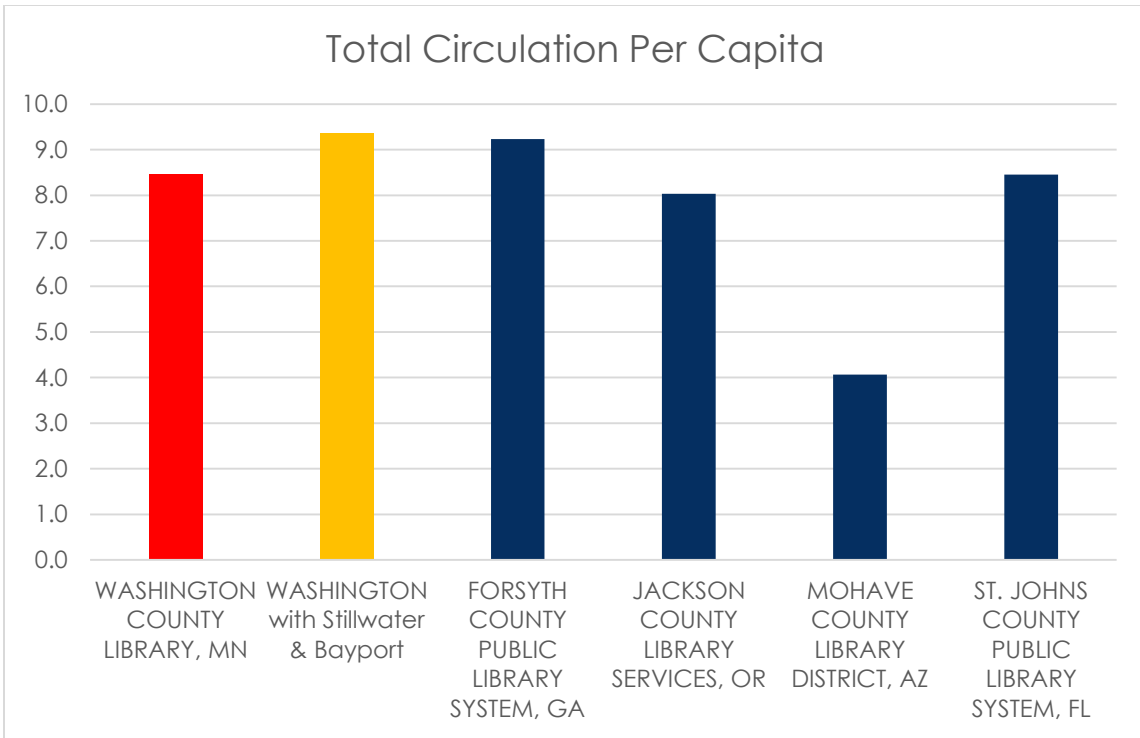
Cardholder penetration measures the percentage of library cardholders compared to the population of the library's area. In other words, $\text{cardholder penetration} = \frac{\text{active cards}}{\text{population}}$ as reported to the State Library Services, Minnesota Department of Education. In some cases libraries exceed 100% because of the high number of cards issued to residents of other counties. Cardholder penetration can only be measured against metro libraries because the data is not required to be made public. Washington County Library has the lowest cardholder penetration of area libraries.²

² While library cardholder penetration is an often used library metric, some libraries do not keep best practices for patron data cleanup. As a result, some libraries have over exaggerated cardholder penetration.



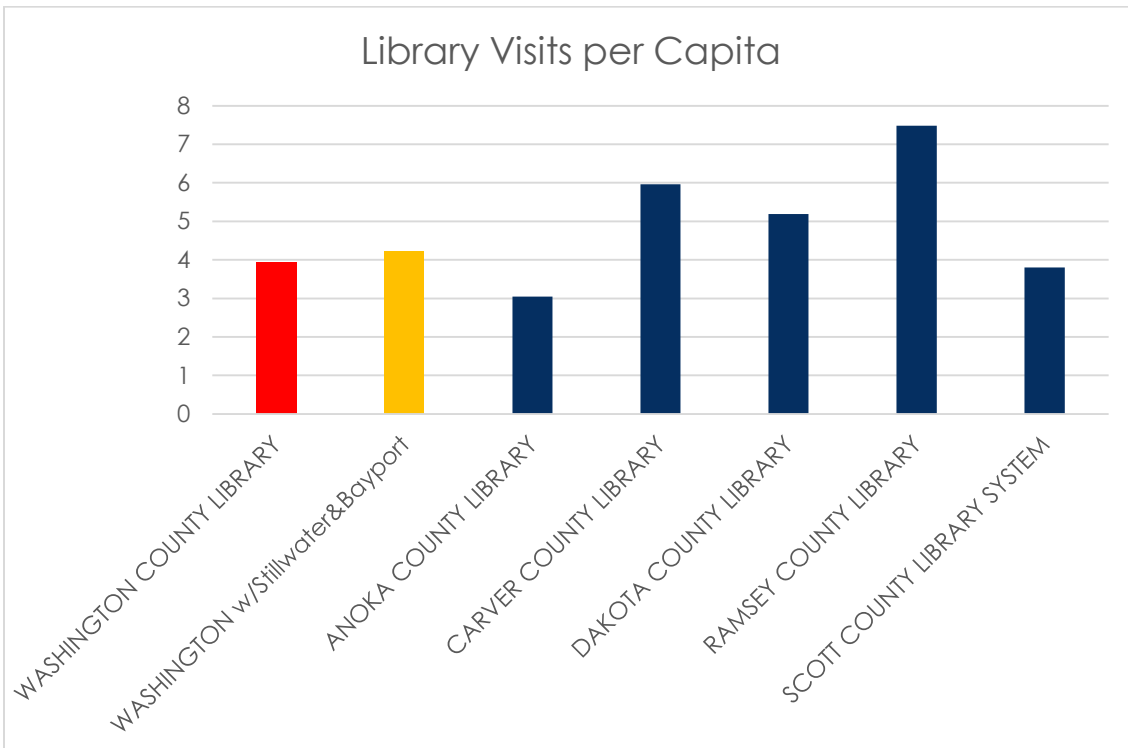
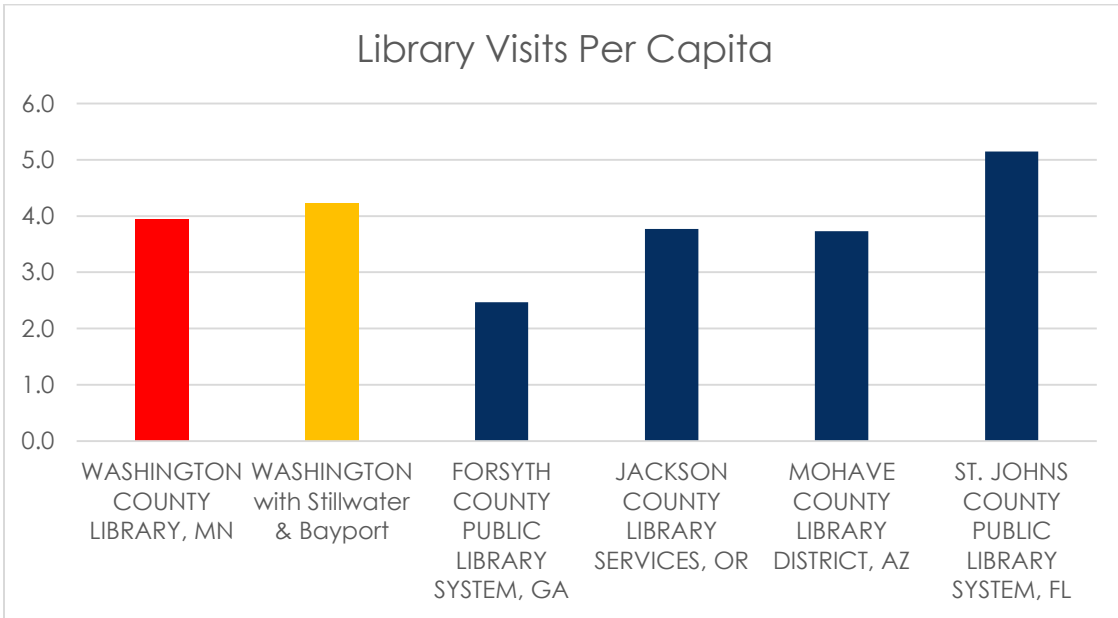
Circulation

Circulation measures the number of items checked out at a public library. In order to measure across libraries, libraries routinely use circulation per capita as a benchmark. Washington County Library outperforms peer libraries in terms of circulation and is in the middle of the pack for area libraries.



