Benchmark 101:
Become a Data-Informed Library

November 13, 2023

Public Library Association

Benchmark

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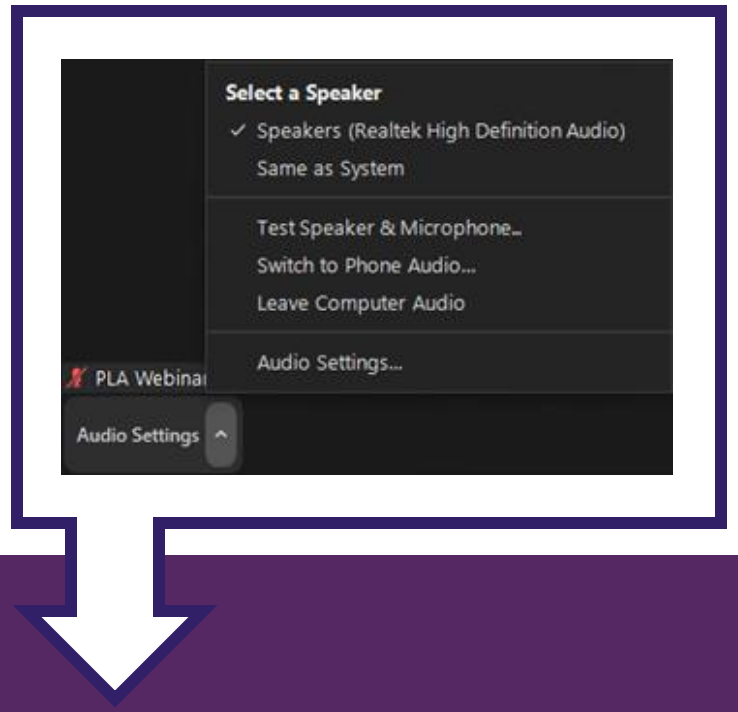

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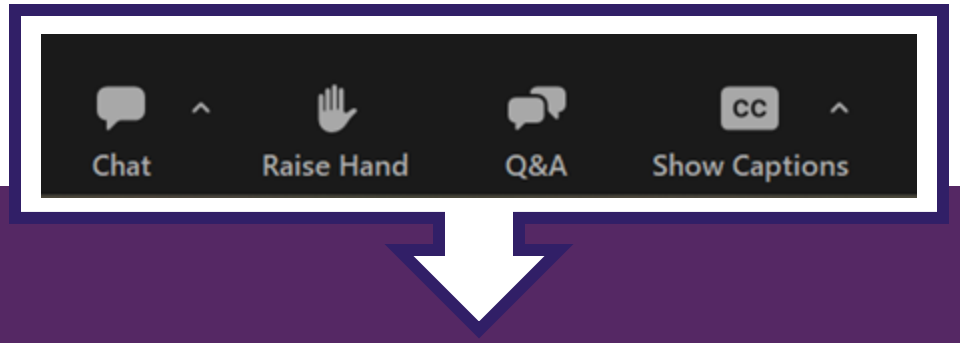

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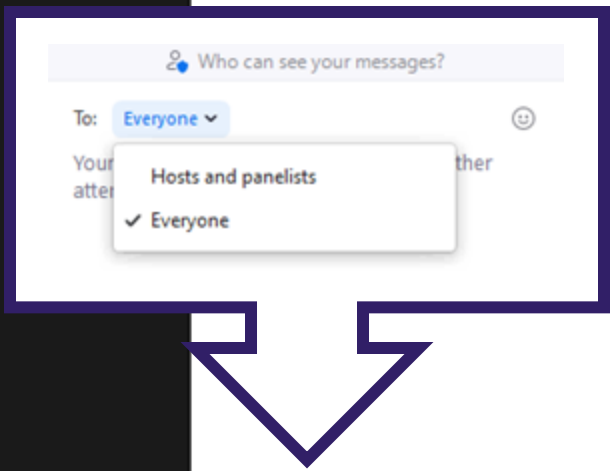

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A Webinars

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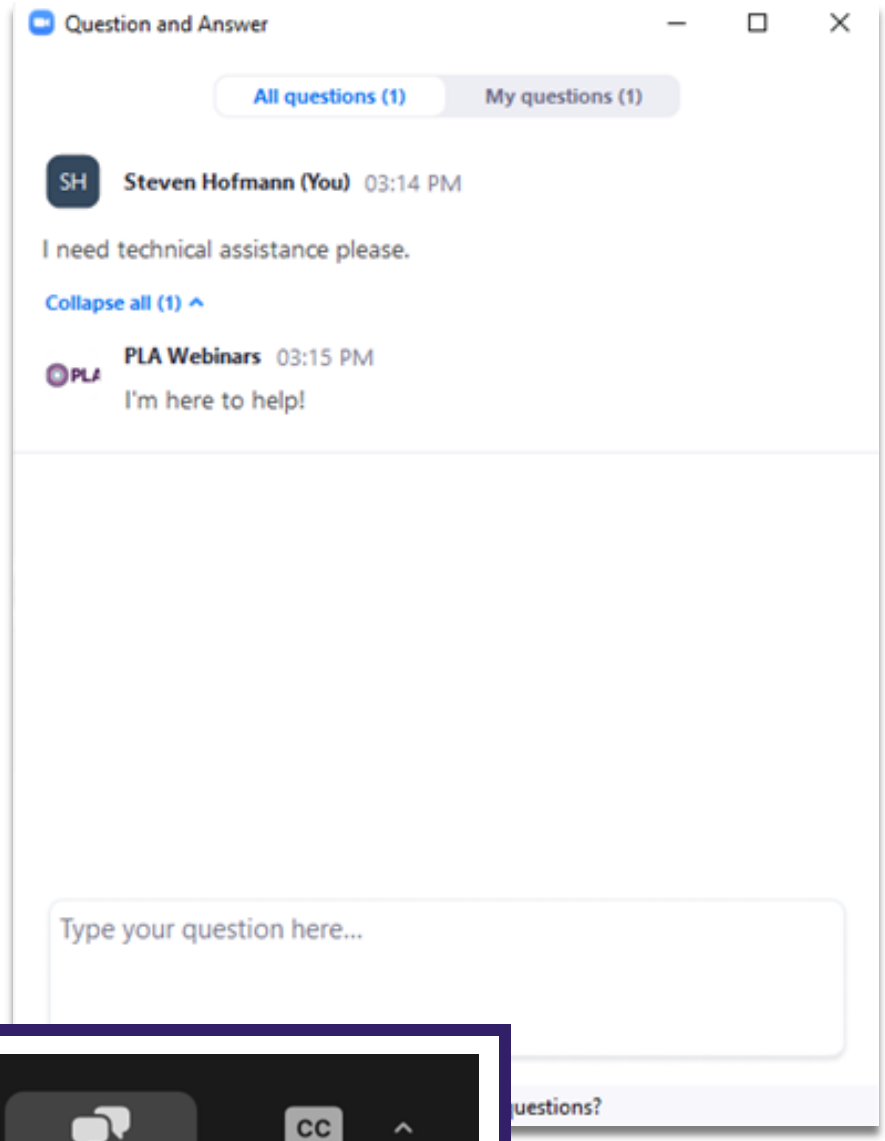

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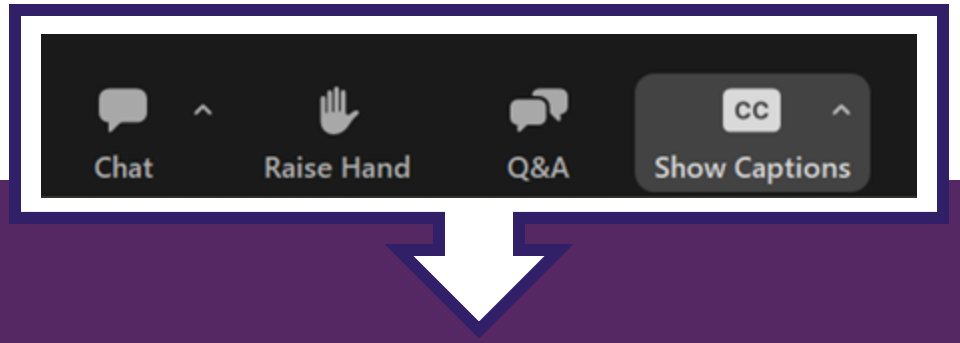

