



[Metropolitan Libraries Section Survey Results 2009](#)

Background

In 2010, Toronto Public Library's request for funding to automate the administration of the IFLA Metropolitan Libraries Section Annual statistical survey was approved. Over the summer, Toronto Public Library worked with Counting Opinions to develop a web-based survey tool. In the fall of 2010, Toronto Public Library put out a call for participation in the 2009 Metropolitan Libraries Section online survey.

Report of Survey Findings

With the introduction of the automated survey and its expanded benchmarking capabilities, Toronto Public Library staff actively encouraged participation from many international libraries to expand the scope and comprehensiveness of the survey. As a result, the 2009 survey drew participation from fifty-seven international library systems-- a 32% increase from 2008 and a 68% increase since Toronto Public Library assumed responsibility for the survey in 2004.

Attached is the 2009 data. For analysis purposes, library systems have been organized by the size of the population they serve within four categories:

- 1,000,000 population and over
- 750,000 to 999,999
- 500,000 to 749,000
- 250,000 to 499,999 (or under 500,000)

This data confirms major trends in library use and library services:

- Libraries continue to attract record number of visits from users through economic hard times
- Speculation about the diminishing value of libraries in the new information age is unsupported
- Increased use and demand for virtual services and e-content is matched by rising user expectations and emerging technologies

With the strong participation rate and high number of first-time participants in the 2009 survey, most of the trend analysis was based on per capita data to allow for comparison between years.



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Between 2008 and 2009:

- Virtual visits per capita surged up 61.5%
- Visits per capita increased by 6.7%
- All visits (physical & virtual) per capita rose 37.3%
- Both circulation and registration per capita increased by 8%
- Use per capita (including circulation, reference requests, visits, virtual visits) jumped 26.1%
- Increased service efficiency: Staffing and performance ratio improved in both visits per FTE (5.7%) and circulation per FTE (7.2%)
- Weekly hours per capita decreased by 16.9%

Virtual visits have grown steadily since 2006 when they were first included in the survey. From 2006, the number of virtual visits surpassed those of physical visits. Between 2008 and 2009, a dramatic rise of 61.5%—from 5.75 to 9.29 per capita—was reported.

Physical visits per capita; however; fluctuate between years. After experiencing a sharp decline of 35.7% from 2006 to 2007, physical visits regained its momentum with a jump of 33% in 2008 and a moderate increase of 6.7% in 2009.

Despite a relative low point in 2007, we continue to see a growing demand for physical library space combined—in-person and virtual— increased 37.3% per capita in 2009.

Economic impacts on libraries

Despite increasing financial constraints, libraries around the world reported stronger outputs in most areas of the 2009 survey, resulting in a 26% growth in overall library usage compared to last year. For comparison purposes, per capita usage was calculated for 2008 and 2009 using the four most-commonly reported library activities: circulation, reference requests, physical visits and virtual visits.

As global economic hardship deepens, its impact on public libraries becomes multi-dimensional, including pressures from shrinking funding resources, rising operating cost and increasing user expectation.

To respond to these challenges, libraries have become more efficient. As a whole, the 2009 survey saw an increased efficiency in the staffing/performance ratios: there was a rise of 5.7% in visits per FTE and 7.2% in circulation per FTE.