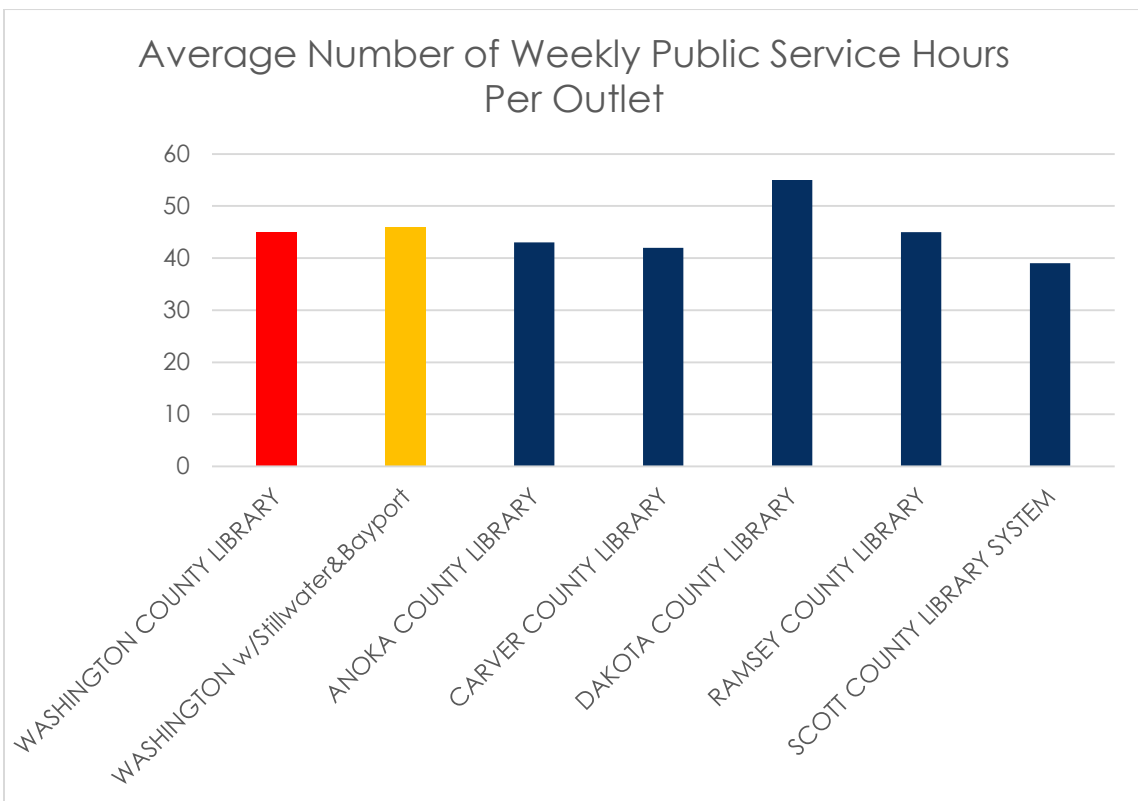
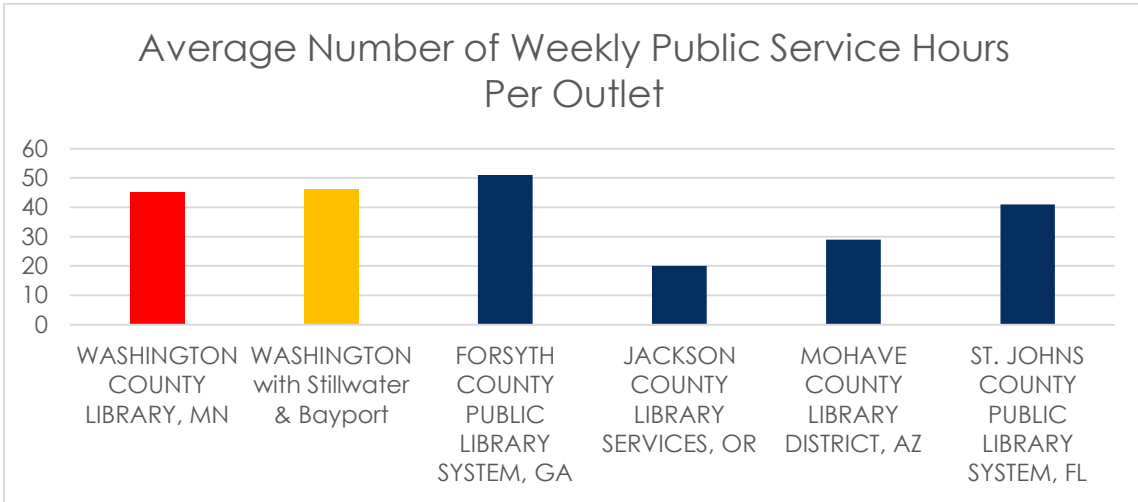
Library Visits (Gate Count)

Library visits, sometimes referred to as gate count, measures the foot traffic of a library. As with other metrics, we use a per capita basis to allow for comparison across libraries. Washington County Library exceeds the average foot traffic compared to peer libraries but is shy of the 5.0 visits average of metro libraries. This may be impacted by average hours the library is open.



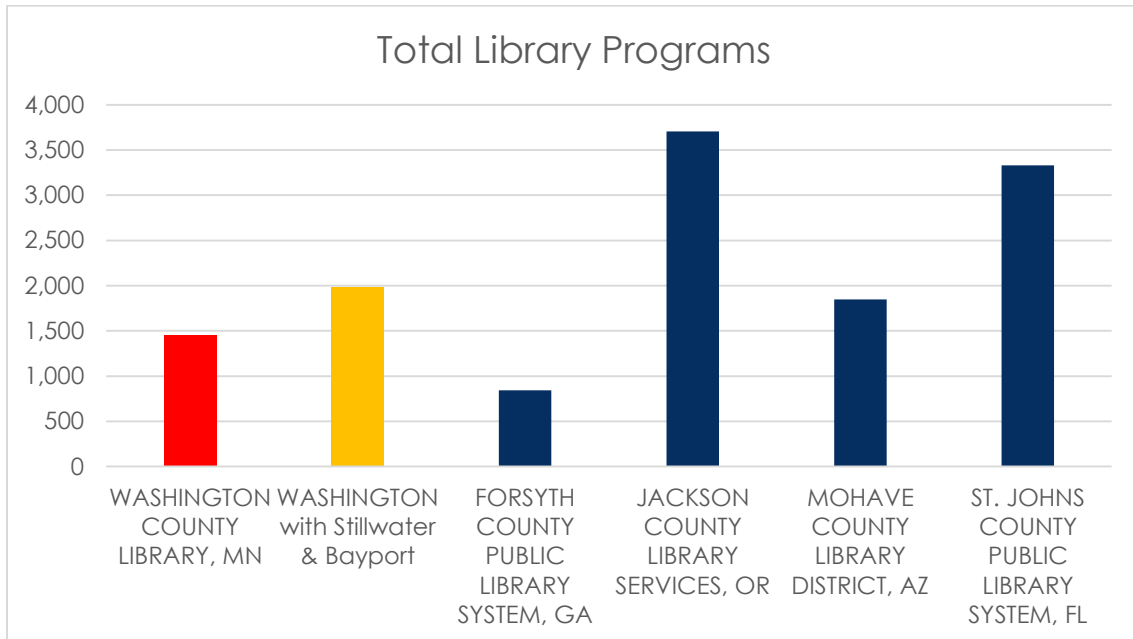
Hours

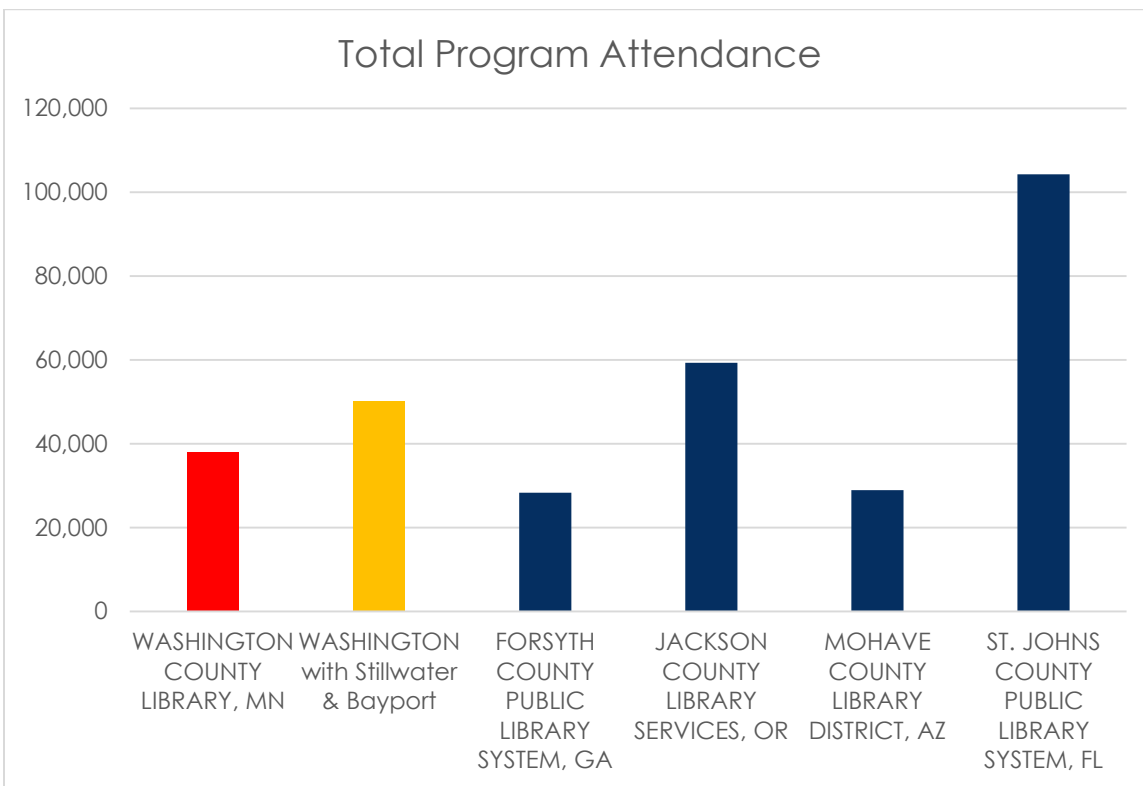
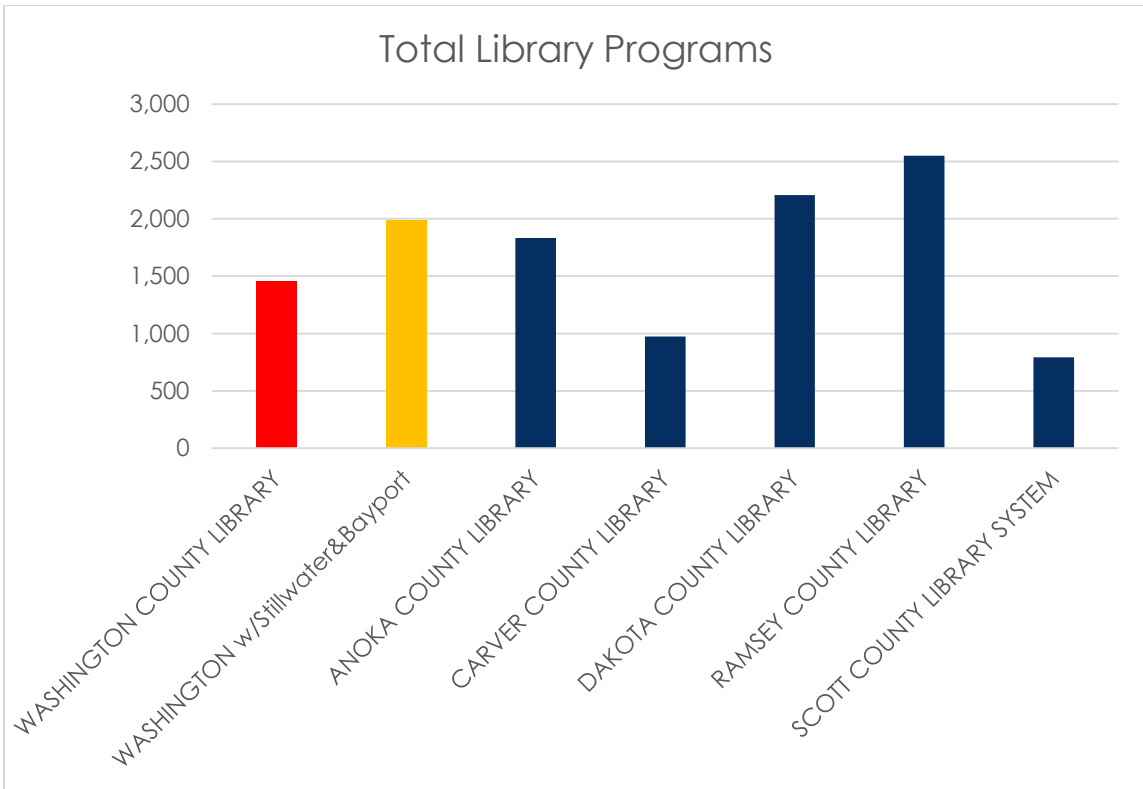
The average number of hours that a library branch is open per week strongly impacts library staffing and expenses. As you can see in the graphs below, average library hours vary greatly by library. One reason for this is the number of branch locations. While Jackson County has many less hours per week, on average, per location, they have 15 locations, almost three times the number of locations as Washington County Library.