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Speakers

Sara Goek
Project Manager,
Data and Research
PLA

Katina Jones
Program Manager,
Evaluation and Assessment
PLA

Renee DiPilato
Director of Libraries and
Historical Resources
Sarasota County, FL

Benchmark

LIBRARY METRICS AND TRENDS

The newest tool for data-driven planning and advocacy in libraries

librarybenchmark.org

PublicLibrary ASSOCIATION

ACRL Advancing learning Transforming scholarship
Association of College & Research Libraries
A division of the American Library Association

Email: plabenchmark@ala.org

Agenda

I. Why Benchmark

II. Making Effective Peer Comparisons

III. Using Benchmark for Strategic Planning

IV. Next Steps

V. Q&A

WHY BENCHMARK

Sara Goek

Public Library Association

Benchmark

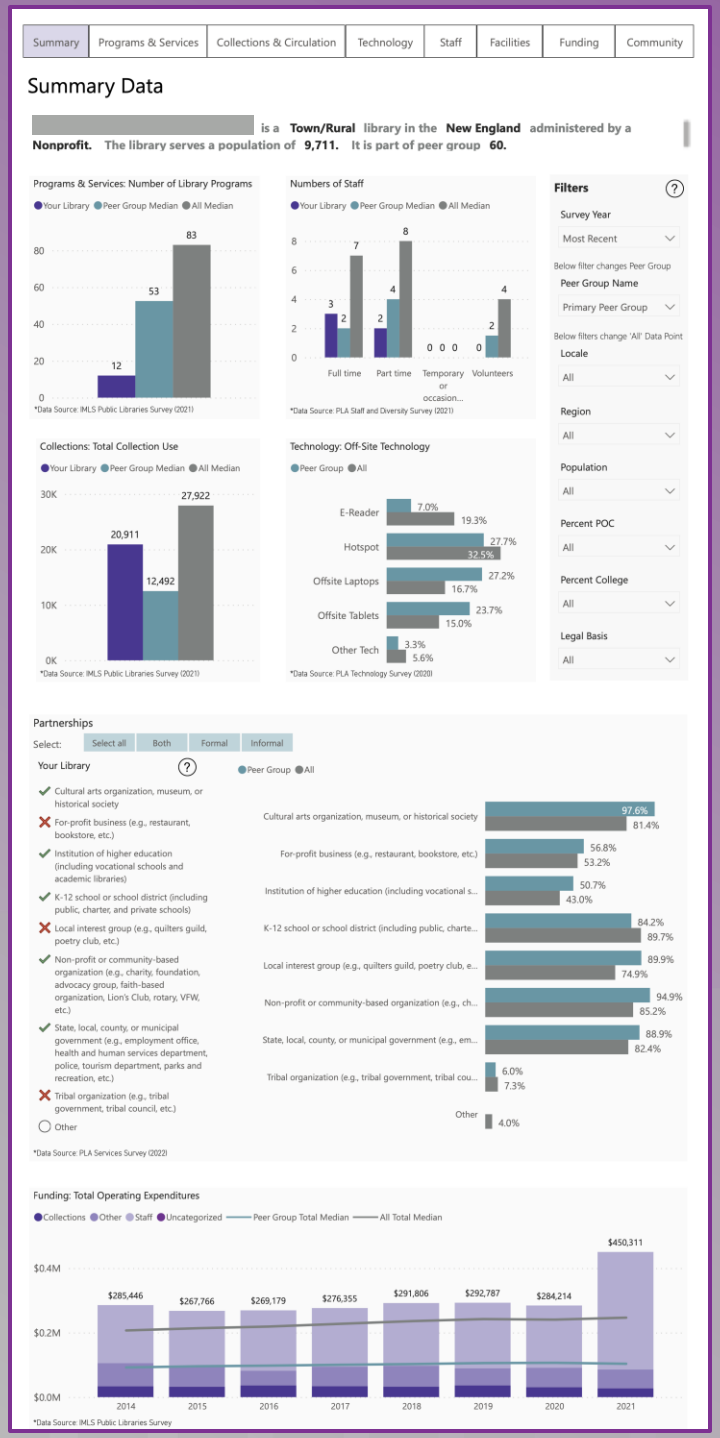
Background

1988-2018
- Annual Public Library Data Service surveys
- PLA Metrics

2019
- Focus groups and conversations with the field
- PLDS retired

2020
- New annual topical survey model launched

2021
- Benchmark: Library Metrics and Trends launched



Benchmark: Library Metrics and Trends

Data available includes:

- PLA annual topical surveys
- IMLS Public Libraries Survey
- Census Bureau's American Community Survey
- Public Library Data Service (historic data)

librarybenchmark.org

Why Benchmark

Performance

Value

Impact

BENCHMARK: LIBRARY METRICS AND TRENDS

PUBLIC LIBRARIES have access to:	Free Access	Subscription
PLA annual surveys	✓	✓
PLA annual survey reports with national results	✓	✓
Your library's responses to past PLA and PLDS surveys	✓	✓
Selected data visualizations with peer comparisons	✓	✓
Account and contact management	✓	✓
Data-related resources	✓	✓
Interactive data dashboards with 100+ unique visualizations of PLA, PLDS, IMLS, and census data	✗	✓
Custom report builder with historical metrics	✗	✓
Create custom peer groups for tailored benchmarking	✗	✓
	Free	**$400**/year*

* get up to 20% off with eligible discounts

Subscriptions

- Subscription types
  - **Public library**
  - Consortium / state library agency / group
  - Corporate
  - Individual consultant / researcher
- More info: https://www.ala.org/pla/data/benchmark
- Free webinar for groups on December 11: https://www.ala.org/pla/education/onlinelearning/webinars/datatools