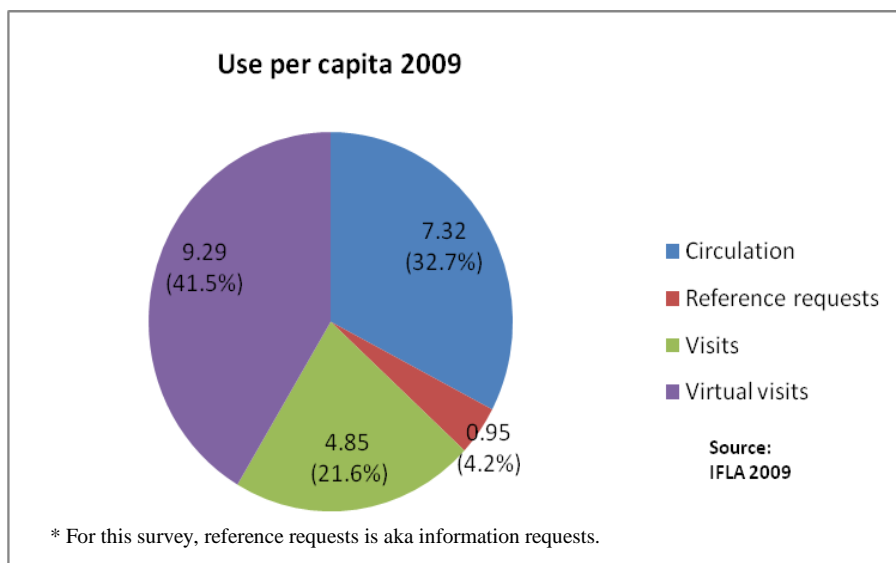
Despite increased efficiencies, it appears there were some cuts to library's open hours. Between 2008 and 2009, there was a 16.9% reduction of weekly service hours per capita.



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Libraries in the digital age

In the 21st century, the internet has become the primary source of information for many people; yet, demand for traditional library remains strong and use of technology-based services is growing quickly, leading to a 26% growth in library use per capita in one year. As a trend, there is a shift to self service with a decline in mediated reference requests. Of the four library activities included in this benchmark, virtual visits comprise 41.5% of the total usage, followed by circulation 32.7%, visits 21.6% and reference requests 4.2%.



The role of libraries as community hubs is expanding. Many believe today's library patrons are increasingly drawn to their local libraries for internet-related services, including free access to electronic resources, internet connections, computer workstations, study and community activities/space and opportunities for user education at both personal and vocational levels. This shift from traditional to non-traditional library usage reflects library's expanding role as information, technology and community hubs. While this new use pattern proves that libraries have adapted well to the shifting needs and expectations of library users in the digital age, the extent and impact of this shift; however; is not fully understood as these activities are not fully captured in library surveys.

Next Steps

1. Technology dominates our daily life; the steady rise in the demand for virtual visits confirms this growing trend. Libraries need in-depth and timely knowledge of their users' need for technology in this rapidly evolving area. In keeping with the survey's goal to collect relevant and current data about library use and



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services, it is crucial that this survey be updated with new measures to collect data on the full range of electronic services offered by today's libraries, including collection and usage of specific types of electronic materials (downloadable and non-downloadable), wireless internet access and use of library websites.

2. As public libraries evolve in its role as information and cultural hubs of their communities, library programming expands in depth and breadth, resulting in a consistent growth in program attendance. In recent years, both American and Canadian public libraries have included library programming in their surveys-- Public Libraries Data Survey (PLDS) and Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC) respectively—to gain better understanding of this new area of focus. As IFLA made reference to “the role of libraries for literacy and information literacy, education and culture” in the *IFLA Library Statistics Manifesto*¹, the Met Lib Annual Survey should support this mandate with new measures on library programming that allow us to collect data and gain understanding of the social and cultural role libraries play world-wide.

Conclusion

In today's economic climate, there is a growing demand for cost-efficiency, accountability and transparency. Reliable and relevant library statistics allow libraries to understand, evaluate, compare, present and plan their services both internally and externally to city administrators, policy-makers and potential funders. In its role as survey Administrator, Toronto Public Library is committed to working with the Standing Committee members to:

- ensure the survey reflects the expanding role of metropolitan libraries and changing needs of their users
- review and redefine existing survey metrics to align with the evolving needs and expectations of library users
- improve usability and currency of the survey instrument as an effective benchmarking tool, by individual library and among library groups sharing similar characteristics
- encourage commitments and consistent participation from libraries to maximize the values of library surveys to promote library services and library use

Attachment 1: Statistical Survey of Metropolitan Libraries Section 2009

Attachment 2: Metropolitan Libraries Survey Results Graphs 2009

¹ IFLA Library Statistics Manifesto <http://www.ifla.org/en/publications/ifla-library-statistics-manifesto>