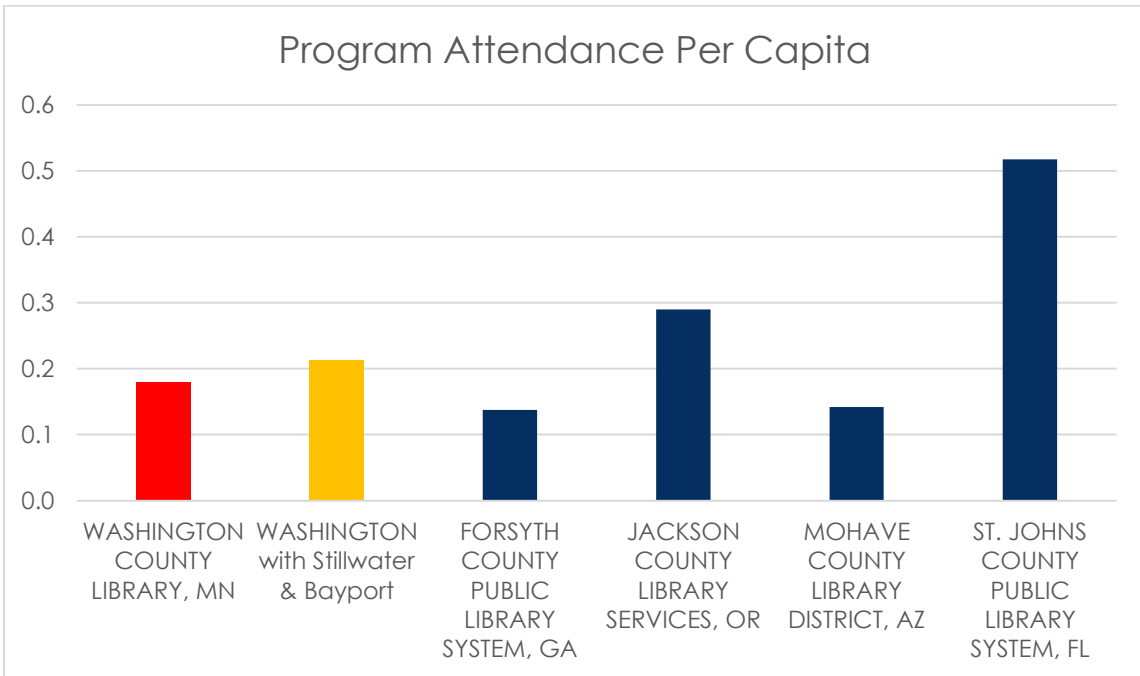
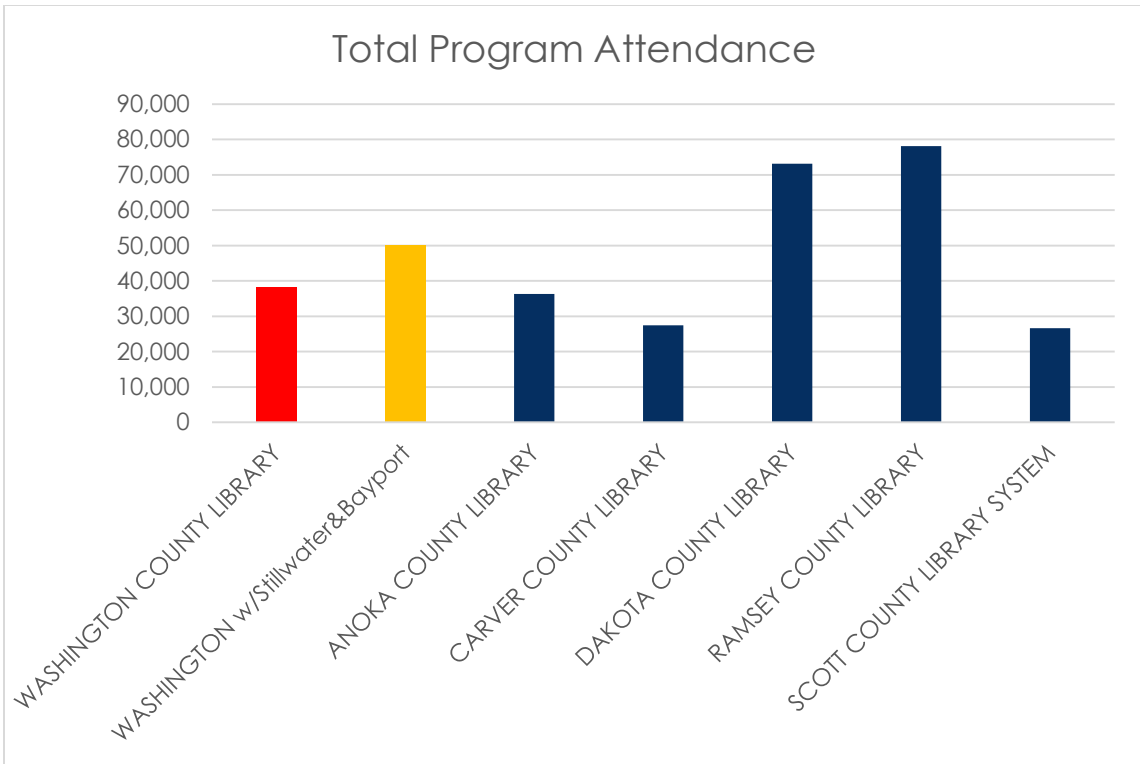


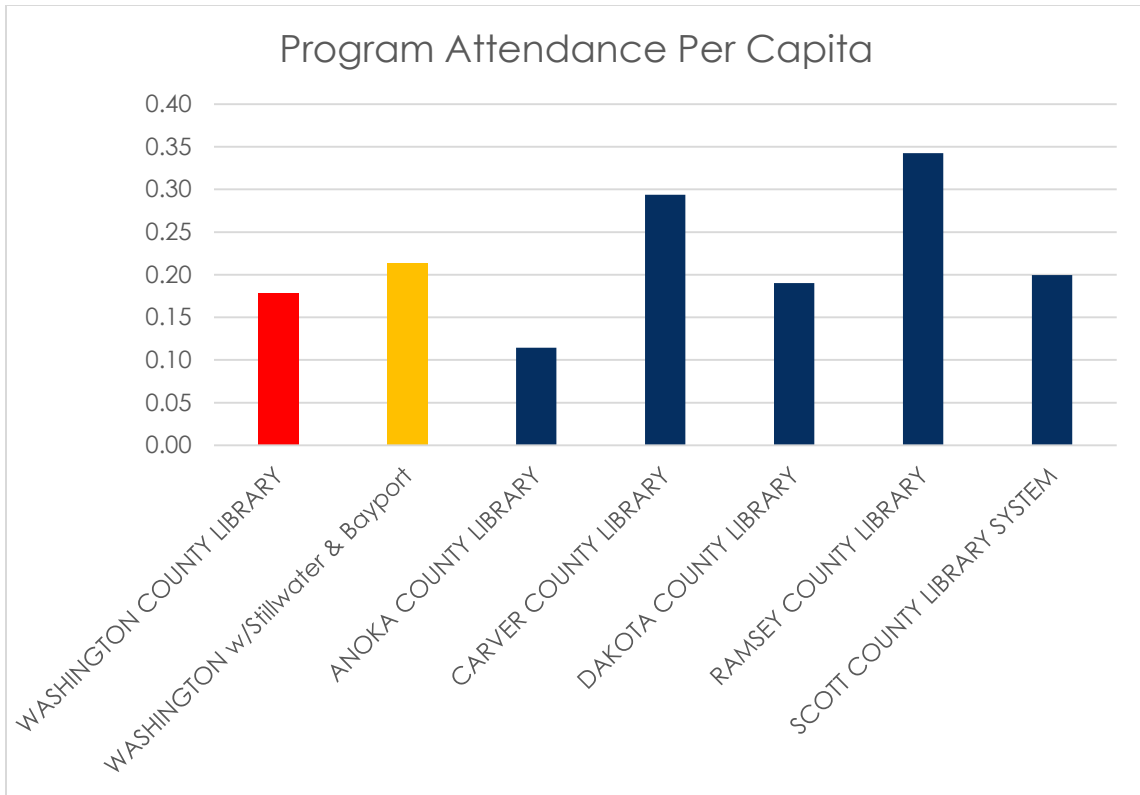
Programs

Today, library programs serve as the heart of a library's operation. In regard to programming, Washington County Library is in the middle of the pack compared to peer and area libraries. This is especially true of adult programs. In fact, 85% of program attendance at Washington County Library is attendance at children's events. The average of peer libraries is 68%. Looking at benchmark libraries, Washington County Library does not offer a comparable number and variety of programs for adults.