MAKING EFFECTIVE PEER COMPARISONS

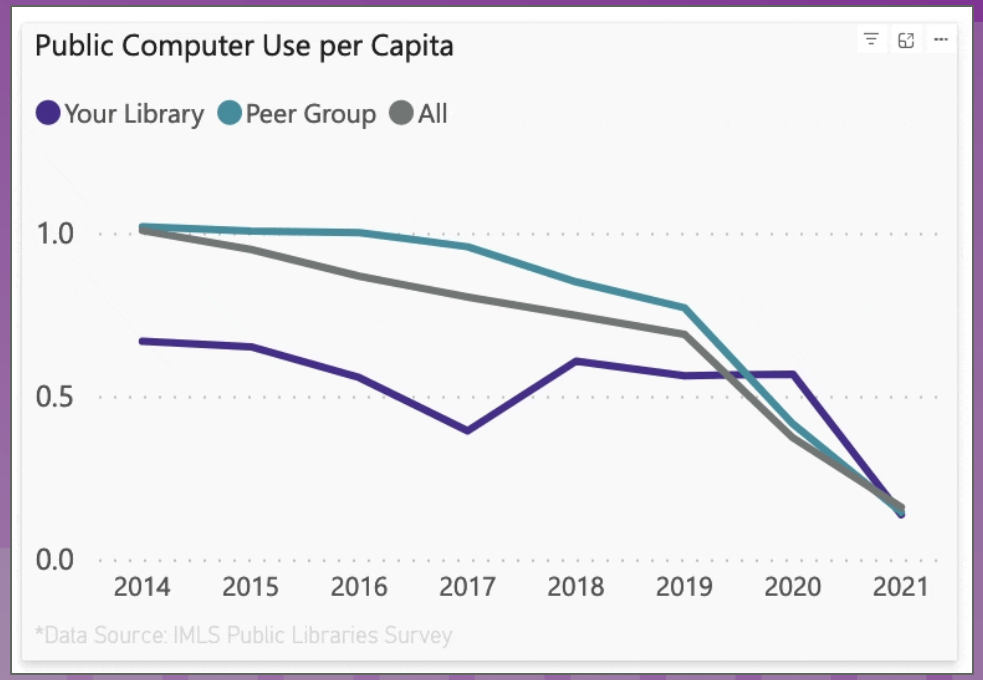
Katina Jones

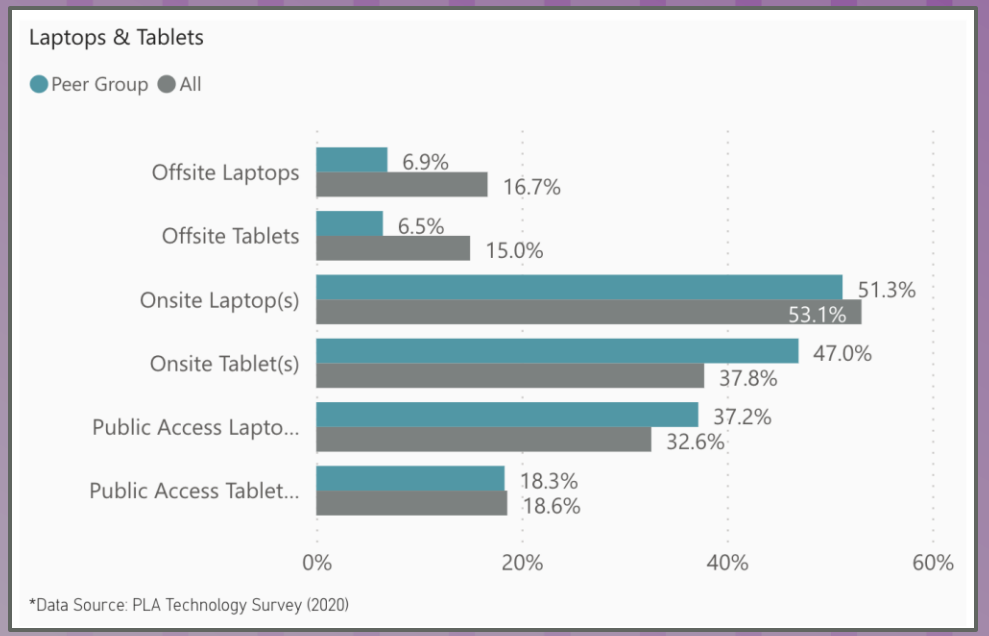
Public Library Association

Benchmark

Benchmarking

The process of comparing your organization's performance with peers' performance for purposes of improvement, decision-making, strategic planning, and advocacy.





Benchmark Subscriber Features

Data Dashboards

Peer Groups

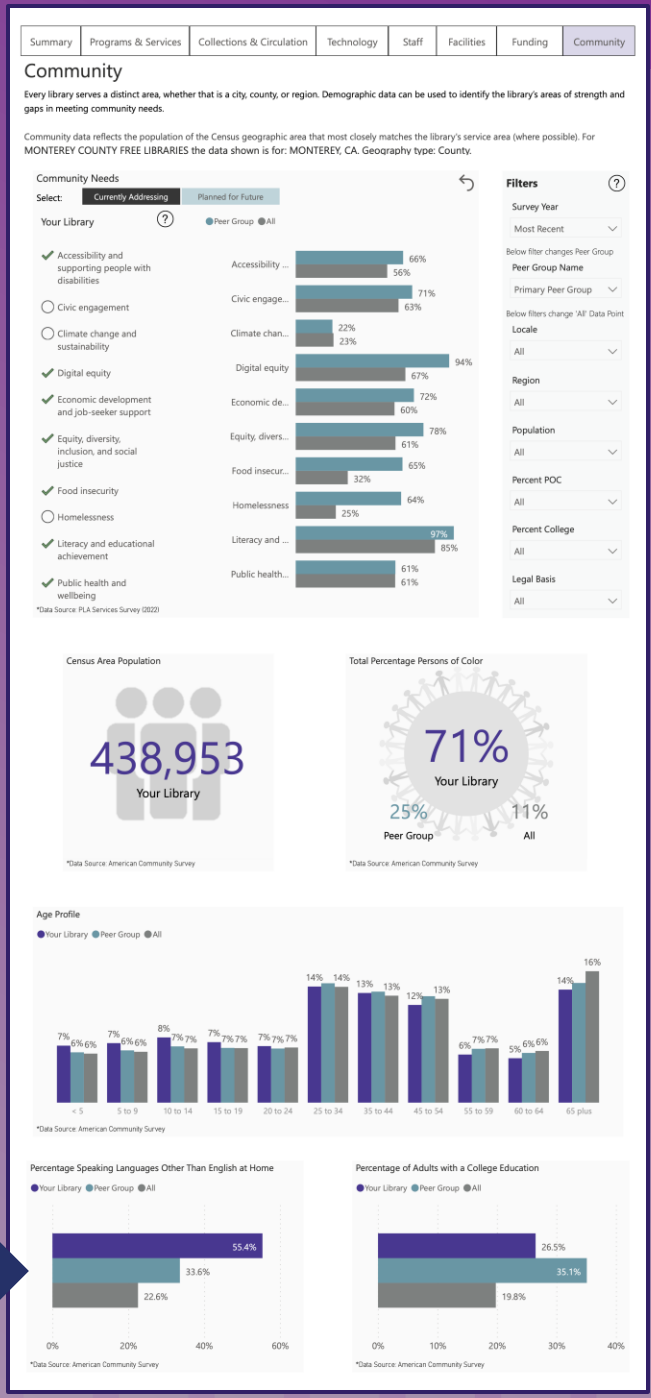
Custom Reports

Visualize

Dashboards

- Summary Data *(includes selected charts from the other topic areas)*
- Programs and Services
- Collections and Circulation
- Technology
- Staff
- Facilities
- Funding
- Community *(pictured)*

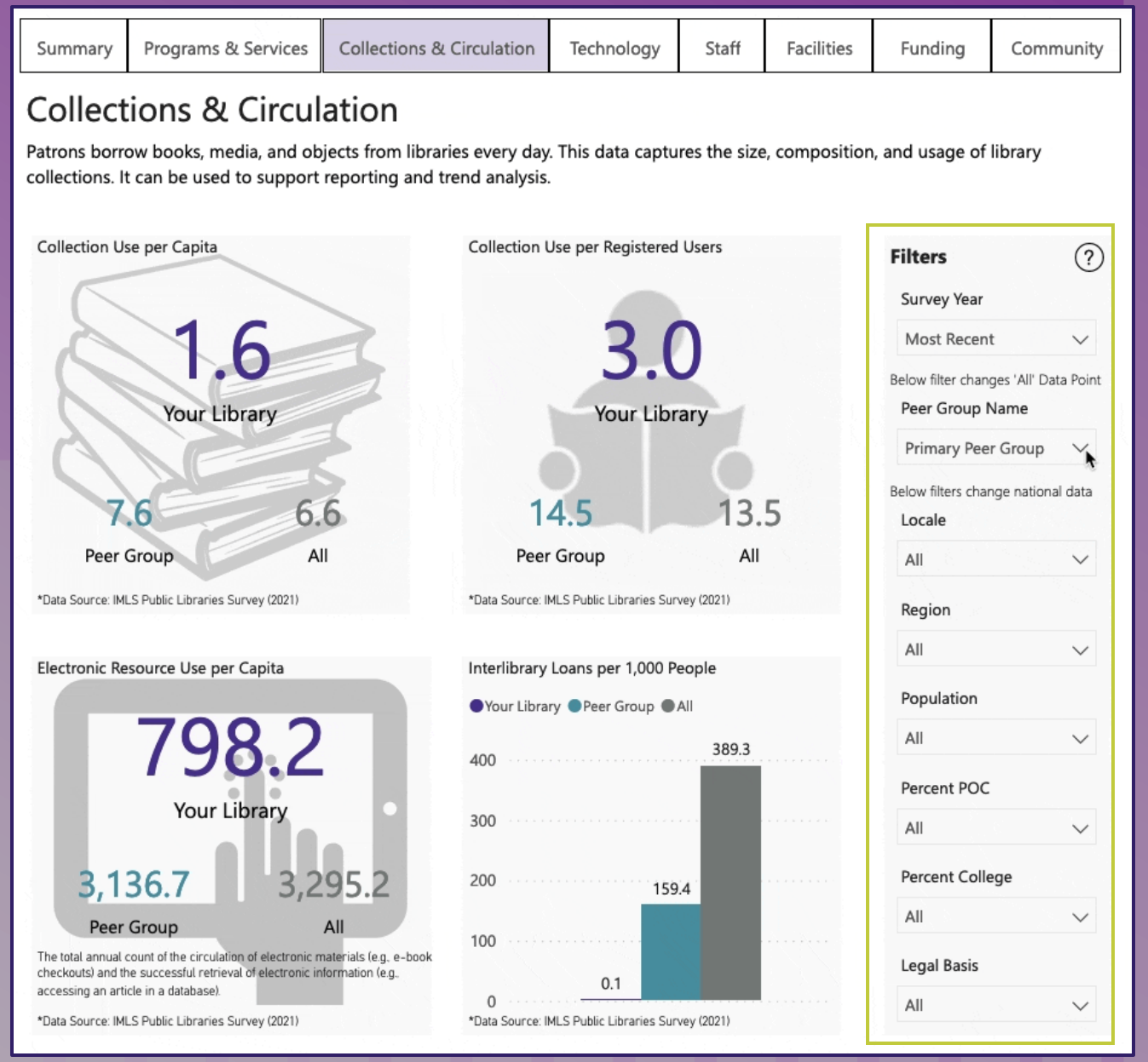
View any chart as a table or export the data



Filter

Explore and filter by:

- Survey Year
- Peer Group
- Library characteristics
  - Locale
  - Region
  - Population of service area
  - Legal basis
- Community characteristics
  - Percent persons of color
  - Percent college-educated

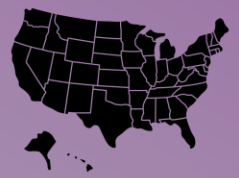


Primary Peer Groups

IMLS Public Libraries Survey

Peer Groups = groups of libraries that share similar characteristics

Peer Group Characteristics



Region

Legal basis

Locale

Percent non-Hispanic white

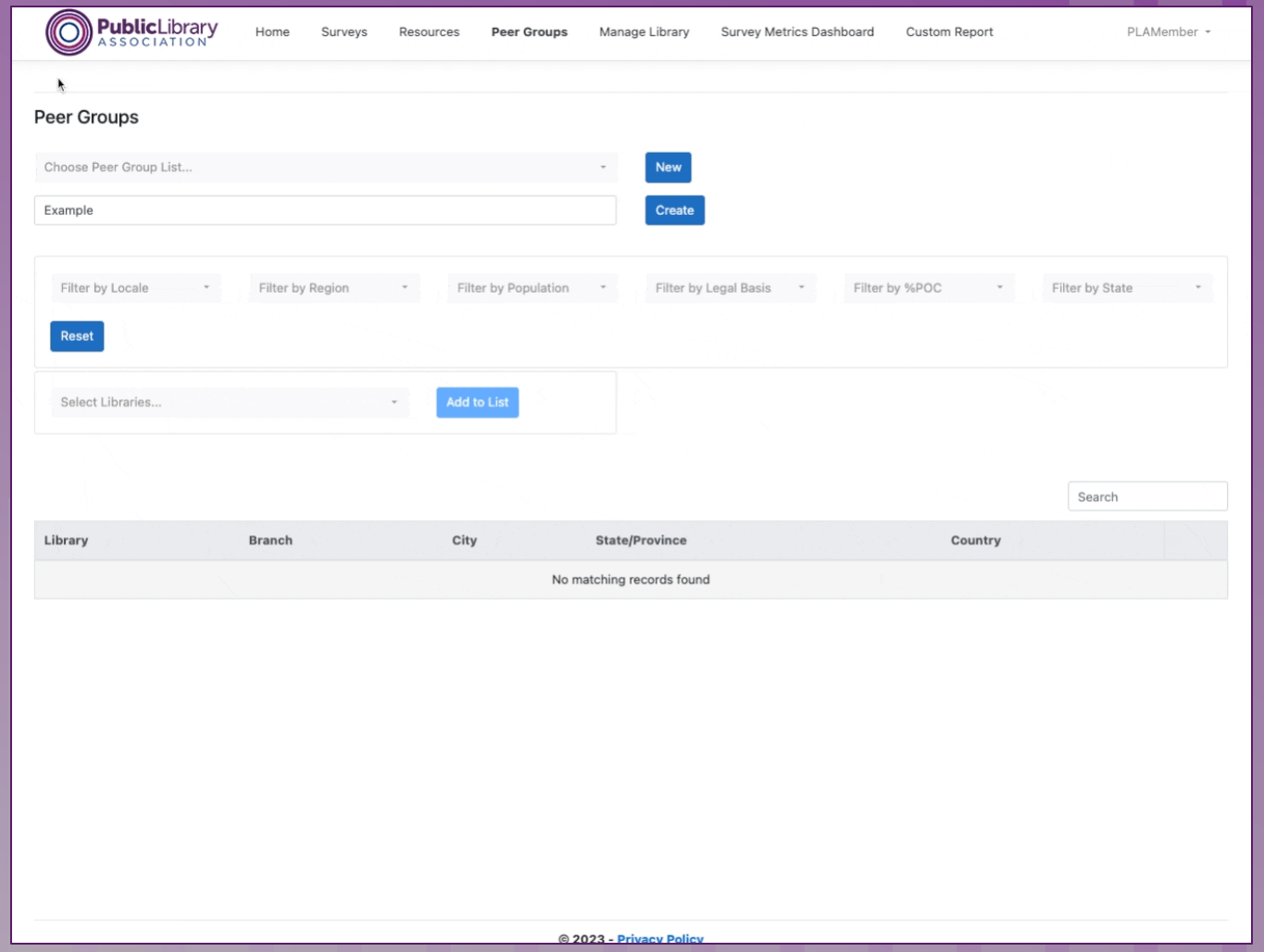
Percent with a college degree

Custom Peer Groups

Filters to select:

- Locale
- Region
- Population
- Legal basis
- % people of color
- State

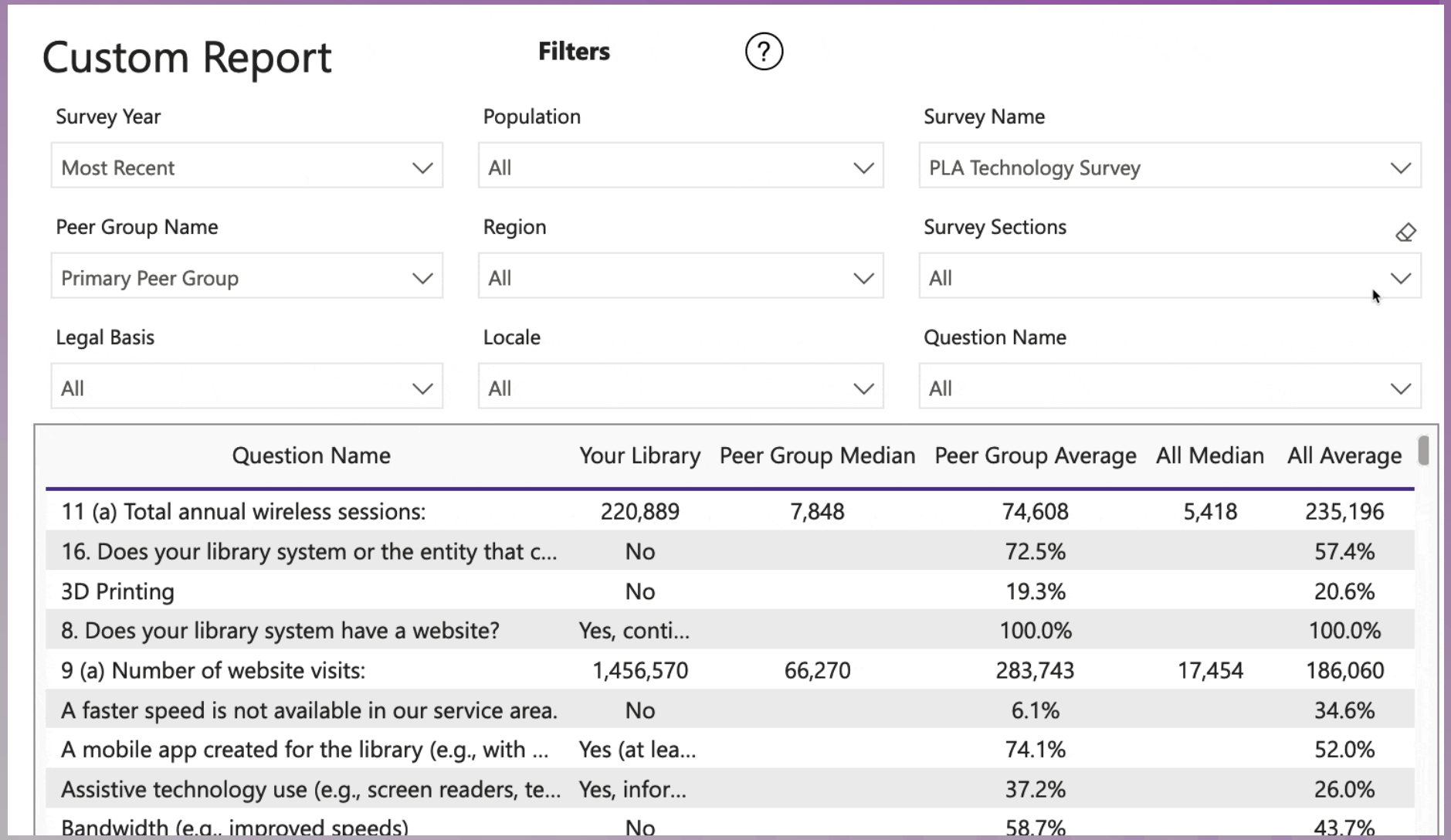
Custom peer groups you create show up in the Peer Group filter in the dashboard



Who are your peers?

General purpose	• Key library characteristics: locale, legal basis, service area population, state/region
Budget justification	• Service area population • Number of branches/outlets • Budget
Strategic planning	• Community demographics • Annual programs/services • Number of paid staff

Custom Reports



Question Name	Your Library	Peer Group Median	Peer Group Average	All Median	All Average
11 (a) Total annual wireless sessions:	220,889	7,848	74,608	5,418	235,196
16. Does your library system or the entity that c...	No		72.5%		57.4%
3D Printing	No		19.3%		20.6%
8. Does your library system have a website?	Yes, conti...		100.0%		100.0%
9 (a) Number of website visits:	1,456,570	66,270	283,743	17,454	186,060
A faster speed is not available in our service area.	No		6.1%		34.6%
A mobile app created for the library (e.g., with ...	Yes (at lea...		74.1%		52.0%
Assistive technology use (e.g., screen readers, te...	Yes, infor...		37.2%		26.0%
Bandwidth (e.g., improved speeds)	No		58.7%		43.7%

Exploring Results

Census data →

IMLS PLS data →

PLA data →

What does the digital divide look like in my community and how does the library address **technology** needs?

- Percentage of households with broadband
- Percentage of households with computers
- Library computers and WiFi
- Library devices for checkout
- Technology training

Does the library's **staffing** align with community needs?

- Population
- Ages: children, teens, adults, senior citizens
- Library visits
- Program attendance
- FTE per capita
- Numbers of staff
- Staff roles

QUESTIONS?

USING BENCHMARK FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING

Renee Di Pilato

Sarasota County Libraries

- An overview of Sarasota County
- Our library system
- Benchmark for strategic planning

SARASOTA COUNTY

Sarasota County Demographics

We have five municipalities

Population ~ 462,000

Culture of philanthropy and non-profit organizations

10 library branches

1 History Center

Approximately 166 staff

$18 million budget

1 Foundation, 11 Friends groups, 3 advisory boards

Dependent on partners and private funding

New Director Drama: 2019-2020

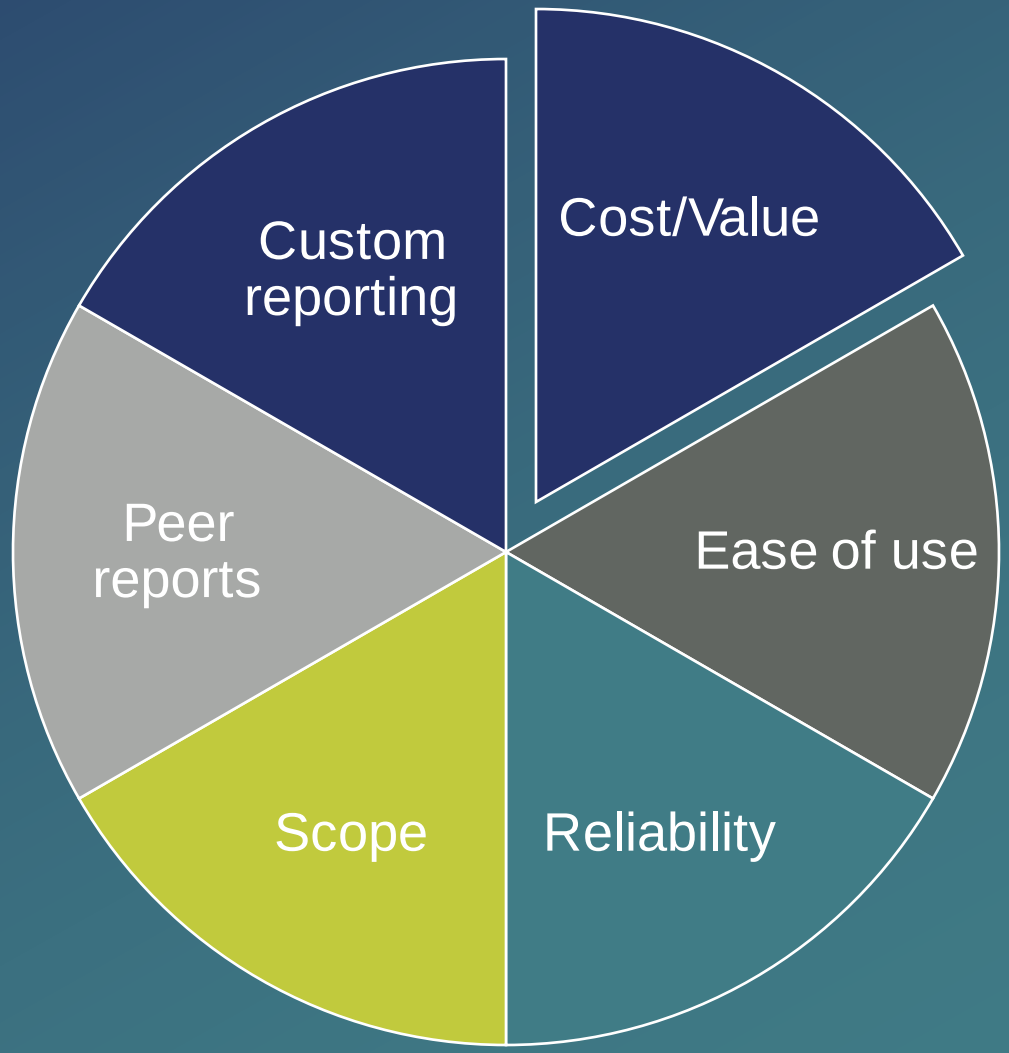
- Tasked with gathering statistics
- Comparing collection expenditures for a budget ask
- Disorganized mess

Moving to a Data Informed Culture: 2021-2023

Goals

- Using data for decision making
- Regularly reviewing data for improvements
- Working with data to tell our story
- Improved communications with stakeholders