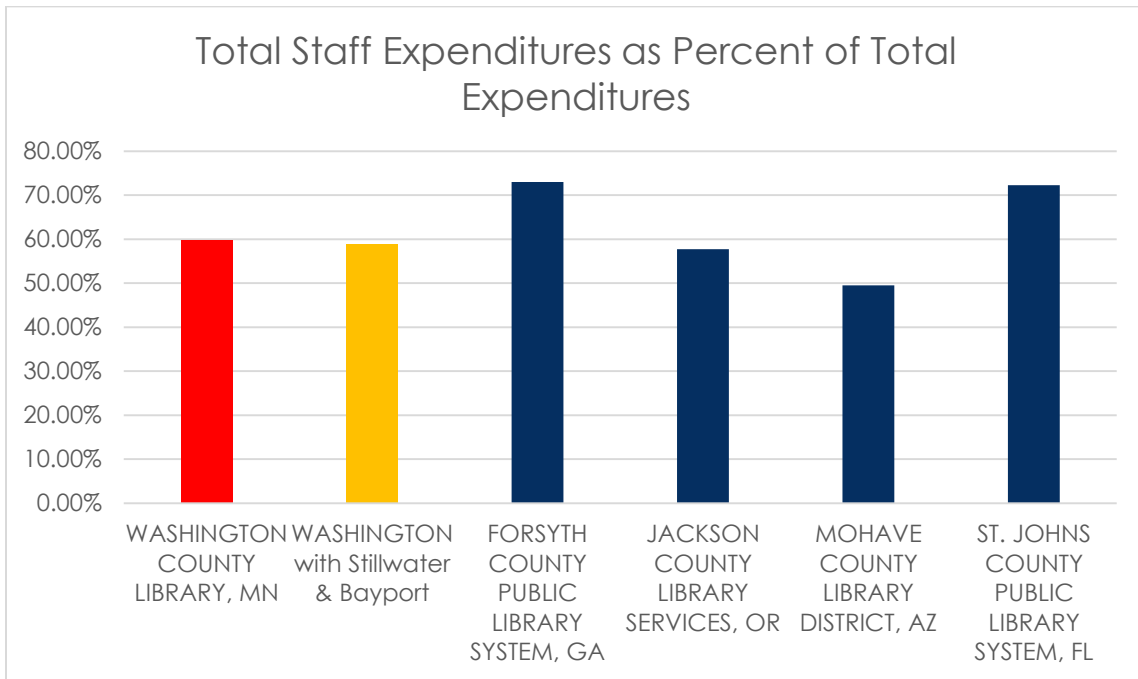
Basic Library Usage Rankings

Libraries are ranked nationally according to four metrics, circulation per capita, visits per capita, program attendance per capita, and public computer usage. *Library Journal*, the only current organization ranking American libraries, uses these four metrics to award 5-star, 4-star, and 3-star status to libraries that exceed baselines for all four categories. While average in comparison to many peer library systems, in order for Washington County Library to achieve 3-star level, it will need to double circulation, improve library visits 2.5-fold, and increase program attendance more than 4-fold.

Staffing

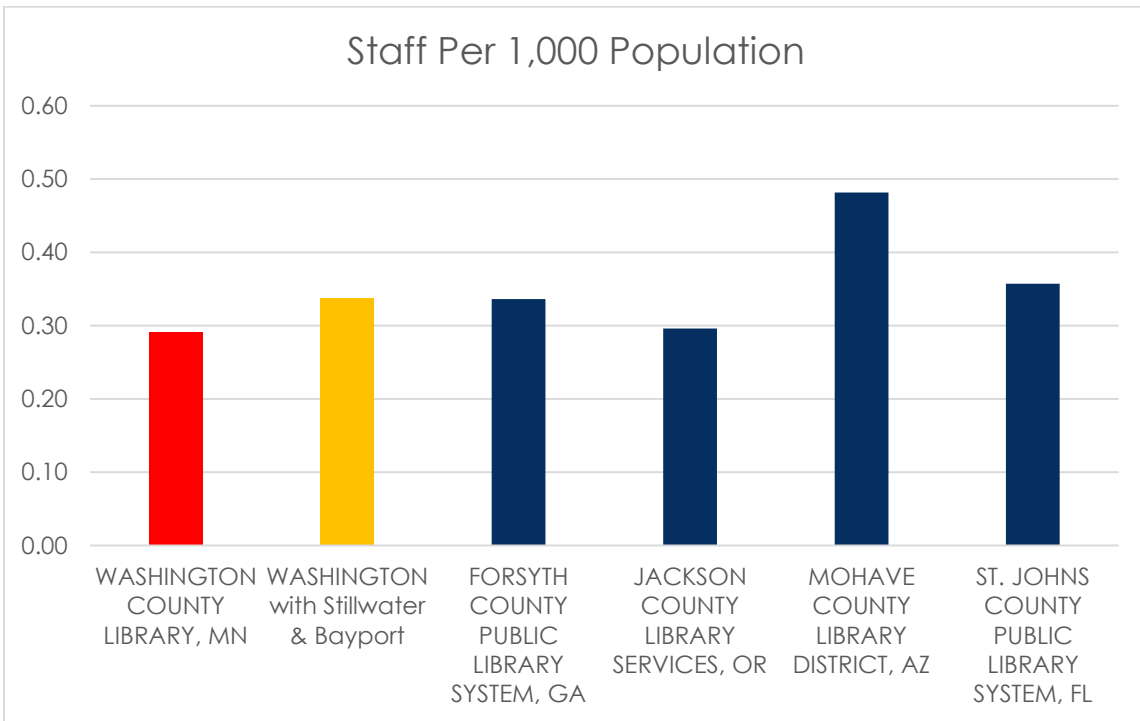
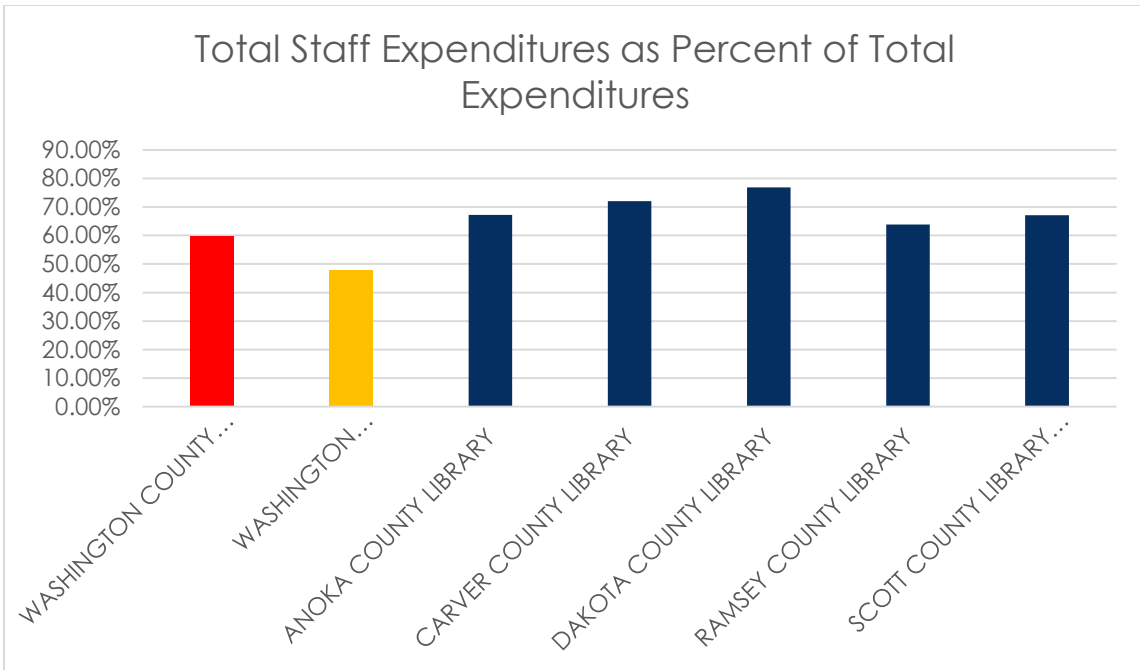
As mentioned in the SWOT analysis, Washington County Library has a staff shortage compared to peer and area libraries. As the staff figures below suggest, Washington County Library spends the smallest percentage of total expenditures on staffing of the area libraries and is in the middle compared to peer libraries. The Library is the lowest in its peer group and low compared to area libraries in terms of the number of staff per 1,000 residents.