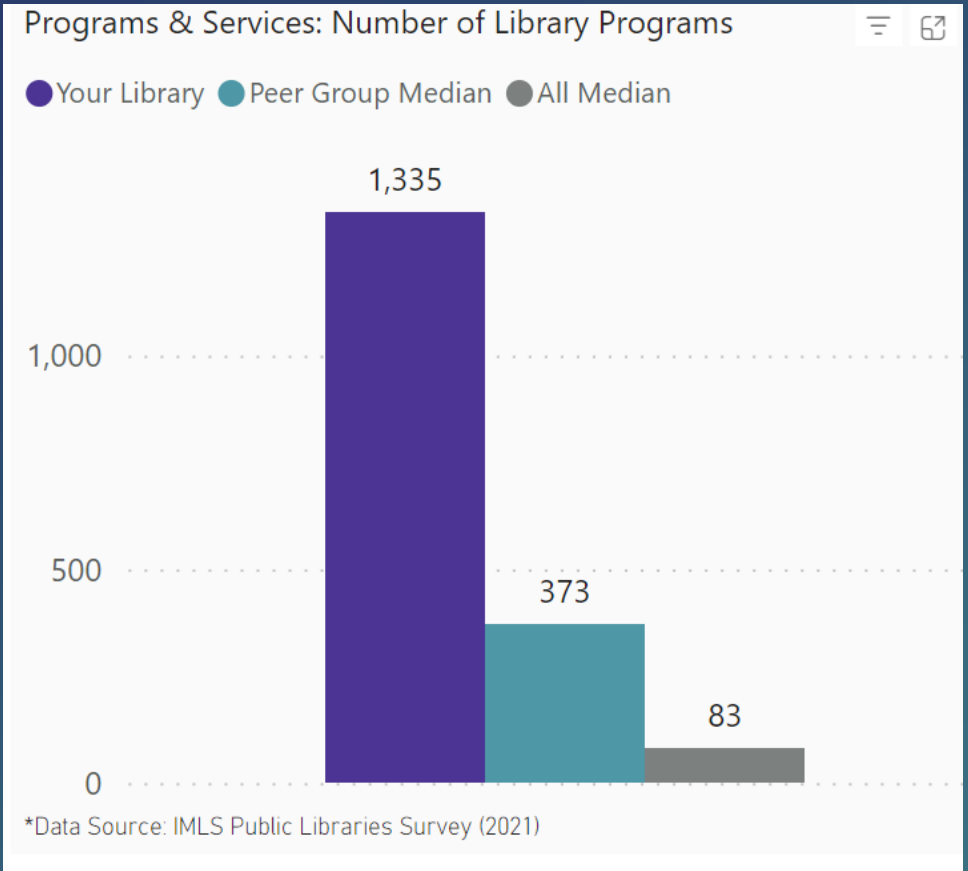
Moving to Benchmark

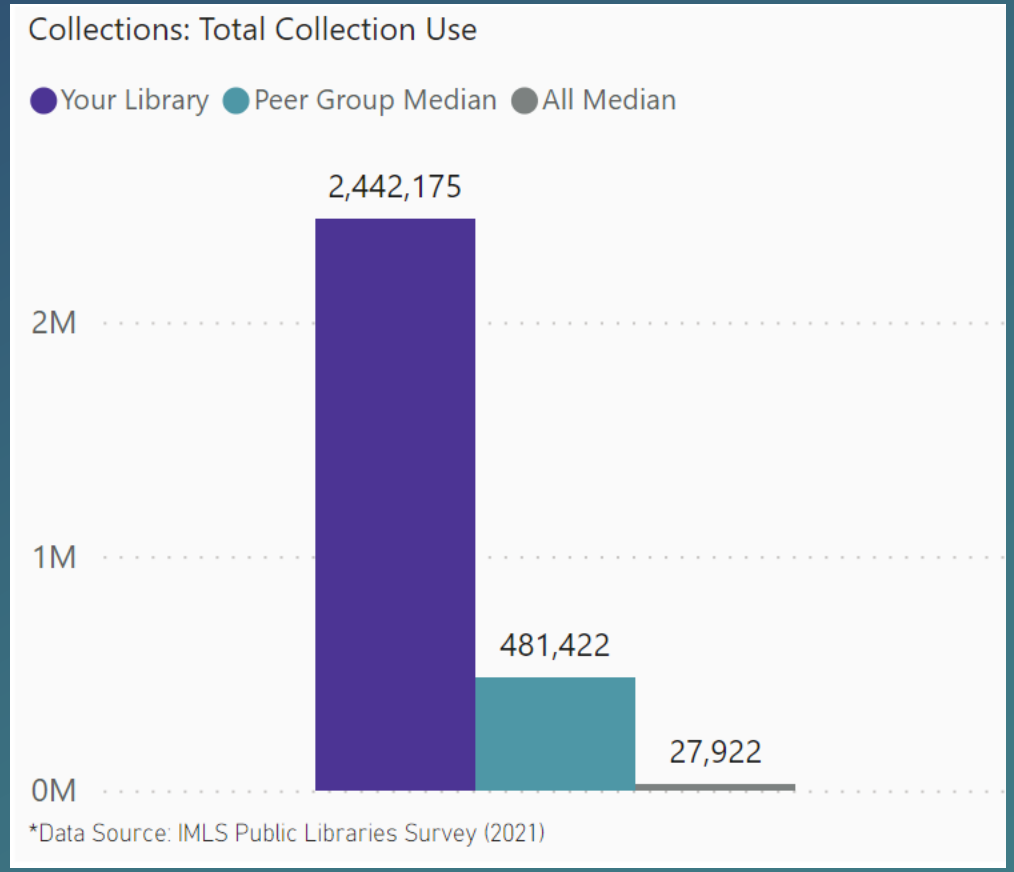


Benchmark and Strategic Planning

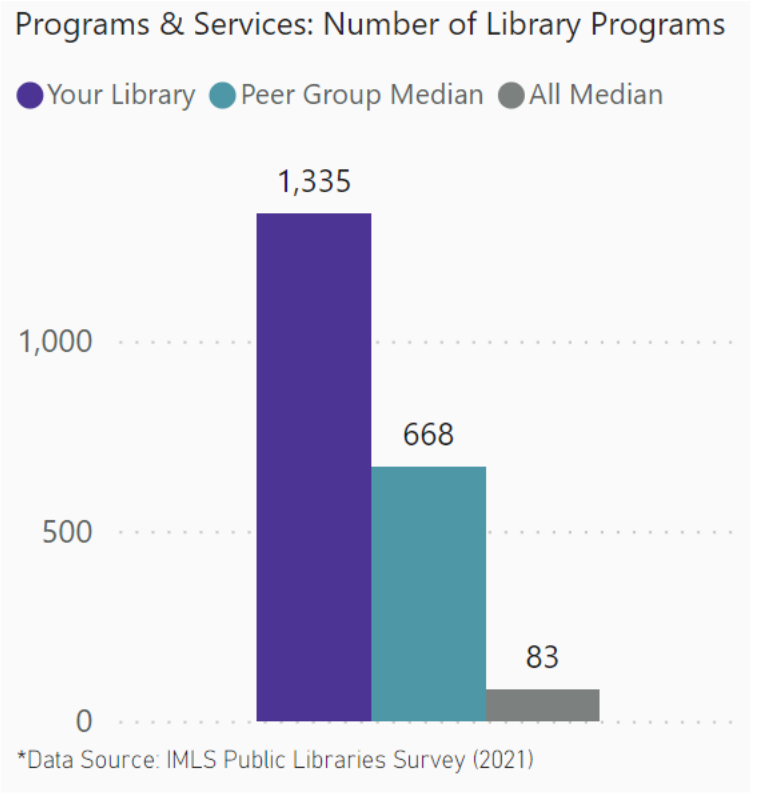
- Benchmark provided insights to performance
- Peer comparisons demonstrated strengths and weaknesses
- Allowed consultant to focus on qualitative processes
- Improved our messaging

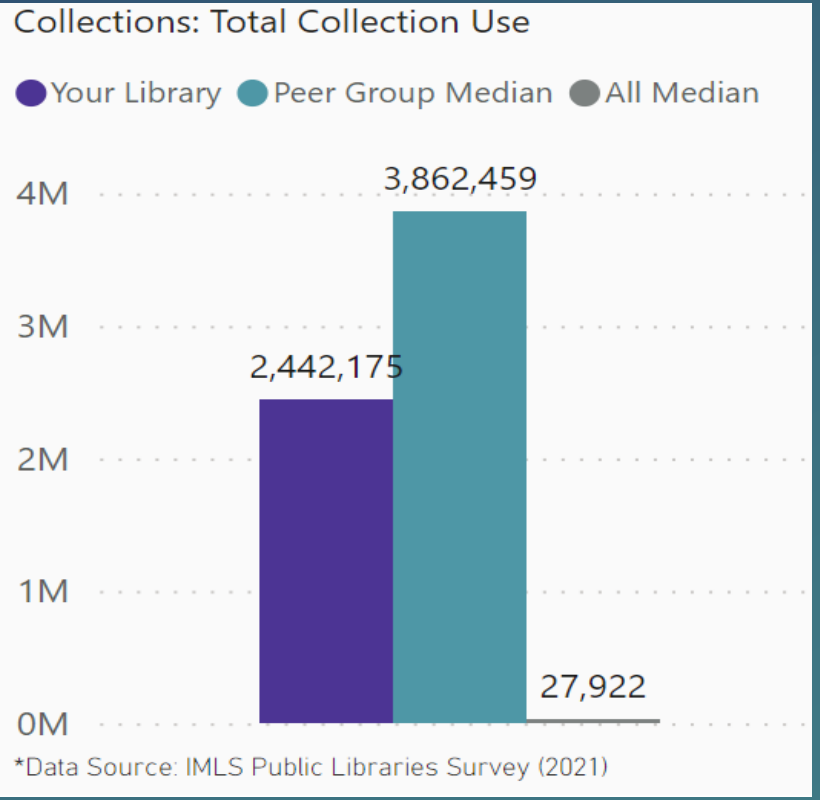
Needs Assessment





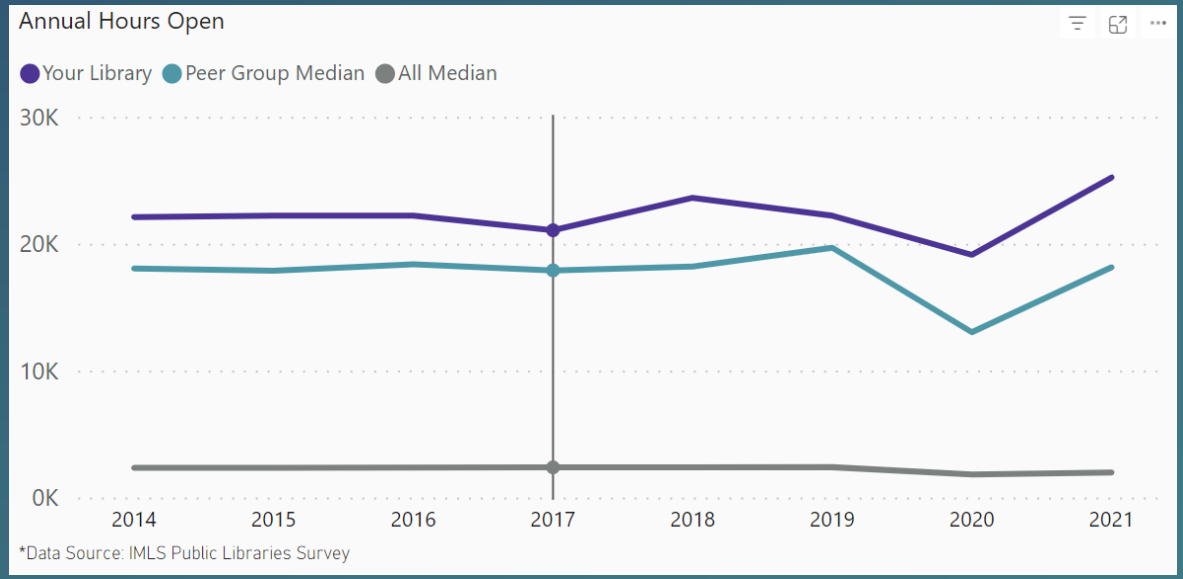
Needs Assessment: Local Peers



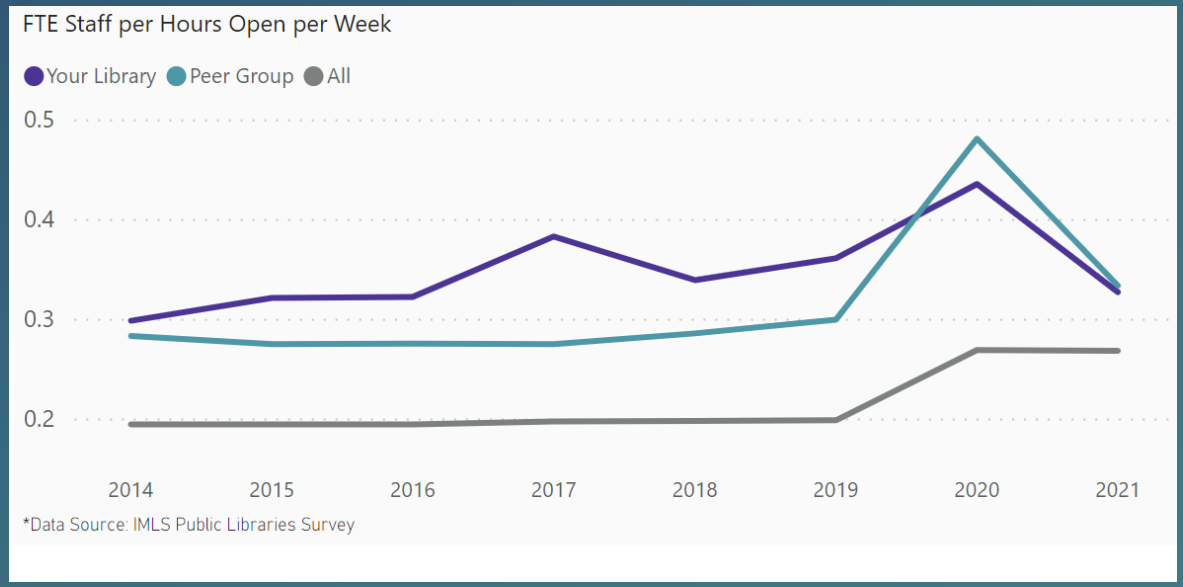


NEEDS ASSESSMENT: LOCAL PEERS

NEEDS ASSESSMENT: LOCAL PEERS



NEEDS ASSESSMENT: LOCAL PEERS



Valuable Features

- Quick snapshots
- Tables and visualizations
- Peer comparisons
- Demonstrates trends
- For strategic planning
  - Budget Trends
  - Collections
  - Library Use
  - Programs/Services
  - Technology

A Work in Progress

- Regularly reviewing data
- Working with data to tell our story
- Using data for advocacy
- Staff training on Benchmark

Why Benchmark?

EFFICIENCY

DECISION-MAKING

PLANNING

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

ADVOCACY

NEXT STEPS

Sara Goek

Learn More: Resources

Tutorials

NEW Benchmark video tutorials
Learn how to make the most of Benchmark's features and peer comparison data for your library. The first ten videos in a new series are now available (Sept 2023).

Getting Started
Navigating your Benchmark account and subscription information.

Creating a Custom Peer Group
How to create a custom peer group for benchmarking.

The Survey Metrics Dashboard
How to navigate the dashboards, interpret the visualizations, apply filters, and see tooltips.

Creating a Custom Report
How to use the Custom Report builder to view and export data.

Viewing Tables and Exporting Data
How to view tables and export data for any charts in the dashboard.

Group/Consortia/State Accounts
How to manage and review member libraries' information (for group account administrators)

Interpreting the Data

About Benchmark
Background on the tool and its development.

Benchmarking
Making effective peer comparisons for planning and advocacy.