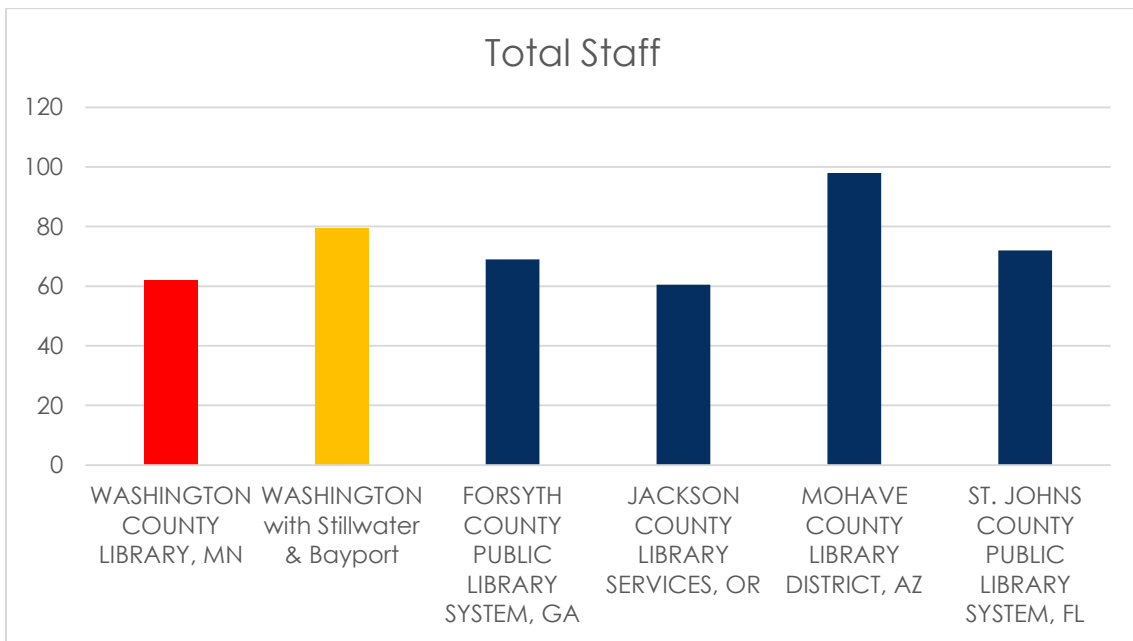
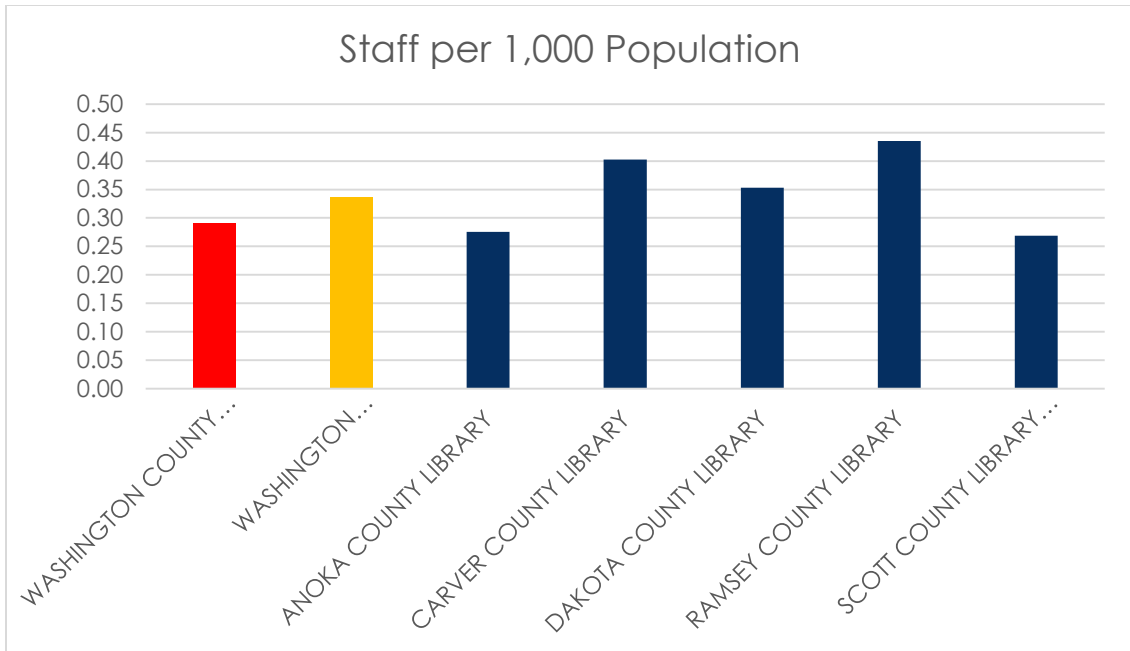
The benchmark for public libraries for percentage of budget devoted to staffing is between 60-65%³. To meet this standard, Washington County Library would have a staff size of .35 FTE per 1,000 residents or 74.5 FTE staff based on recent population size to remain competitive to area and peer libraries. *Minnesota Library Standards* defer to the *Illinois Library Standards* and provide guidance for 60 staff plus .25 per 1,000 for minimum, .5 per 1,000 for growing, .75 per 1,000 for established or 1.0 per 1,000 for advanced.⁴ To meet the minimum standard of 60 plus .25 staff per 1,000 would translate to a staff size for Washington County Library of 113.25 FTE.

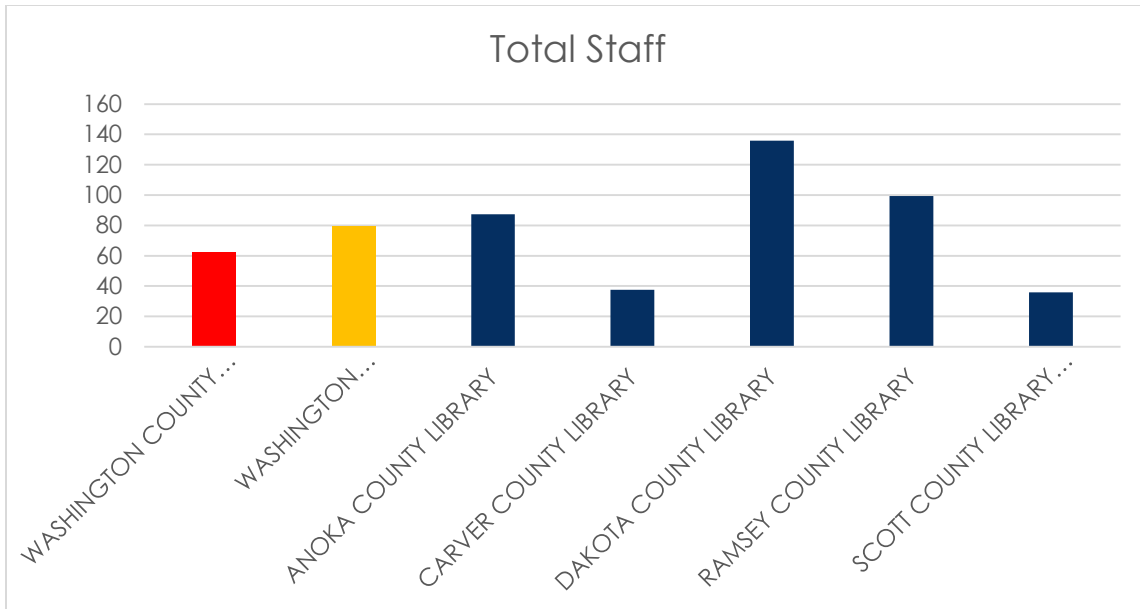


³ State Library of Kansas. (2012). *2012 Standards for Kansas Public Libraries*.

⁴ Library Development and Services: Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning. (1996). *Standards for Minnesota Public Libraries: Essential, Enhanced, And Excellent*. & Illinois Library Association. (2014). *Serving Our Public 3.0: Standards for Illinois Public Libraries*







Collections

Library collections make up the second largest percentage of most library budgets; staffing being the largest. The recommended percentage of a library budget devoted to collections is between 11% and 12%⁵. Washington County Library exceeds this benchmark by between .25 and 1.25%.

Below you will see the *Library Journal* study of materials purchased by libraries for 2014.

⁵ Library Development and Services: Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning. (1996). *Standards for Minnesota Public Libraries: Essential, Enhanced, And Excellent*. & Illinois Library Association. (2014). *Serving Our Public 3.0: Standards for Illinois Public Libraries*.

MATERIALS	2008 %	2009 %	2010 %	2011 %	2012 %	2013 %	2014 %
PRINT BOOKS	66.5	64.9	63.8	61.6	58.8	59.5	59.2
MEDIA*	18.2	19.7	19.8	20.4	24	23.1	24.4
DVDs / Blu-ray titles	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	11.7**	11.7	12.1
Downloadable movies	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.6	0.3
Audiobooks	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	9.0**	8.0**	7.4
Downloadable audio	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2.4
Music CDs / Downloadable music	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	3.3**	2.8**	2.2**
EBOOKS	n/a	1.2	2.6	3.7	6.2	6.8	7.1
ELECTRONIC PRODUCTS (including reference)	10.1	8.9	7.9	9	7.3	6.6	6.1
OTHER	5.2	5.3	5.9	5.3	3.7	4	3.2

*Netted media (audiobooks, DVDs, downloadable movies & music CDs)

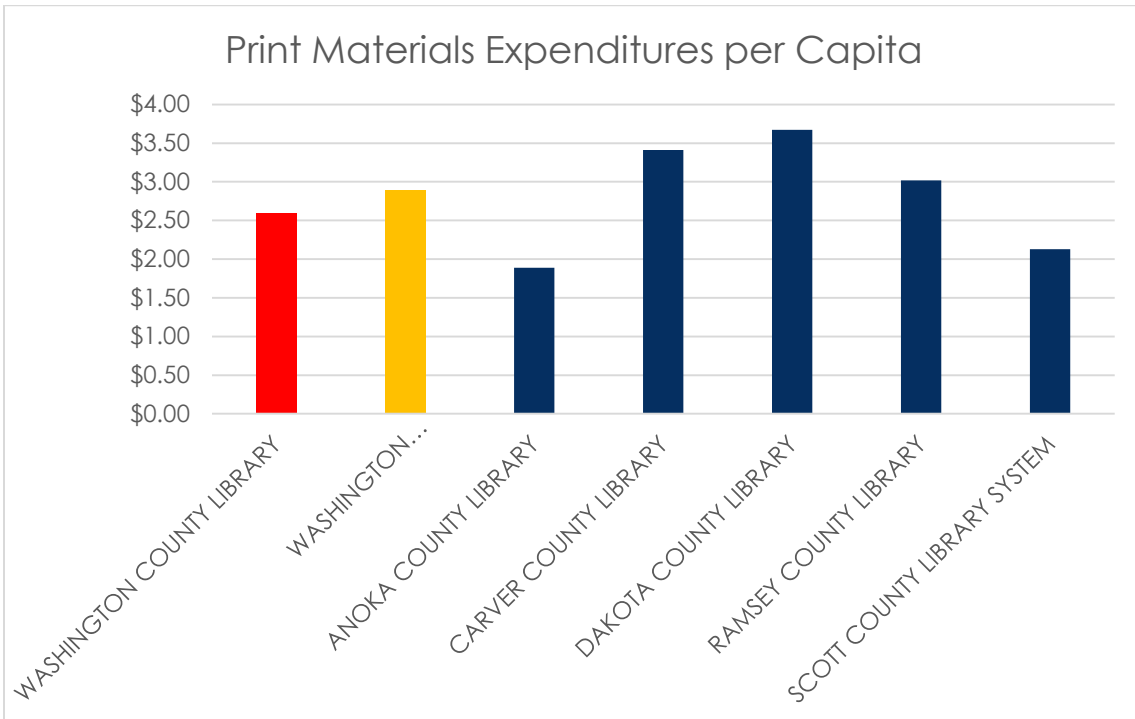
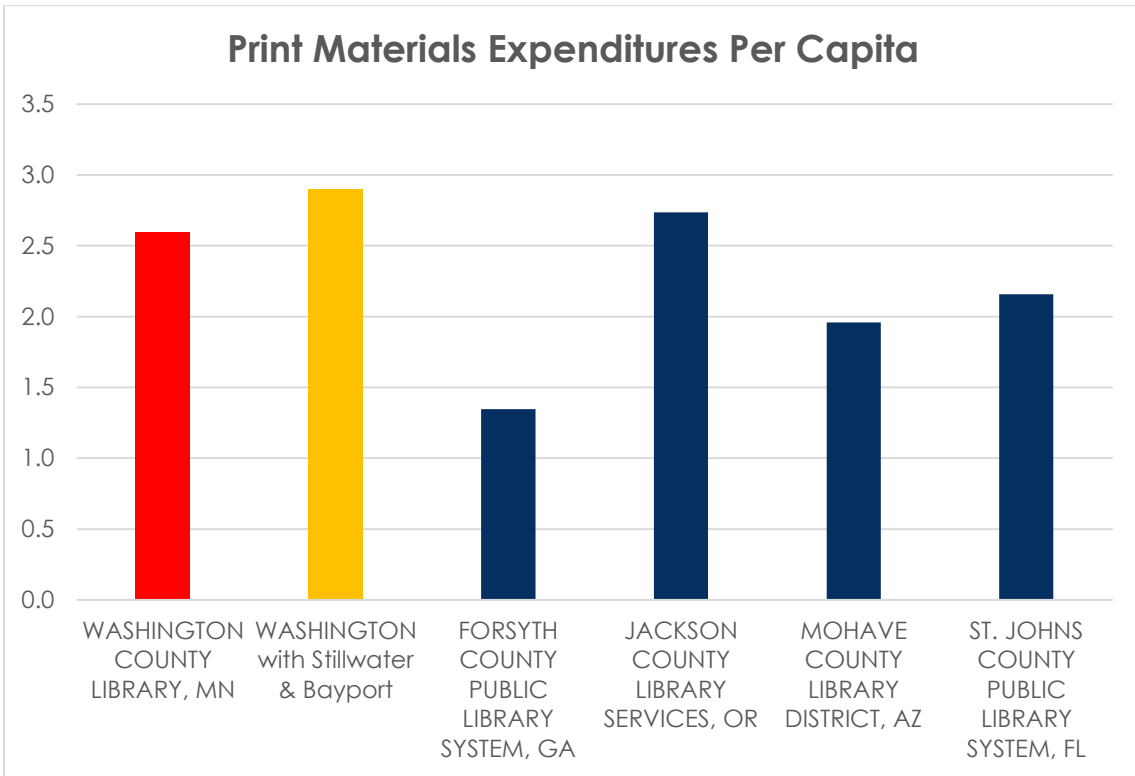
**Physical and downloadable counted together.

SOURCE: LJ materials Survey 2015

Print Materials

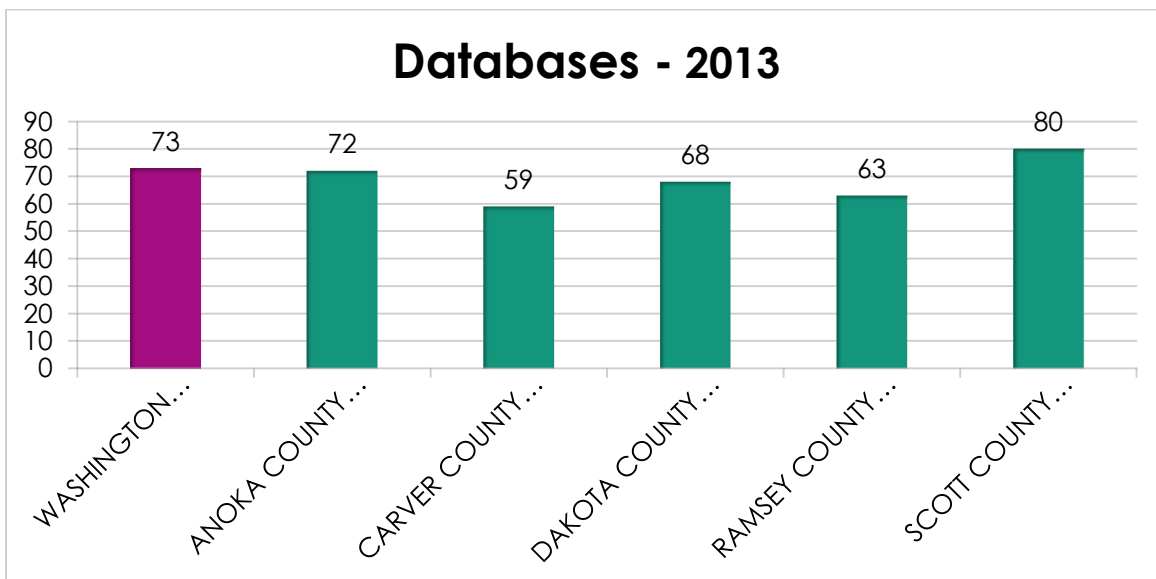
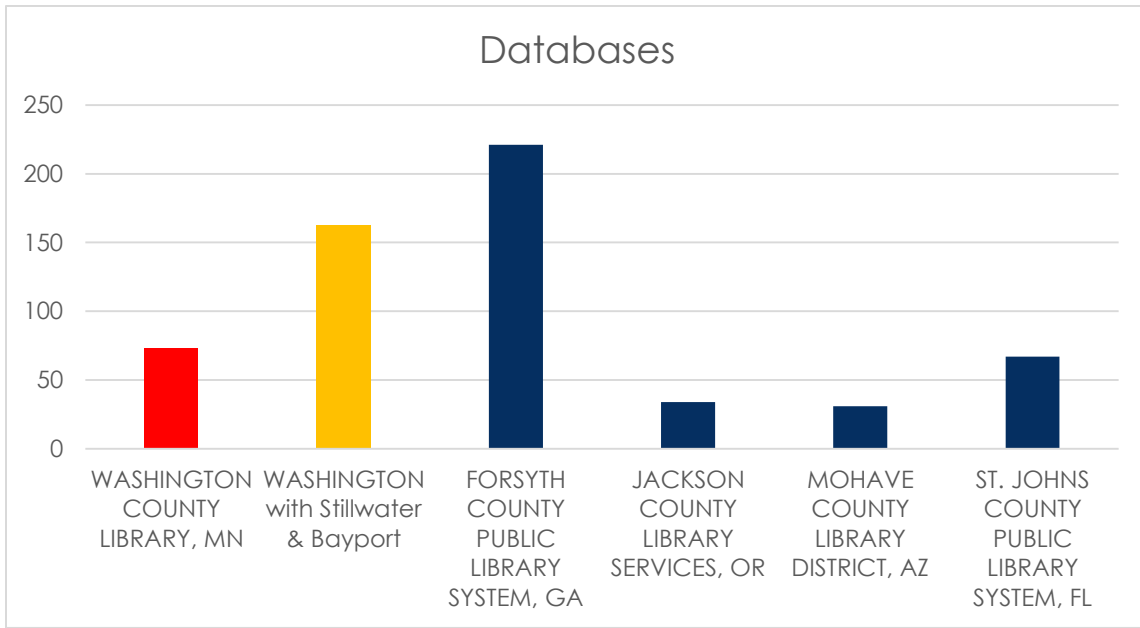
The print materials line represents the money invested in physical books. Washington County Library exceeds the average of peer libraries but is under the area libraries average. As will be noted below, Washington County Library spends less money on electronic materials than both peer and area libraries. Washington County Library spends \$2.60 per person on physical items. The national average, according to *Library Journal's* Materials Breakdown study, for libraries of Washington County's size is to devote 53% of total collections to print materials.⁶ The overall budget for collections is low considering the educational needs of the county and a growing educated workforce.