Peer Groups
An outline of the primary peer groups in Benchmark and the methodology used to create them.

PLA Survey Data
The Benchmark dashboards include data from PLA's new annual topical surveys and historic Public Library Data Service (PLDS) surveys.

IMLS Public Libraries Survey Data
The Benchmark dashboards include IMLS PLS data from 2006 to the most recent available.

Census Data
The Benchmark dashboards include data drawn from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

NEW: Use Cases
Four use cases demonstrating how public libraries could use Benchmark in practice (published June 2023).

Surveys

2023 PLA Technology Survey Worksheet
Survey worksheet (fillable PDF)

2023 PLA Technology Survey Instructions
Survey instructions and glossary

2022 Services for Strong Communities Survey
Survey worksheet (fillable PDF), instructions, and glossary

2021 Public Library Staff & Diversity Survey
Survey worksheet (fillable PDF), instructions, and glossary

PLA Technology Survey (2020)
Reference copy (PDF) of the 2020 Technology Survey.

PLDS Surveys 2011-2019
Reference copies of all Public Library Data Service annual surveys, 2011-2019 (PDF).

Other Resources

FREE webinar: Benchmark 101
Get a behind-the-scenes look at Benchmark's interactive and user-friendly data dashboards and reporting tools for public library subscribers in this free PLA webinar on Monday, November 13, 2023.

Updates
A record of updates and new features in Benchmark. Most recent: PLA 2022 survey data, IMLS PLS FY21 data, and new use cases published (6/20/23).

Frequently Asked Questions
Updated 09/27/2023

Webinar recording: 2023 Technology Survey
This free on-demand webinar provides an overview of PLA's 2023 Technology Survey and covers why your library's response matters (recorded Oct. 12, 2023).

Webinar recording: Public Library Staff and Diversity
An overview of the results of the 2021 Staff and Diversity survey, highlighting how the data suggests both opportunities and challenges for the future of public libraries (recorded Oct. 4, 2022).

Webinar recording: Introducing Benchmark
PLA member leaders and staff introduce

Use Cases

- Children’s programming
- Facilities improvements
- Ebook readers for accessibility
- Hiring a language specialist

Open through December 16th!

2023 Public Library Technology Survey

Help PLA measure and share emerging trends around tech resources, infrastructure, digital literacy, staff, and budget.

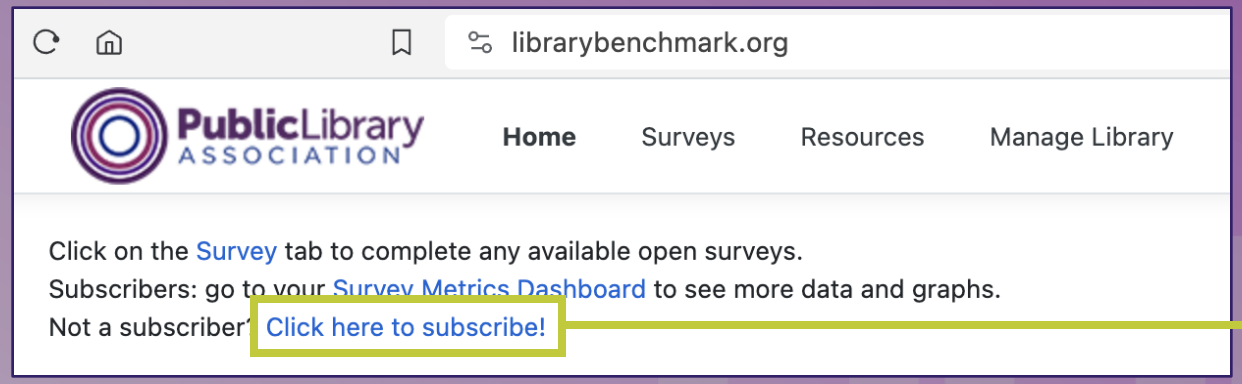
Participate now at librarybenchmark.org.

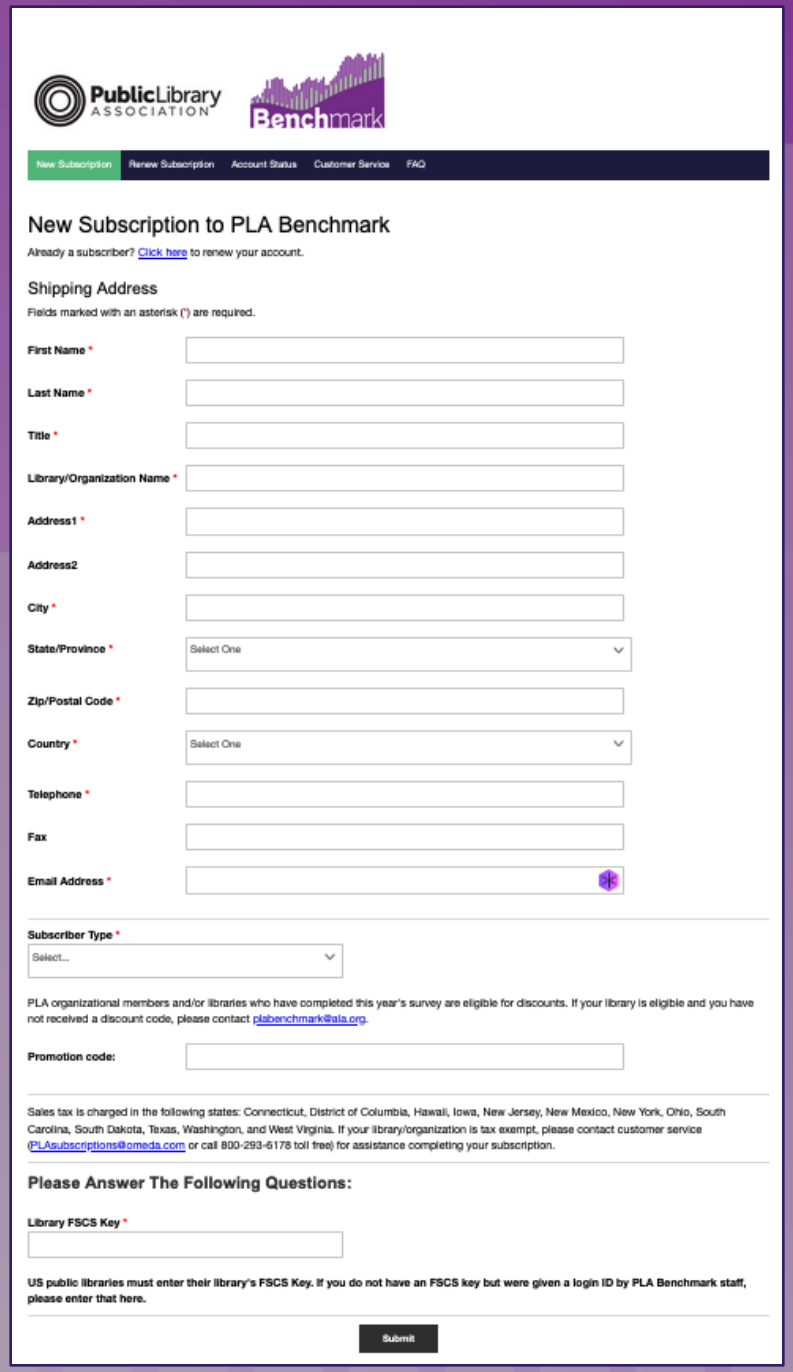
Participants will be entered into a drawing to win free group registration for a PLA webinar!

Benchmark

Public Library Association

Subscribe





Login to your library's Benchmark account

Link to the subscription form is at the top of the Home page

Participate in the survey and use your **discount code**!

Next Steps for Benchmark

- Data updated annually
  - American Community Survey 2022 estimates available in early 2024
  - IMLS PLS FY22 data available summer 2024
  - PLA 2023 Technology Survey data available summer 2024
- Continued improvements to the resources, dashboards, and interface

Adam ID The Noun Project

QUESTIONS?

THANK YOU!

Visit: librarybenchmark.org

Email: plabenchmark@ala.org

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