⁶ Hoffert, B. (2015). Materials Breakout | Materials Survey 2015. *Library Journal*.



Databases

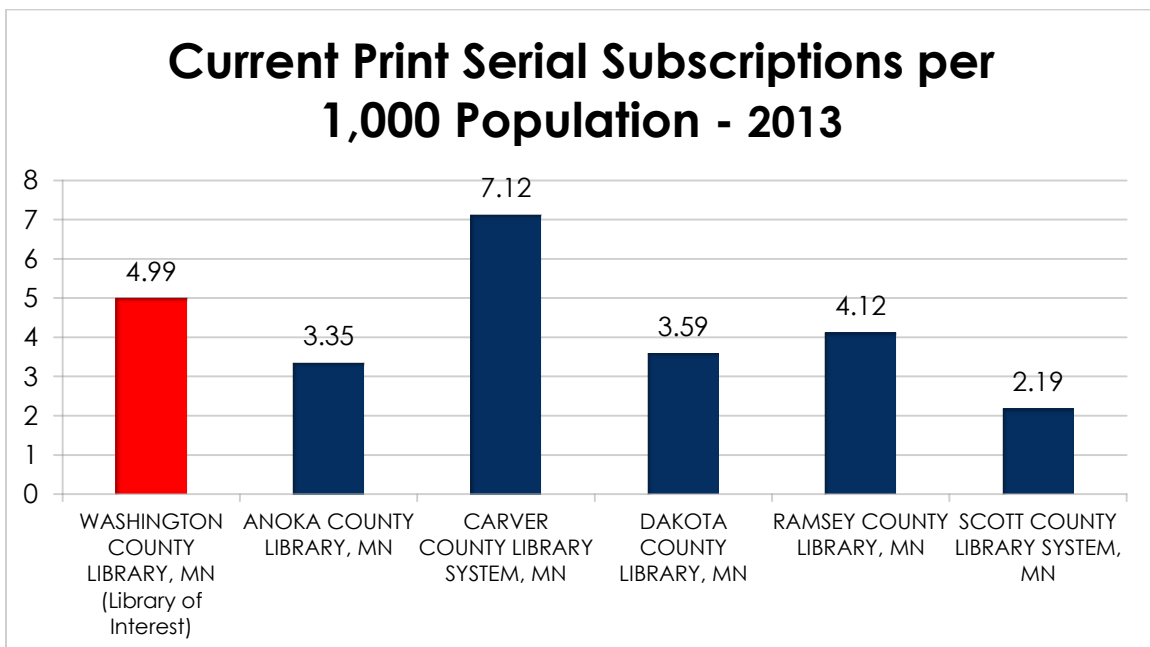
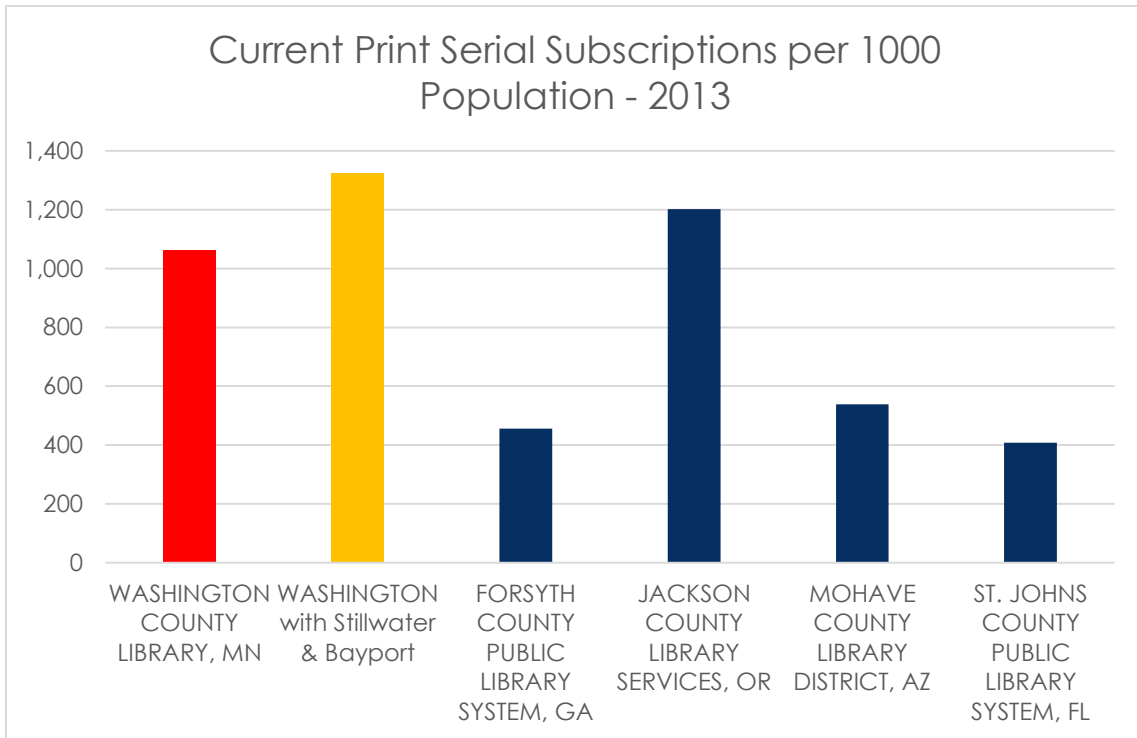
Databases are the number of databases that a library subscribes to in order for residents to access journals, newspapers and magazines online. As you will see, Washington County Library is heavy on database subscriptions.⁷



⁷ MELSA and the State of Minnesota provide the Library with 69 of the databases it subscribes to.

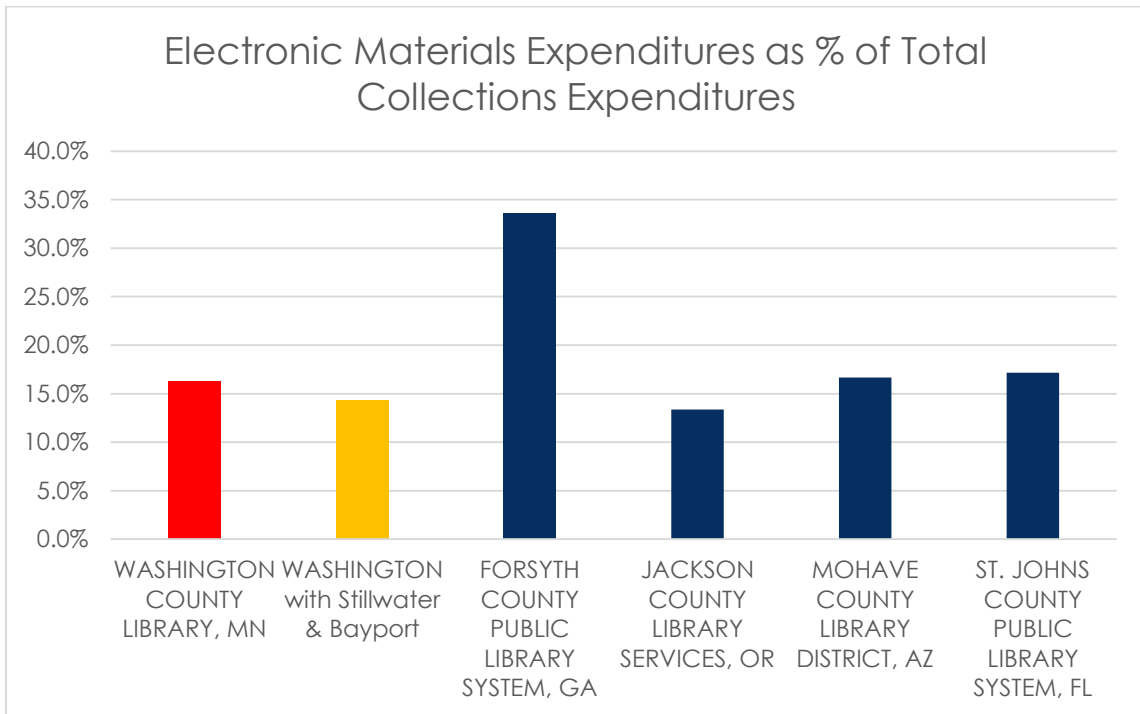
Serials

Serials are the newspapers and magazines that a library subscribes to in print form. In order to evaluate serials we look at subscriptions per 1,000 residents. Here we see the Library exceeds the average of both peer and area libraries.

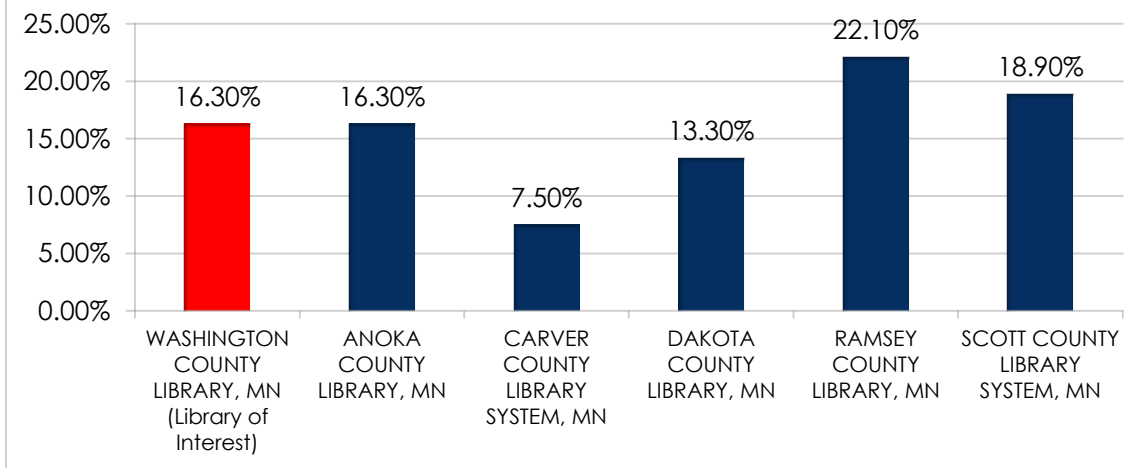


Electronic Collections

Electronic collections typically include eBooks and downloadable audio and video collections. Washington County Library is low in terms of the percentage of its total collections budget devoted to electronic materials. As the demand for these materials will likely increase, Washington County Library may consider increasing the investment in these materials.



Electronic Materials Expenditures as Percent of Total Collection Expenditures - 2013



Total Collections

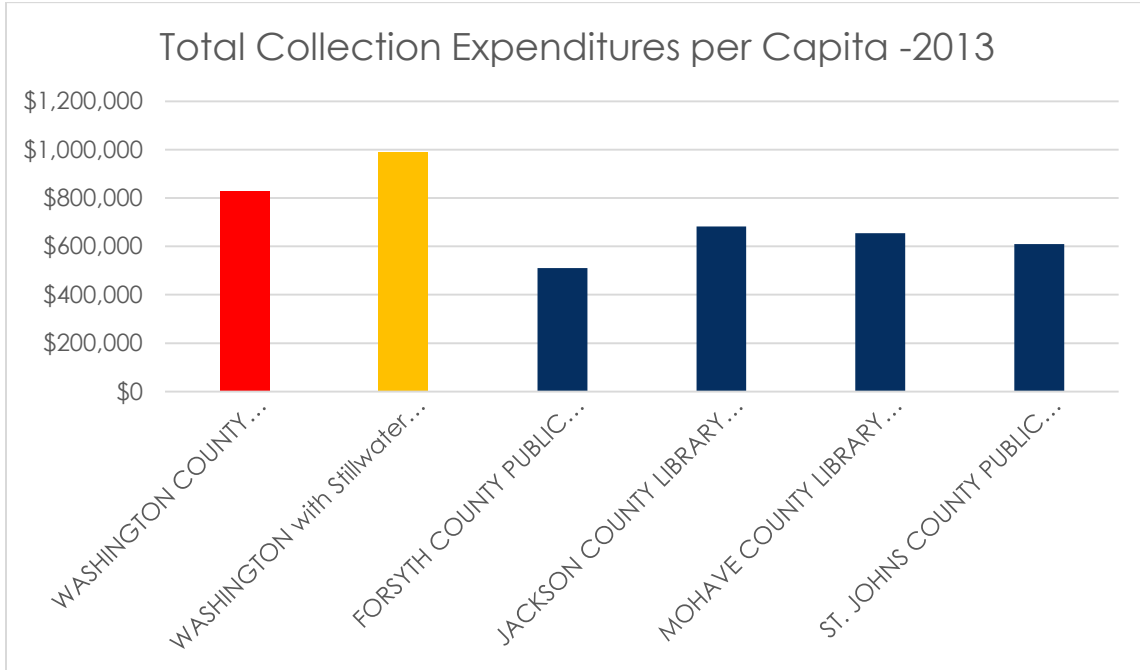
Washington County Library's total collections budget exceeds the average of peer libraries but is under the average of metro libraries. As mentioned above, the benchmark for library collections is between 11% and 12% of the library's total budget.

Also of note, Washington County Library offers fewer video units per 1,000 residents than most area and peer libraries. Furthermore, Washington County Library does not provide video game collections at all. As both of these collections have a higher circulation average than books, should the Library expand videos and add video games, we would expect to see improvements to circulation and visits.

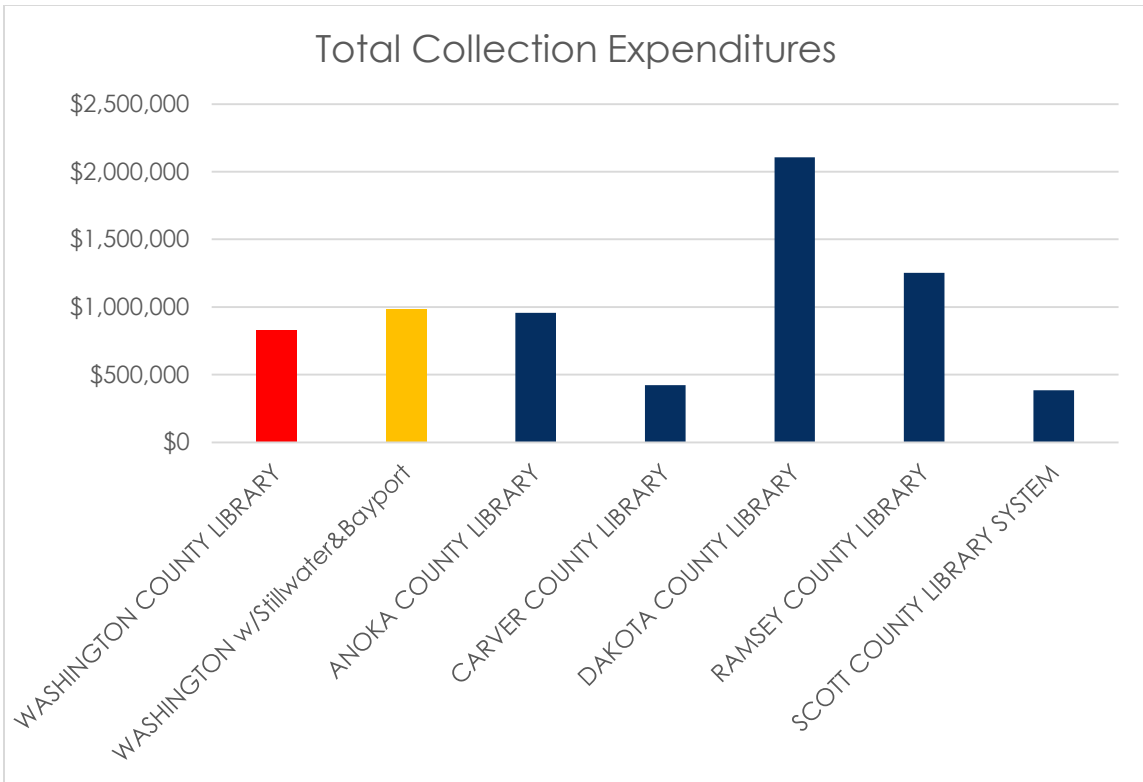
Library Journal's 2015 material breakdown article indicates that libraries are increasing the percentage of collection dollars devoted to DVDs. In 2012 and 2013 it was 11.7% and in 2014 it represented 12.1%. Moreover, the circulation of these materials is up. In 2014 DVDs represented 22.5% of total circulation⁸. Video game boost book circulation as well. Houston Public Library noted that lending video games has increased their book

⁸ Hoffert, B. (2015). Materials Breakout | Materials Survey 2015. *Library Journal*.

circulation between 15 and 20%.⁹ While streaming services provide some content, they simply cannot match the breadth and width of a library's collection. Moreover, many publishers of video content do not open their holdings to services like Netflix.



⁹ NPR. (2013). *At Libraries Across America, It's Game On.*



Efficiency Ratios

Libraries do not routinely use efficiency and operational ratios like the corporate world does. While these ratios have not been validated, they do demonstrate efficiency of library usage of resources and staff.

Washington County Library is generally more efficient than peer libraries but less than area libraries. Overall, the Library operates at a high level of efficiency, especially considering its size and budget constraints. However this high level of efficiency may also be negatively affecting usage or service levels in some areas.

Library Name	Budget/ Circulation (lower is more efficient)	Inventory Turnover (lower is more efficient)	Budget/ Visits (lower is more efficient)	Budget/ Program Attendance	Print Materials Budget/ Circulation (lower is more efficient)	Staff Efficiency Circulation (Higher is more efficient)	Staff Efficiency Program Attendance (Higher is more efficient)	Staff Efficiency Gate Count (Higher is more efficient)
WASHINGTON COUNTY LIBRARY, MN (Library of Interest)	2.764	0.177	7.193	177.966	0.254	35,130.127	613.404	13,500.725
FORSYTH COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM, GA	4.186	0.138	15.659	303.433	0.146	27,447.913	409.536	7,337.928
JACKSON COUNTY LIBRARY SERVICES, OR	2.738	0.313	5.835	100.158	0.341	27,143.890	978.831	12,735.684
MOHAVE COUNTY LIBRARY DISTRICT, AZ	7.296	0.221	7.945	215.178	0.482	8,439.306	294.776	7,750.367
ST. JOHNS COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM, FL	2.917	0.180	4.792	52.810	0.255	23,668.583	1,448.153	14,407.333
ANOKA COUNTY LIBRARY, MN	2.614	0.183	7.290	217.847	0.222	30,938.912	415.704	11,092.440
CARVER COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM, MN	3.174	0.206	5.923	137.052	0.307	27,649.960	729.620	14,815.714
DAKOTA COUNTY LIBRARY, MN	2.274	0.137	5.603	165.724	0.287	36,207.210	538.218	14,693.092
RAMSEY COUNTY LIBRARY, MN	1.969	0.112	5.304	137.016	0.150	46,298.831	786.925	17,188.859
SCOTT COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM, MN	3.500	0.255	5.827	125.173	0.336	23,491.913	741.857	14,110.290

Average of peer libraries	4.284	0.213	8.557	167.895	0.306	21,674.923	782.824	10,557.828
Comparison to peers	-1.520	-0.036	-1.365	10.072	-0.052	13,455.204	-169.420	2,942.897
Average of metro libraries	2.706	0.178	5.990	156.562	0.260	32,917.365	642.465	14,380.079
Comparison to metro libraries	0.058	-0.001	1.203	21.404	-0.006	2,212.762	-29.061	-879.354